The Never Ending Sacrifice

by bluegoldrose

Summary

Life is a sacrifice, a choice between need and desire. The world is at war and ancient prophecies are about to be fulfilled. Everyone must make hard decisions that can mean life or death.

To tell the truth or hide it? To love whom you want or marry whom you must? Does family come first? Does duty to the crown? Does loyalty? Your honor? Who do you trust when the world is at war and winter is coming? Will it bring death or life, hope or despair?

These are the decisions of each generation, a never ending sacrifice.

A mostly canon AU that also fulfills and explains as many prophecies as possible. Spans a period pre-canon through the spring after Azor Ahai returns.

Relationship tags added when events in the story reach the relationships.

Critiques are welcomed.
Story is on pause, to be re-written.
This story is long and builds slowly. This story follows the books closely and assumes that you have read them and that you have some knowledge of the show. The canon divergences are introduced fairly quickly, but some divergences do not change major canon events while others do. Some chapters are very short because they are bridges between already established events and events that are unique to this story. Some characters, whom I love dearly, are 100% staying with their book canon, so their stories do not pick up until 'Feast for Crows' and 'Dance with Dragons' events begin to appear in this story.

Not everyone who died in the original story will die in this tale. That being said, after the story passes canon there will be deaths before the end.

Content warnings as appropriate for this fandom, if a chapter contains disturbing content I will put a warning in the beginning notes. I tend to not use "curse" words, sex scenes are rating appropriate.

There is one major original character, added because I wanted to explore female bastards, especially in the context of House Stark.

I will occasionally read through and edit the chapters for any mistakes that I missed or scenes that can be improved.

The Never-Ending Sacrifice

End of the Battle for the Dawn

8,000-10,000 Years Ago

As told by scattered tribes calling themselves free folk.

Three brothers stood with their armies beside them. Behind them a wall of ice, four hundred feet high. One brother was dressed in all black, he was the second born. The second was clothed in wolf pelts, he was the youngest brother. The third wore silver and grey furs and bore an iron crown upon his head. He was the eldest brother and King of Winter.

"It's done. She is defeated," said the middle brother.

"No, she will return. We have only weakened her," the king replied.

"But the deaths, this wall of ice, your sword..."

"She survived. Dawn has broken and her spells have faded, but she was not destroyed."

"Then it was all in vain? The death of your wife?"

"No. It was her death that allowed the sun to rise again. Her blood that wounded our foe and gave
strength to the wall that will protect us. May my children forgive me.”

The youngest brother finally spoke. "I will have no part in your kingdom, neither will my people. Blood magic defies the gods."

"Where will you go," the king asked.

"We will remain here beyond your wall, free of the blood upon which it was built."

"If you remain on this side you will not be safe."

"No, but we will be free."

The youngest brother then turned his back and led his people into the wilderness away from their brothers. With a sad shake of his head the king turned to his other brother.

"What of you and your men?"

He looked thoughtfully between his elder and younger brothers. "We will remain on your side of the wall. We will watch and wait for her and her creatures to return. We will guard the realms of men from this night until the end of days."

“You will be needed. Some day men will forget the dangers she has wrought upon the world. Perhaps they may forget the sorceress lives at all.”

“Then we will remember for everyone.”

“We must, for surely the north will not forget that winter will come again.”

So it was agreed. The eldest brother would return as King of the North. The middle brother would remain as the first Watcher on the Wall. The youngest brother, unwilling to bend to the eldest, would lead his people in freedom and peril beyond the Wall.

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**The Prophet Vellan**

About 5,000 years ago

*From pieces of parchment in the library of Valyria; lost with the Doom.*

In those days it shall be that the Long Night will come again. There will come a day after a long summer when the stars bleed and the cold breath of darkness falls heavy on the world. In this dread hour a warrior shall draw from the fire a burning sword. And that sword shall be Lightbringer, the Red Sword of Heroes, and he who clapsps it shall be Azor Ahai come again, and the darkness shall flee before him. From the blood of this first hero will he be reborn. With him will be two others. Warriors to ride beside him. Together they shall slay the ancient evil, the Great Other. The curse shall be lifted and the darkness will never haunt the world again.

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**Aeneya the Dreamer**

3,000 years ago

*Copied from the writings of an anonymous scholar; rumored to be kept in the vaults of a prominent family in Volantis.*
Blood

A river of blood covering a wasteland of snow.

Two great armies converging. A host of people from all ends of the earth. A host of monsters. Dead bodies with blue eyes that walked and fought like mortal men. Leading them were creatures of ice.

Above them all three winged shadows, screeching and soaring in the sky. From their mouths fire, causing the hearts of men and monster to quail. Upon the back of each winged beast a warrior.

Theirs will be the song of ice and fire.

Three dragon riders born of fire and blood and ice.

One shall wield the sword of heroes. The flame of Lightbringer. He shall be Azor Ahai reborn. Of the same blood as the first hero he will be, and darkness shall flee before him.

One will wake dragons from stone. All the earth shall tremble in terror before the rider who wakes the dragons. The armies of the world will gather before and praise the Dragon Prince.

Three heads the dragon must have. Life and death and love. For the third will be a healer to bind the broken lands and peoples.

In fire and blood, when the Long Night falls again upon the world, the dragons will return and the heroes will defeat the ancient foe. There will be three. Three dragons. Three riders. Three heroes to wake the dawn.

Queen Naerys Targaryen

Around 180 years after Aegon’s Conquest

“Mother?”

“Yes my love?” The queen looked down at her young daughter and smiled. She could not help but smile at her children, especially young Daenerys when she was trying to stay up past her bedtime.

The girl wore a solemn, serious expression. Upon an adult it would be regal, upon a six year old it was precious. “Will there ever be dragons again?”

Naerys sat beside her daughter and stroked her silver-gold hair. I have seen their return in my dreams. “One day they will return. It was prophesied long ago. Do you remember the words of our house?”

She scrunched her little nose. “Fire and blood.”

“Our ancestors chose those words because the promised prince will wake dragons from stone. With fire and blood the prince will defeat evil and unite the realm and his will be a song of ice and fire.”

“Why ice and fire?”

“No one knows. The prophecy was made so long ago that much has been forgotten.”

“Will the prince marry a princess and live happily ever after?”
The Queen kissed her daughter on her head. “Of course my sweet little one. Now it is time to sleep.”

The girl yawned and nodded, curling against her mother’s side. It was not long before she was sound asleep. The dragon must have three heads too. No one knows why that is either. Perhaps for our house, perhaps.

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Princess Rhaella Targaryen

Summerhall

259 years after Aegon’s Conquest

In duty she had wed her brother Aerys. The prince who was promised will come from myself and my brother. The woods witch promised us that, but prophecies are dual edged swords and people lie. Her father believed in the promised prince. Her grandfather believed in the promised prince. So Rhaella and Aerys were wedded and bedded. Upon learning that Rhaella was pregnant, the planning began.

They gathered at Summerhall when the end of her term drew near. Almost all the royal family was gathered. Almost all their closest companions were there. Also at Summerhall was a sorcerer and the last petrified dragon eggs of House Targaryen. The eggs had been kept safely hidden away by the family ever since the last dragon died.

Her father and husband were not there when she went into labor, they were away in King’s Landing. Her maids, maesters, and midwives told her that a feast was beginning in the great hall for the occasion. A feast and a funeral. Blood magic is accursed. There was to be a blood sacrifice upon a pyre when the new prince or princess was born. The King was certain that this child would be the prince that was promised. This child would wake the dragons.

Rhaella had scarcely pushed her child into the world when the screaming began. It was a loud, unearthly sound which rang out across the courtyard; the sound of a hundred voices crying out in terror. They could see the flames beginning to burst through the windows and roofs across the courtyard.

“A son,” the maester told her, his voice quavering. “A prince, your grace. I am afraid we must get out before those flames reach us.”

She nodded frantically. They helped her clean up and dress hurriedly. They whisked her and her newborn son outside. Outside, they found a small gathering of frightened people who had safely escaped the conflagration. Together, they watched as Summerhall burned.

There were no dragons that came to life that day, only a newborn prince and countless deaths. Some people whispered that he was the promised prince. They told Rhaella that the sacrifice was not in vain. The blood, salt, and smoke, surely that meant he was the promised prince.

They named him Rhaegar. Rhaella could only pray that the sacrifices made for his birth were not in vain. As he grew, did not disappoint as a son or a prince. He was kind, intelligent, well learned, and a good fighter. He was her pride and joy. Surely none of the pains it took to bring him into the world were mistakes? Surely he was the prince that was promised?

Years later on Dragonstone, when her baby girl was born, she could only see how flawed prophecies were. Rhaegar was dead. His children were dead. Only little Viserys and Daenerys were left. Perhaps the prophecy would be fulfilled through them? Perhaps they were just fools? The Queen
died before the storms quieted that day. She would never know that the prophecies were about to be fulfilled.
The She-Wolf and the Dragon Knight

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was a cool, clear summer night when Prince Rhaegar found her in the woods. She was carefully working on the straps of her armor, with some difficulty. With no helm on he could identify her readily. He smirked and shook his head. Of course it was the she-wolf. He silently raised his sword and placed it behind her neck. She froze in place, her hands stilled on the laces and straps. “My father thinks the Knight of the Laughing Tree wishes to overthrow him or is plotting against him. He sent me to seek out the truth of the mystery Knight. Shall I tell him that Lord Rickard has a fourth son?”

“You could say that you found nothing of the mystery knight, my prince.” Lyanna Stark’s voice did not waver, did not seem frightened at all. Rhaegar Targaryen smiled. What manner of woman is she that she has no fear of a sword to her neck?

“Turn to face me. Carefully, as I will not lay down my sword.” She did as commanded and faced him. The girl’s look was so defiant that he almost laughed out loud. Could this really be the same girl he remembered crying as he sang during the feast not so many nights ago? “Why do you fight in the lists?”

“Some men need to be taught lessons, so I did what I had to do. Besides which, a woman can fight just as well as any man.” Her reply was fierce and her grey eyes hard.

“So I can see, but you are a lady.” A lady who fights as if she were a man, though I would not encourage her at the moment. She let out a derisive sound from the back of her throat. “Not by choice, I’d rather fight than sit in a room gossiping and sewing and acting like a doll that will one day be forced to bed whatever man my father chooses.”

So that was the problem. “Lord Robert Baratheon from what I have heard.” Her glare confirmed his statement, and her obvious distaste. He removed his sword from her neck and sheathed it. “I am sorry, though I have found that none of us really have a say in whom we wed and whom we love or even in our fates.”

“You believe in fate,” she asked skeptically.

He gave favored her with a smile. “Targaryens have always believed in prophecy and fate. We settled on Dragonstone because my ancestress saw the Doom of Valyria long before it happened.” Is she the one? There must be a third child... The dragon must have three heads... “For ages we have dreamed that the dragons will return.”

“And some of your family have drunk wildfire to become dragons, while others perished amid flames in Summerhall.” She muttered with a rueful smile.

He sighed. He knew about his family’s failings all too well. The tragedy of Summerhall happened to awake the dragons, but it only brought death. All for naught. I am not the prince that was promised, it is my son. I have seen him, and Rhaenys, and a third with dark hair... “I will not deny that there have been madmen in my family. However there have been good, wise kings as well.”

“Which one will you be, your grace?” She was smirking at him, her head cocked to the side.
condescendingly. He could not help but smile back at her.

“The greatest king since Aegon the Conqueror I hope.”

She laughed at that. “How will you manage that, my prince?”

He reached out a hand and caressed her cheek. She blushed immediately. “I believe in prophecy.”

She shivered at his touch on her cheek. “Let me help you out of your armor. Where did you get it from?”

“I... I got the pieces from various tents. My brother Benjen helped me dress in them.” She was blushing again, possibly at the thought of him helping her out of the armor.

“Why is your brother not helping you out of your armor?”

She flushed an even deeper shade of red. “He is keeping the others out of the tent they share so that our eldest brother can spend time with a girl.”

He raised an eyebrow. “I see. May I help you then, as all your brothers have left you alone?”

She bowed her head gently. “If it please your grace, I would appreciate your help.”

He nodded and proceeded to unstrap the plates from her chest and arms, then from her legs. She stretched with a sigh of relief when all of the armor was pulled away. “Thank you.”

“It was a pleasure my lady. Return the armor where you found it and I will tell my father that I only found the shield of the Knight.” It was the least he could do, she was no threat to his father. All his father ever fought anymore were the phantoms in his own mind, there were no enemies.

She raised an eyebrow, suspicious of him. “That’s all?”

He smirked wickedly. *If she blushes at just at touch... “I could ask for a kiss.”*

She blushed again, anger and shock glinting in her eyes. “You, you’re married, you wouldn’t dare.”

He laughed heartily. She was proving ever so fun to tease. “I am also a prince so I can dare many things; however, I will not. Go back to your tents and no harm will come to you.” The prince then proceeded to pick up her shield, and walk away. A very perplexed Lyanna was left to the task of returning the armor to its proper owners.

The day came when Prince Rhaegar won the tournament. He rode past his wife and laid the wreath of flowers upon Lyanna Stark’s lap. He smiled at her, the same wicked smile he had when asking her for a kiss. Princess Elia’s face was blank. The faces of all the others in attendance were shocked, dismayed, or quite salacious. Lyanna just glared at him, blushing red as blood. Then the moment passed, and everyone drew breath again as Rhaegar left the field.

Later that day, as some of the people were packing up to leave, she found him and threw the wreath at his face. “What were you thinking,” she shouted at him, fury flowing through her like a wildfire. “You disgrace your wife before a crowd and give me the token of the tournament!” They were alone by the lake, in a copse of trees.

He frowned gently and thoughtfully, picking up the wreath and caressing the broken flowers. “My bride knew what I was going to do; we talked about it beforehand. Do you know that she can bear me no more children? Rhaenys’s birth left her bed-ridden and Aegon’s nearly killed her. She came
to the tournament to distract herself, he is with a wet-nurse now. She is still not quite recovered.”

She was quieted, unsure of why he would tell her that information. "I am sorry to hear that your grace."

He acknowledged her sentiment with a gentle nod of his head, his silver hair falling over his shoulder. "Do you remember how we spoke of prophecy and fate the other night? For a long time I have had premonitions in my dreams. I suppose my family has that curse. We were told the prince that was promised will come from our line. That is why my grandfather had my parents marry. That was why Summerhall burned. The dragon must have three heads though, and if the Prince is of my line then I must have another child." His voice trailed off and her jaw dropped when she realized what he was implying.

"Have you gone mad! I won't be some mistress to a man, even if you are to be king one day!" The color had risen in her face again, and her fists curled.

"What about a second wife?" He spoke the words gently, simply. He searched her face to see what she thought.

She found her balance against a nearby tree. "You're married... I'm promised to be married." The words sounded feeble on her lips but her brain was not working enough to form a different reply.

"You are betrothed to a man whom you despise," he scoffed. "The Targaryens are not held to the same rules as the rest of the people. I may take two wives if I wish. You would be a second Queen; our child would be a Prince or Princess. We would just need to keep things quiet for a while."

She stared at him. His eyes were gentle and honest. "Does your wife know of this plan of yours?"

"Yes, she gave me her permission." He favored her with an almost shy smile. "I would never act without her blessings."

Lyanna gave a solemn nod. "Why me?"

He mulled over her question for a moment before he smiled and took a few steps closer to her. "Because I have never met another woman like you. I held a sword to your throat and you did not shake or flinch. You were so defiant, so strong, so beautiful, and sure of yourself." He laughed and caressed her cheek. "Few men have the courage that I have seen in you. I fear that I will never meet someone like you again."

A nervous giggle escaped from her lips. "What makes you think that I will agree?"

"Because you do not want to marry Lord Baratheon. I could see in your eyes how much you despise the man. You want freedom, excitement, adventure. He offers you none of those things."

"Do you," she whispered with a tremulous smile.

"One day I will be king. What greater adventure is there?" He gazed into her eyes and smiled. "Plus I will let you wield a sword as you will."

"Is that your best selling point," she questioned with a laugh. "A sword and a crown?"

"What more do you want? I can give you the world." She looked down at the ground, trembling. He placed his hands gently on her shoulders and ran them down to her hands, grasping her small hands with his large ones. "I am sorry if I frighten you. I tend to run on passion and you inspire that in me."
She squeezed his hands and her grey eyes met his beautiful dark indigo ones. "I am not afraid, not of you. I am just overwhelmed. I... I will go with you. I just worry about what everyone may think."

He gently caressed her face with one hand, and she trembled again. "Everything will be fine, I swear it to you." He pressed his lips to hers and it felt like fire melting ice.

Lyanna shifted anxiously in the boat. She had been silent since they had come into view of King’s Landing. She had never seen the capital before. The spires and domes of the buildings peeked above the dark, high walls of the capital. She marveled at its size, even in the dull light of evening the structure was imposing. She had an uncomfortable knot in her belly. I ran away and married the Prince. Now to meet his first wife.

Rhaegar had insisted repeatedly that Princess Elia would be delighted to meet her, yet Lyanna still had her doubts. They were rowing to the high, rocky cliffs beneath the Red Keep. He had told her that there was a hidden room where they would all meet. Ser Arthur Dayne had taken a rowboat before them so that Elia would be there when they arrived.

When their rowboat was tied up, Rhaegar disembarked. He then helped Lyanna step onto land. “Welcome to the Red Keep, my Princess.”

She smiled at him and pressed a kiss to his lips. His kisses helped her anxiety lessen. “Are you sure,” she asked for the hundredth time.

He laughed and tucked a loose tendril of hair behind her ear. “Everything will be fine. Elia will tell you that herself.”

He began to walk up a narrow, half hidden path. She trailed behind him, unsteady from the ships they had taken. “What if nothing is fine? I mean, I should have told someone. Running away in the night... A lot of people will be worried about me.”

“No.” He turned back to her. His face was sad and stern. His pale hair glowed in the moonlight. “If my father knew...” He caressed her face and let the hand trail until their hands met. “He is not well. If he knew, then I fear for all of us. He could kill you, me, Elia, and our children. He would put Viserys on the throne after him. You and Elia are far too important for me to let anything happen to you.”

She gave his hand a squeeze. “Why won’t she hate me? I would hate me.”

He chuckled gently. “She has never hated you, my dear; she never will. She believes in the prophecies just as much as I do.”

They continued along the paths and into the hidden parts of the Keep. Eventually, they came to a massive room where a large mosaic of a three-headed dragon was laid in red and black tiles in the floor. The vast room was lit by a few lit braziers on the wall. The lights faded into the darkness of the many corridors that led to the chamber. Ser Arthur Dayne, Princess Elia Targaryen, and a slim blonde girl were standing in the room when they arrived.

“Your grace,” Lyanna breathed out as she knelt before her husband’s first wife.

Elia laid a gentle hand upon the younger woman’s shoulder. “Please stand; I wish to speak with you, and formalities take too much time.”

Lyanna stood, and quickly found herself embraced by the other woman. “I want to thank you for all that you have done. I know that it must be confusing for you. Our Prince is a kind, enthralling man.
I can bear him no more children. You however, you can bear him sons and daughters that will be princes and princesses beside my own Rhaenys and Aegon. Does she know yet?” The princess shifted her gaze to their husband. He shook his head.

“I have told her a little of the prophecies. I have said naught of our plans. Do you think it wise to discuss these things before your serving girl?”

She smiled, somewhat condescendingly. “I plan to send Jyana with Princess Lyanna as a maid and companion. Knowing you, you have forgotten that women need companions and maids. She has no family, and is a dear companion to me, though she is my servant. Only Lady Ashara was dearer, but she has returned to Starfall.”

Rhaegar gave her a questioning look. “Why has she returned so suddenly?”

His first wife looked rather embarrassed. “She was unwell, and wished to return home.”

“Some man got her with child she means,” Ser Arthur growled.

“For her good name, she has been returned home so that she may be delivered of this quietly,” Elia said with some exasperation that she was forced to tell the whole story. “She seems quite devoted to whomever he was for she will not give even the hint of a name. It seems to have happened around the time of the Tourney at Harrenhal.”

The prince gave a nod of the head. “Returning to the matter at hand; my Lady Lyanna, I married you for many reasons. I admire your spirit, as you well know. There are also the prophecies. All of my life I have read and studied words written down as prophecies. Some were written by madmen, some by kings, and some by maesters who were transcribing the events of the Dawn Age.”

He offered a hand to each of his wives; together they stood clasping hands. “House Targaryen has always had prophetic dreams. We dreamt of Valyria’s Doom. We see the return of the dragons, and it has driven some in my family to madness. I have seen the dragons returning and three riders upon them. When the Long Night returns the prince who was promised will rise to defeat the ancient evil and bring peace to the world. The dragon must have three heads, three of my children to ride the three dragons. Everyone thought that I was the promised prince, but Aegon was conceived beneath the bleeding star. When you have a child there will be three. Together, ours will be the song of ice and fire. The Sun of Dorne and the Ice of the North.”

He paused, a feverish excitement had lighted across his face. The other four watched him intently.

“I plan to overthrow my father when spring truly arrives. He is a madman. I have not wanted to believe that for a long time, but I cannot keep denying the truth. When the time arrives my Lyanna, I will declare that you are my wife. I will ask for the help of the North and the help of Elia’s Dorne. The people love me, and I believe that they will follow my lead. I mean for this to be a bloodless coup. Not everything is in place yet, or I would do this now. I could not wait to take you, with your marriage to Lord Baratheon so soon...”

Lyanna trembled in fear. She saw that Elia was frightened too. The plan made sense though, at least to those listening.

Telling her of his father’s madness would be the hardest thing he had ever done, Rhaegar realized as he climbed the stairs to the chamber they shared. Gerold Hightower had arrived a few short hours earlier from the capital. He knew that the letter had to be from Elia, she was the only one who knew where he was and how to get there. He read the parchment thrice before he could muster any words.
“Why didn’t you come to me sooner,” he had questioned, his voice hard.

“No one knew where you were your grace. Thrice I asked Princess Elia before she would tell me, and that was on my honor and life to keep it a secret and leave for you straight away.” Ser Gerold had stared at Rhaegar accusingly, and the prince felt the weight of guilt crash upon him.

Rhaegar had not realized the depths of madness into which his father had plunged. Nor had he anticipated how impulsive Lyanna’s eldest brother had been. Rhaegar could not help but wonder how different things might have been if only he had told the truth to everyone. Surely he could have protected his wives and children?

Truth be told, Rhaegar had enjoyed the thrill of running away with Lyanna. It was a freedom that neither had ever experienced. They had wanted to run away together. They had wanted to forget that consequences existed. They had wanted to remain together in their Tower of Joy forever. Now reality had come crashing upon them in the form of the darkest tidings a letter could bear.

War. Murder. Madness.

The consequences they had sought to run from, were now too high to ignore, and would be higher still each day. He had to change things. He had to stop this war and his father. His father should have been removed as king long ago, but Rhaegar had refused to see the truth. Now all that Rhaegar could see were the words of death his wife had written. The dragon prince spent a long time figuring out what to say to his Lyanna.

She was resting in their bed when he reached their room. Her brown curls were flowing about her head, tangling in her usual knots that were nearly impossible to comb through. She was still as beautiful as the day they married in the godswood. She had insisted that she marry in a godswood and not a sept. She was no southerner, she declared, and the seven were not her gods. Maybe they were not his gods either? Hers were simpler and easier to appease.

He had to wake her. He knew that he had to do it. He had to tell her that her father and eldest brother were dead, murdered by his own father. He had to tell her that her that he must return to King’s Landing and lead an army against her second brother, and former betrothed. He wondered how any gods could allow such things to happen.

He spoke her name gently and kissed her lips.

She smiled at him sleepily. “My prince.” Steel grey eyes fluttered open, smiling at him. Her face grew stony as she looked at him, and she seemed at once more awake. “What’s wrong?”

He sat on the bed beside her, clasping her hands gently with his. “Ill tidings from King’s Landing. Would that I could withhold this news from you.” He looked away from her and breathed deeply. “Your father and brother Brandon were executed for treason. Your brother Eddard, along with Robert Baratheon and Jon Arryn have declared war. There have already been several battles, and my father seems to be losing ground.”

She stared at him for a long time; her face was blank and she made no sound. “I want to see the letter,” she whispered finally. He gave her the letter and stood so that she could have space to read the news. He watched as she read the words over and over again, until the tears that were flowing from her eyes made the ink run on the page. He could recite the letter in his head as she read the words.

Rhaegar,
Much has been happening in the capital that you need to be made aware of. I perhaps should have written sooner, but I was afraid. Your father has become more paranoid, more violent. I fear for myself and our children. However, it is not about us that I must write.

A week after you and Lyanna departed, her brother Brandon arrived. He had heard that Lyanna was captured by yourself and your men. He demanded your head and his sister’s release. He and his companions were taken prisoner. The fathers of the men were summoned to court to answer for their sons. All were executed.

I do not want to write these things but I must. Your father’s brand of punishment... no man should endure what was inflicted upon them. Lord Rickard Stark demanded a trial by combat. Your father choose fire as his opponent... He was burned to death above a fire while Brandon watched. Brandon was tied to a device which choked the life from him as he struggled to reach a sword and free them both.

After all the men died, your father sent a letter to Lord Arryn demanding the heads of Lord Robert Baratheon and Eddard Stark, now Lord of the North with his father’s death. The three Lords have risen against the crown in rebellion. There have already been battles fought. The rebels are winning support with each victory.

I do not know what to think. I do not know what course of action is best. These are dark and horrible days. Your father demands your return and wants to know where you are. I pray for your safety and that of Princess Lyanna. We need you here my love.

Elia

“No,” she screamed suddenly. She jumped up from the bed and paced frantically around the room, as though she were caged. She repeated the word over and over again, as a shout and a sob. “You... you liar! You promised everything would be fine! Even your wife Elia said everything would be fine! You said nothing would happen, that we would all be fine!” She sobbed violently, her whole body shaking with rage and despair. “Will your father kill the rest of my family? Will you kill my brothers who remain?” She crumpled the letter in her hand as she shook.

He had no good reply for her. “I must do my duty and return. I never thought that this would happen. You know that we were waiting. You know why... I was trying to keep you safe... I failed us all...”

He wanted to hold her close, but he did not know if she would collapse in his arms, try to scratch his face off, or both. “I should have sent my father a raven,” she choked out softly. “If I had told them that I left willingly, that you did not steal me, they would still be alive.”

“Don’t blame yourself. If I had never given you that crown of flowers...” He felt the guilt wash over himself in waves and he sat upon the bed.

She collapsed back onto the bed beside him and sobbed against his shoulder. “We can’t tell anyone now can we?”

He shook his head and gently stroked her back. “It’s too dangerous now. I need to keep you safe.”

She looked at him with hollow eyes. “You have to leave don’t you?”

He sighed and caressed her face. “Soon, I need to help end this war. I will leave my three kingsguard with you when I return.”

She nodded slowly, as though she had no strength left.
He tarried a fortnight longer before returning to King’s Landing to fight for his father’s cause and to return to his first wife and children.

He would never see her again.

Chapter End Notes

In case you are ever wondering about the timeline, I made a really long one that actually fits everything properly. I developed it mostly from existing timelines that I found on the internet.
The Quiet Wolf and the Falling Star

She laughed as she danced, Ned noticed. She spun and twirled like a butterfly, and her eyes, oh her eyes were the color of amethysts. He was too shy by far to talk to her. Ashara Dayne, who was so painfully beautiful that she could only be a dream. He wanted to dance with her too, and more than dance. He couldn't ask her though, he would just turn red and stay quiet.

Brandon saw Ned looking at her throughout the dances. "Go dance with her, brother. Before you freeze to stone in your seat wanting and never taking."

"I don't know what to say to her. I think of words but my mind loses them when I see her." Ned mumbled into his wine.

Brandon laughed and clapped his younger brother on the back. "You just ask if she would like to dance." With that, Brandon Stark stood and walked over to Ashara Dayne. She was retrieving a glass of wine for herself after the dance ended, and looked surprised that Brandon had gone to speak with her.

Ned reddened and looked down at the table. Surely Brandon wouldn't dance with her and insult his brother, yet Brandon was all impulse so Ned wasn't quite sure. "Excuse me," said a soft feminine voice a few moments later.

Ashara was standing before him, a gentle smile on her face. Brandon stood a bit behind her, grinning like a child who had just stolen treats he was forbidden. "Your brother said that you wanted to dance with me, but were too shy to ask. I would love to dance with you, if you want."

He swallowed the lump in his throat. "My lady, it would be an honor to dance with you."

He walked around the table and took her arm gently. He felt as though he was walking on air the whole time they danced. She was more charming up close than she had been from afar. She encouraged him through the dances, laughed merrily at the small talk they made, and asked him to escort her back to her tents.

On the walk back to her tent they laughed and talked. She was very good at putting him at ease, asking simple questions and finding out what he liked so that they would be able to speak at length. The walk to her tent was not long enough, he mourned.

"Thank you for a wonderful evening Eddard," she said softly, with a gentle smile on her face.

"Please, call me Ned, all of my friends do. I loved every moment that we have spent together tonight. I hope we can see one another more throughout the tournament." The words came pouring out of his mouth, surprising even himself. He was always quiet and thoughtful, but she seemed to be able to pull words from him with no trouble and could stop his thoughts with a smile. His pulse beat wildly just looking at her.

She caressed his cheek with her small, cold hand. "I would be delighted to see you more." Then she gave him a soft peck on the lips and before he could react she slipped into her tent.

He walked for some time before returning to his tent. Upon entering, he found his brother Brandon kissing the neck of a blonde girl while Benjen and Howland Reed slept. Ned raised an eyebrow and coughed, startling the pair. The girl flushed red, gave Brandon a parting kiss, and hurried out with her face down.
Brandon flopped face-down onto the cot and sighed. Ned just stood there, staring at his brother. "Who was that?"

Brandon shrugged. "I think a Hightower, though I could be wrong."

"You're betrothed to Catelyn Tully," Ned reminded his brother as he sat upon his own cot and pulled off his boots.

"Yes, but not wedded or bedded to her and still young enough to have fun when I see it." He laughed easily. "I'll not bed another girl once I've married Lady Catelyn, I swear it. So how did you like Ashara, you were out quite late you know."

Ned mumbled something to himself as he pulled off his clothes and put on a night robe. His older brother propped himself up and looked at him. "What was that?"

"We danced, and talked, and I walked her to her tent. Thank you for having her talk to me." Ned smiled softly. "Sleep well Bran."

He groaned. "I'm too old for that name anymore Ned. Sleep well little brother."

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Ned would meet Ashara at the end of the day's games or after she left Princess Elia later in the day. They would take long walks around Harrenhal and discuss the mysterious Knight of the Laughing Tree who had appeared at the tournament. Ned did not tell her his suspicions that the knight was Howland Reed. He did not really care, so long as he could talk to her and look at her and kiss her. He kissed her first the second time he had walked her to her tent. It was a long, passionate kiss, and they melted into one another's arms. He had kissed girls before, in the Eyrie, often at Robert's prodding. He had enjoyed their kisses, but they were nothing like Ashara. Ashara was wonder. Ashara was the fire in his veins. The Vale girls had meant nothing. It was like that every night, the walking, talking, and kissing.

Upon walking back to his tent several days into the tournament, Ned noticed his sister walking back to her tent alone. "Lya, why are you out alone this late?" His voice was scolding, he knew, and she just wrinkled her nose at him.

"Why are you out so late brother," she shot back, her head held high.

"I am not a girl who could be harmed by a man." The concern in his voice was evident, but she just rolled her eyes and slipped a dagger from her boot.

"I'm fine Ned. No one will hurt me. How have things been with Lady Ashara?" She was trying to distract him and succeeded. He blushed.

"We just talk," he mumbled.

"So late," she inquired with a grin.

He sighed. He had to give her something before she would give anything back. "We talk a lot and... kiss. Now what were you doing?"

She had an odd expression at that, somewhere between amused and profoundly annoyed. "Being threatened by a prince." She pulled her hair to the side and he could see a thin cut on her neck. He flushed between pale from fear and red from fury. She put a hand gently on his. "Ned, it's nothing to worry about. He didn't even realize that he had cut me. He was talking to me about." She paused and sighed deeply. "I was the secret knight in the jousts. He caught me taking off the armor. We talked,
and then he took the shield and told me to put the armor back where I had found it. He won't say anything."

Ned shook his head. "You are too much like Brandon; I fear it will hurt both of you in the end."

She laughed. "You worry too much. I am a free woman until I am forced to marry your horrid friend, until then I can do as I wish. Brandon will marry soon and he will settle down as well. Learn to have fun and enjoy life Ned."

He knew there was no winning the fight with her, so he hugged her. "I worry about you little sister. I am glad you are safe. Sleep well, Lya."

She smiled up at him. "I love you. You sleep well too Ned."

The following day Brandon was defeated by Rhaegar Targaryen in the jousts. Ned was disappointed for his brother; Ashara was happy for her lady's husband. They decided to take a ride away from the tournament toward the lake. They dismounted and walked around once Ned secured the horses. He took her by the hand and they strolled near the water. They had not walked very far when she caressed his face and kissed him passionately, leaving him breathless.

"I don't want this tournament to end," she murmured into his neck. "I don't want to leave you."

He sighed against her. "We could ask our fathers if we could be promised. If, if that's something you want."

She looked up at him with wide eyes. "Nothing would make me happier. It may take some time. I would want to talk with my father in person about you." She smiled at him, her face radiant.

"Maybe we should wait until my brother Brandon marries, and my sister Lyanna," he said as he smiled back at her. "Two marriages is probably enough for my father to handle right now."

She laughed merrily. "I can imagine. Soon though, soon we can be together."

With few more words they resumed their kissing. Slowly, they found themselves on the ground, pulling at clothes and laces. They whispered few words, being driven by desire for one another.

His hands were up her skirts and his trousers were half off when the reality of what they were doing finally broke out in Ned's mind. He stilled, wanting her, watching her chest rise and fall with heavy breaths. "Are you... do you... I mean..."

She groaned. "I love you Ned. Please, I want you." Her eyes were dark with lust, and her hips moved against him. He realized he couldn't resist her. So he continued up her skirts, until he found his desire. Some part of him found it strange that there was no shyness in him as he touched her. He had never touched a woman intimately before, but some instinct drove his actions. It was not long before he found himself in ecstasy between her legs. She groaned against him, moaned against him, murmured his name over and over like a prayer. When their lovemaking was finished, the sun was low in the sky.

He lay beside her panting. They were both half disrobed. She pressed a kiss to his forehead and to his lips. "We need to return to our tents."

He kissed her. "I wish that we could stay here forever."

"So do I."
With unhappy sighs the pair redressed, returned to their horses, and rode back to the camp. When they reached her tent the two parted with a kiss that seemed almost chaste.

The following day was the final day of the tournament. Prince Rhaegar Targaryen and Ser Barristan Selmy were the final two contenders, and they fought hard against one another. Ned stood with Brandon, Benjen, and Lyanna. Ned glanced to Ashara occasionally throughout the match. She was seated with Princess Elia and her retinue and glanced to him occasionally as well. Both men fought well, but Rhaegar won in the end. The wreath of blue roses for the Queen of Love and Beauty was placed upon the Prince's lance and he rode straight past his wife and placed the wreath in Lyanna's lap.

The silence of the crowd was deafening. Some of the people were smirking, or making crude jests to one another, most however, had faces showing shock or dismay. Robert was furious and stomped away from the crowd. Ned noticed that the Dragon Prince smirked a little and with a bow of his head, left the field. Ned and his brothers escorted their sister to their tent. She was shaking they had realized, but they didn't realize at first that she was shaking from fury.

"I'll throw the flowers in his face," she shouted as soon as they were within the confines of the tent. "Lya, don't do anything rash, he's our crowned Prince," said Brandon.

She was crushing the flowers in her hands. "He won't hurt me, and I don't care!"

Months later Ned and Robert Baratheon received word in the Eyrie that Lyanna had been taken from White Harbor by Prince Rhaegar. Lord Robert wanted to go to the Stormlands and lead an army to take Rhaegar's head. Lord Arryn urged patience and caution, and they waited. They waited when news of Brandon Stark and his men riding out from near Riverrun to confront the crowned Prince arrived. They waited when news of Brandon's capture and a call for Rickard Stark and the father's of the men who were with Brandon was sent out. Later, news reached them of the way in which King Aerys killed the Starks and their men. It was that same day when Jon Arryn sat the new Lord Stark and the Lord Baratheon down in his solar and spoke with them.

"King Aerys wants your heads," the old man told them simply. The two young men looked at him with anger in their eyes. Robert started to speak, but Jon simply held out his hand and continued. "I will not kill you boys, and I will not let the murders of Lord Rickard and Brandon Stark to go without protest. The King is mad, that is clear enough for anyone to see now. We will raise up our banners and go to war against him."

Lord Baratheon cheered. Eddard Stark only nodded his head in quiet agreement. My sister is missing. My father is dead. My brother is dead. I am Lord of Winterfell. They made their plans together and raised their banners in rebellion. After the Battle of Gulltown was won for their side, the Lord of Winterfell went north to raise his bannermen and the Lord of Storm's End went south to raise his bannermen.

Jon had told Ned that they would need more allies. The wisest course of action seemed to be keeping the promise of Rickard Stark to Hoster Tully that Lady Catelyn Tully would marry the heir of the North. Lord Hoster agreed to wed Catelyn to Eddard and Lysa to Jon Arryn. So, after the Battle of the Bells, Eddard Stark and Jon Arryn led their companies to Riverrun.

The two Tully girls were beautiful; dressed in white with blue and silver accents, the girls stood before their soon to be husbands in the sept. Ned felt a twinge of pity for the younger girl Lysa, she was to marry a man older than her own father. Jon Arryn was a good, kind man, but he doubted the young girl would see past Jon's grey hair.
Ned's eyes, however, were on Lady Catelyn Tully, his bride. Her auburn hair hung half up in a long braid and half down, flowing over her shoulders and down the length of her back. Her eyes were the purest blue, bright and gentle. She was better than Brandon had ever described.

She wasn't Ashara. He felt a stabbing pang of guilt as he said his vows, remembering the girl at Harrenhal he had given his love to, the girl whose virtue he had taken. The girl who he wanted even as he swore himself in marriage to another. After the tournament had ended, they had found one another again much later that day. Ashara seemed worried about Princess Elia, but they soon stopped speaking about the tournament and he found himself within her again. They had promised to speak of betrothal after Brandon and Lyanna were married. Now though, Brandon was dead, Lyanna stolen away, and the country at war. House Dayne had sworn its loyalty to the crown, and House Stark was in open rebellion. Marriage to Ashara Dayne was no longer an option.

So with duty to his house in mind, he said his marriage vows to the girl who should have been his brother's wife. The wine, music, and song made everyone merry, but he found it hard to smile. This was his celebration, but only because his family had been murdered. Later, he and Catelyn were escorted up the steps by the guests, their clothes pulled off as they went. Finally, they were alone and quite naked, in their wedding bed.

Her body was beautiful. He couldn't deny that. It was confusing to be so aroused by one woman while his heart still cared for another. Ashara is lost to me; Catelyn is my bride. He had noticed that her whole body blushed red when they had taken off her dress, he thought it beautiful.

"I," he began, pausing at the word. "I know that you were to marry my brother, and that you should have been his. I am sorry that you lost him."

She gave him a sad half-smile. "My lord, he was your brother. I can not imagine how you must feel now."

He nodded. "Please, call me Ned, I am your husband now. I will be a good husband to you, I promise that."

"Call me Cat if I am to call you Ned." She spoke gently, nervously. She chewed her lip a little before she spoke. "I will always do my duty to you as a wife." She blushed a deep shade of red, nearly matching her hair. "We should…"

He nodded and flushed a little. He kissed her as he had a few hours before when they wed. Together they pushed the covers aside and kissed again and again, until something close to lust filled them. They touched one another gently, exploring the curious ways that it made them feel. When she seemed ready, he entered her. He muttered an apology at her pain, as he had with Ashara. Ashara had laughed and kissed him. Catelyn just nodded and said that it was ok. When they were finished, he cleaned them both and they fell asleep beside one another.

Months later Ned found himself in Dorne. He was on the way to a place called the Tower of Joy, where Lyanna was said to be kept. Rhaegar was dead at the Trident at Robert's hand. King Aerys, Princess Elia, Princess Rhaenys, and Prince Aegon were all dead in King's Landing. Queen Rhaella and Prince Viserys had escaped to Dragonstone. Now Robert Baratheon was called King of the Seven Kingdoms.

They were seven companions Ned Stark, Howland Reed, William Dustin, Ethan Glover, Martyn Cassel, Theo Wull, and Mark Ryswell. They arrived to see Oswell Whent, Gerold Hightower, and Arthur Dayne, the last loyal Kingsguard of Aerys awaiting them. They spoke few words and then they fought. Ned could hear Lyanna scream inside the tower. He had to get his sister back, to keep
her safe.

His sword ran through Arthur Dayne, Ashara's brother, and it felt like betrayal. Beside him all were
dead except Howland. Ned climbed the tower and found Lyanna, laying in her bed with blood
everywhere. She looked so pale and small in the bed. He had forgotten how young they both were.
He barely noticed the young woman in the room who was crying.

"Ned," Lyanna's voice came softly. "Ned I'm so sorry, sorry for everything."

"No." He gently caressed her cheek and knelt beside her. "Lya, nothing was your fault."

She shook her head in protest. "It was all my fault. I married him Ned, at an old weirwood tree. We
ran away together." She let out a ragged sob. "It was going to be a secret until I had a child, but then
Aerys..."

"Aerys is dead. Our family is avenged," he said soothingly, but he felt sickened inside.

With what little strength was left to her she shook her head vigorously. She looked so frightened that
it scared him. "The guards were for my child. Ned, promise me you need to keep them safe."

Ned looked and finally saw the young woman who was holding a babe in her arms, and gently
touching another bundle in a cradle. Howland was in the room then, surveying the scene quietly.

"Promise me Ned," she whispered again. The color was draining from her face as her blood soaked
the bed.

"I promise Lya," Ned choked out, a lump in his throat. "I promise to keep them safe."

She smiled up at him and her eyes fluttered closed. He sat there, grasping her hand as she died. He
was frozen in grief and guilt. *What have I done? What have we all done? The kingsguard were for
my sister and the child she was about to bear. I killed Ashara's brother. How will I keep the children
safe? Robert... Robert will kill them. Oh Lya...* Howland pried Ned's hands from those of his dead
sister.

They prepared the bodies as best they could, lighting funeral pyres for each of them from the
furniture within the tower. Lyanna's bones were carefully gathered from her pyre and placed inside a
chest so that she could be buried in Winterfell. The rest were laid to rest in funeral cairns made from
stones that they gathered from the tower. There were fresh horses in a stable, and goats as well. They
used the goat milk for the babes, and finding a carriage, loaded what they needed upon it. Jyana, the
girl who had been Lyanna's maid, cared for the children as they traveled. They were riding to
Starfall, Ashara's home, where he would return Ser Arthur's sword to his sister.

Their arrival at Starfall was a solemn one. He met Lady Ashara in her solar. She was as beautiful as
he remembered, but he now had a wife and soon a child at Riverrun. Howland, Jyana, and the
children were being tended to elsewhere, and a wet-nurse had been called for the babes. Ned placed
Dawn, Ser Arthur's greatsword, upon a table before her. To Ned's surprise, she didn't even shed a
tear as he related the tale.

"I'm so sorry Ashara," he uttered weakly. "I'm so sorry for all of this."

She walked to him and touched his cheek gently, as she had so long ago at Harrenhal. "When last I
saw you, there was nothing in the world that could make me sad. Now... When I heard that you
married Catelyn Tully, my heart broke. When my father died in the war I felt that my strength was
gone. Now you bring me my brother's sword and tell me that you are sorry."
She did not seem angry, he found that he wished she was angry. She just seemed numb, as numb as he felt. "Did you kill him?"

He could only nod sadly. "May the gods give him rest," was her quiet reply. "Walk with me Ned."

He complied and walked with her. They walked in silence, side by side, neither wishing to speak. She led him out of the castle to a large lichyard. Eventually she knelt before a small stone beneath a large tree. "This was my greatest loss Ned." He scarcely heard her whispered words as she looked at the grave with tears in her eyes.

He did not understand, not at first. Then he looked around and saw that all of the grave markers in the section they stood in were smaller than in the rest of the yard. They were in a section reserved for infants. When had Ashara known a child who died?

"Rhaegar's children can have the nurse Wylla accompany them on your trip back to Winterfell." Ashara's words shook him to the core, if she knew then so could anyone else. She looked up at him and a smile ghosted across her lips. "Oh Ned, of course they are your sister's why else would my brother and the other kingsguard have been at the tower. The secret is safe with myself and Wylla. She nursed my little Rosalyn when she wouldn't latch onto me. She looked so much like you Ned. She had your eyes. She got sick... so sick..."

Ashara stopped talking and just started to weep. Ned fell to his knees and held her as she sobbed. That is when the tears came into his eyes as well. He had lost a father, a brother, a sister, and friends in this war. He had lost Ashara when he married Catelyn. This though, he had never expected that he could have lost a child that he never knew.

"I'm sorry Ashara. I'm so sorry. I loved you. I still love you. I would have married you," he murmured into her hair as he held her.

She pulled back and stared at him with her beautiful violet eyes. "Would you leave her for me?"

He felt a knife go through his heart. There was no way he could say yes, even though he wanted to stay with her. "I can't."

She lowered her eyes sadly, picked herself up, and walked away. He stayed at the grave, memorizing every detail of the stone which said so few words. It was night when he returned to the castle. The next day, Ashara Dayne was gone. She had thrown herself from the Palestone Sword.
Catelyn was at Riverrun with her infant Robb when she received word that Ned had set sail from Dorne to return to Winterfell. He had chosen that mode of transport as it was the swiftest way from one far end of Westeros to the other. She was required to come North as the Lady of Winterfell, though her travel time was anticipated to be slow as she was a new mother. It took three weeks for all of her possessions and necessary supplies to be packed for transport. She was terrified. She had travelled occasionally with her sister to various cities. They had been to the Twins, Seagard, Maidenpool, King's Landing, and Lannisport, but she had never been to Winterfell though she had been betrothed to Brandon Stark since she was a girl. She kissed her father, brother, and sister goodbye. Lysa was departing for King's Landing that day, to see her husband Jon Arryn again.

"Be strong little Cat," her father had told her. She would do her best.

She had companions with her for the journey, servants whom she had grown up with in Riverrun. They amused her and helped her with her son as they traveled the many long miles to Winterfell. Her tensions eased during the journey, but increased again once she saw Winterfell. A man rode out to greet them when they could see the gates and men on the walls clearly. She assumed it would be her Lord husband Eddard coming out to greet her, but instead the man she saw was a young Brandon. He swung himself off his horse as he reached the wagon carrying Catelyn.

"Lady Catelyn Stark," he asked, and bowed his head when she confirmed her identity. "Welcome to Winterfell my Lady. I am Benjen Stark, Lord Eddard's younger brother."

She smiled at him and shifted the small bundle that she cradled in her arms. "Meet your nephew Robb."

He smiled and brushed the bright red hair atop the boy's head with a gentle hand. "It's a pleasure to meet you both. Lord Stark would have come out to meet you but many of his Lords have been keeping him busy ever since he returned home. I would be glad to show you around Winterfell."

"Thank you." She gave a polite smile. *My husband hates me so he sent his brother to greet me. It's so dry and cold here. Even the people are cold. Breathe Cat, breathe. This will all be fine.*

Benjen mounted his horse again and led them the rest of the way to Winterfell. He helped her out of the carriage and pointed out what different buildings were and the names of various townspeople. The majority of what he said went in one ear and out the other, there were so many names and buildings that it was too much to take in all at once. She was also anxious to see Eddard Stark again. *Ned,* she reminded herself. *He asked me to call him Ned.*

They finally entered the Great Keep and he led her to the Great Hall. True to his word there were at least a dozen Lords each trying to discuss various topics with Lord Eddard Stark. She forced a smile to her lips upon seeing him seated on the platform. He looked like a Lord at least, serious and impassive. *I have to spend the rest of my life here.* Her anxieties fled when he looked at her and smiled.

"My Lords," he proclaimed, silencing the room. "I would like to present to all of you my lady wife, Catelyn Stark."

She stepped forward through the crowd and stood before him. She did a half curtsey and held out Robb to him. He took Robb in one hand and gave her the other. "Your son my Lord. I have called him Robb for King Robert."
He gave her a small smile again. "A perfect name my Lady. My Lords I give you my son Robb, the heir to Winterfell!" The men cheered and Catelyn beamed. "If you will excuse us, I believe that my lady and I have much to discuss. I will resume these discussions tomorrow."

They walked arm in arm from the room. Catelyn was still smiling to herself as they left the Hall. *This will be alright, everything will be fine.*

"How was your trip here my la... Cat?"

"Long, though we had no issues. I am glad that you made it through this war in good health. I was saddened to hear about your sister though."

He sighed heavily. "We did all that could be done." They walked in silence then. Him brooding on the war and the loss of his family. Her with no words to say. They were still strangers though they had made a child together. He opened a door after leading her up a flight of stairs and down a few halls. "This is the nursery. My brothers, sister, and I all spent our earliest years in this room. Robb already has a bed setup."

She smiled at that. She stepped into the room and saw that there were three infant beds set up in the spacious room. A woman was sitting near the fireplace rocking an infant. She whispered "My Lord" and nodded her head at Lord Stark and continued humming a tune to the infant. Catelyn was confused. She didn't understand why there was a woman with a baby in the nursery. More puzzling was how the beds were arranged. Two were on one side of the room while the third was on the opposite side of the room. Ned placed his son in the solo cradle before walking to the other side of the room and observing the cradles there.

"Ned?" Cat didn't understand.

Ned Stark looked at his wife solemnly and walked out of the room, indicating that she should follow, without saying a word. When she hesitated he spoke again, softly so that the babes were not awoken. "The woman is a nurse, her name is Wylla. If Robb is in need of anything for the moment she can tend to him. For now... We must talk."

At that she followed and he led her to what she assumed must be his solar. The room was a short walk from the nursery. "Please make yourself comfortable." She took a seat but was far from comfortable, and clearly so was he. She waited a long while before he spoke.

"Wylla is here to be a wet-nurse."

"I... I don't understand. I do not need a nurse for Robb."

He sighed heavily. "No, Robb will be quite fine with you. She is for the twins."

"Twins?"

He wasn't even looking in her direction. He had wandered to a window and was staring outside. "They are named Jon and Rosalyn. They will bear the surname Snow."

*A bastard name... oh no... "They are yours?"

He nodded and turned back to her, a pained expression on his face. "I am sorry my Lady."

She swallowed the lump in her throat. "It has been a long journey my Lord, where will my rooms be that I might freshen up."
He said no words but led her out again to a room closer to the nursery. Her maids were already inside putting her belongings away. "Be strong little Cat," she heard her father's voice tell her. So she remained strong, though she wanted to weep. A man fathering bastards at war was quite expected, but to bring them home and raise them beside your trueborn son? She felt the shame burning inside her, yet said no word of it to her husband.

A week passed and he had not touched her. They lay beside one another each night, but he did not so much as lay a finger on her. She felt that she must be doing something wrong or that he hated her and loved the mother of his bastards. She had learned in that week that no one knew who the mother of the children was although there were rumors. There were tales of Ashara Dayne with beautiful violet eyes who threw herself from the highest tower of Starfall and landed in the sea where she died. She had no courage to ask him about the mother of the children. She did however find courage to ask about another matter.

They were lying in bed for the night, and he had assumed his normal pose of curling to the side away from her. "My Lord... Ned... Do you not want me?" She was glad for the dark because she could feel the heat rise in her cheeks at her question.

He turned and faced her. "Of course I want you my Lady, my Cat. I just... I know that you have been angry with me about the children and I did not wish to push you into anything you did not want at the moment."

She smiled, her heart warmed by him suddenly. "I... I am you wife, it is my duty to honor you and fulfill your needs. No matter what my opinion on the matter."

He caressed her cheek gently. "Your opinions matter. I would not be doing my duties to you as a husband if I never considered your feelings. I am sorry that I have neglected you."

With that, he kissed her gently. To her surprise she moaned at his kiss and pulled him closer, kissing him deeper. Before long they shed their night clothes and explored one another. Kissing, touching, feeling the hunger for one another. Where there first coupling had been duty, there was passion and desire in their touches this time. She shouted his name so loudly that she blushed at the thought that they may have been heard. He laughed at the suggestion, saying that the walls were too thick, and that even if anyone heard then no one could say their Lord and Lady did not know how to please one another. She loved his laughter, it made her feel safe, and it reminded her of his brother Brandon whom she had loved.

A week later, having made love each night, she found the courage to ask him about Ashara Dayne. He terrified her that night. He had been so warm and kind but a moment before, and then at the mention of the woman's name he was colder than she had ever seen before.

"Never ask about their mother! They are my blood and that's all you need to know! Who told you the name Ashara Dayne?"

She told him, and then he left. He did not return to her that night. She was nursing Robb in the nursery when he found her late that morning. He looked as though he had not slept and he was covered in twigs and dirt.

"My lady, when you are finished tending to our son I hope that you will join me in my solar." He spoke to her gently and then left after observing all three children for a moment. The nurse was resting in an alcove in the room.

When she finished, she returned Robb to his cradle and left the room. Upon entering his solar, she seated herself in the same chair as she had two short weeks before, when he had told her about the
bastards. He looked up from his writing and gazed at her sadly.

"My lady, my Catelyn, I am sorry to you for all that I have done against you. I should not have yelled at you last night. I should not have brought two children home who are not yours. There are things that I cannot change and for that I beg your forgiveness. I spent last night in the godswood. I go there when I need to think and pray as all my forbearers have. It occurs to me that you do not have a place to go here to pray to your gods, you were raised in the Light of the Seven were you not?"

She regarded him with curiosity. What manner of man had she married? He was so different from Brandon. The eldest of Rickard Stark's sons was wild and impulsive. The second son it seemed was quiet and compassionate, willing to admit his faults. "I was my... Ned."

He gave her a half-smile. "I want to build a sept for you to pray in. I want you to teach our children all that you know of the Seven. For I confess that I do not know them, and I know that you would want our children to know them."

She smiled and a tear fell down her cheek. "Thank you."

"I have failed you before Cat, but I promise you that I will not fail you again. I will be a better husband to you than any other man would be..." He stopped himself suddenly when he realized that the other man would have been his brother Brandon. "I know that you were meant for Brandon, but I will do my best..."

She stood and, when she had walked to him, caressed his cheek. She then bent and pressed a kiss to his lips. "You are the man that I have married and I believe that we will make this work in time. We can name our next son for Brandon."

He kissed her back. "We will."
Rosalyn

It was hard to say when she began to notice the differences between how she and Jon were treated when compared to the other children. She was probably so young that she had no memories of being treated the same as the other children. If such a time had ever existed. Around just their father they were all treated the same. He listened to each of their concerns, hugged them, taught them lessons, and told them how much he loved them. Lady Catelyn Stark, their father's wife, was an entirely different matter. She had no qualms about making sure that Lord Eddard Stark's bastards knew they were not his trueborn children. As if they could forget being called bastard every day. As if they could forget being pushed aside when a Lord or Lady came to visit. As if they could forget that they bore the name Snow instead of Stark.

Rosalyn Snow was about seven the last time she could remember calling herself Rosalyn Stark in her head, just to see if it fit. Somehow Rosalyn Stark never seemed right. She was a Snow. A bastard girl with no claim to anything and no mother at all. In a way, Old Nan was the mother figure for herself and Jon. She was the only woman of the household who would treat the twins as though they belonged.

When they were ten, she and Jon made plans to run away. They stuffed two satchels full of clothes, and food that they had stolen from the kitchens, and snuck off to the gates of Winterfell late at night. They made it to the gate and a guard stopped them. He dragged them all the way to their father's solar. It seemed an eternity before he arrived, half-dressed and half-asleep to deal with his twins.

"Where were the two of you going," father questioned after he took a seat.

"Volantis," Jon replied causally, staring at the rug he was kicking with his foot.

Ned Stark raised an eyebrow. "And how were you planning to get there?"

"We were going to walk to White Harbor and take the ships," Rosalyn declared with certainty.

Lord Stark nodded solemnly at her proclamation. "I see. Why do you want to go to Volantis?"

"We don't want to be bastards," her twin seethed.

Their father let out a deep sigh and knelt before them. They were taller than him when he was kneeling, but not by terribly much. He grasped one of Jon's hands and one of Rosalyn's with his own large hands. "You are precious to me, both of you. I would not want any harm to come to you. In Winterfell you are safe. Beyond our walls are wild animals that would eat you. There are men that would steal you and sell you to slavers or kill you or worse."

The worry in his eyes was overwhelming and she started to cry. "Why does your wife hate us so much?"

He pulled them both close, and they buried their faces against him. Jon was still rather stiff, but Rosalyn was weeping into their father's shoulder. "To her you are a reminder of my sins. I cannot make her change, even though I wish that she would love you."

"Who was our mother," her small voice trembled.

He hesitated for a moment. "When you are older I will tell you both about your mother. For now it is late and I am glad that the two of you are safe."
"Why won't you tell us about her," Jon shouted, pulling away.

"Jon," their father's voice was firm and unyielding. "Do you not believe my promises? Do you not believe that I have your best interests in mind?"

Rosalyn peeked at her brother from where she was nestled. His fists were clenched but he eventually hung his head. "No father. I... we just... well... everyone says bastards are shameful and sinful. That we aren't as good as Robb and Sansa and Arya and Bran... And maybe you were ashamed of our mother if you never talk about her."

"Jon..." Never in her life had Rosalyn heard her father sound so sad. "I am not ashamed of your mother. All that I do not tell you is for your own good. One day I will tell both of you about her. I promise you. Now it is time to sleep, understood?"

"Yes father," they replied in unison.

He stood and took their hands again, leading them from the room. He returned Jon first and said goodnight with a kiss on his brow. Then he continued his walk to Rosalyn's room.

"Father?"

"Yes?"

She stopped and looked up at him, pressing her lips together thoughtfully. "May I learn to be a maester?"

He chuckled at that. "No my dear, only men learn to be maesters. They study at the Citadel in Old Town."

Her face fell, but she was determined. "But there are people who aren't maesters who do the same things, like healers and midwives. Can I learn to be a healer? I could spend time in the glass gardens and learn all the plants."

He considered her request for a little while before replying. "I will ask Maester Luwin in the morning about your request."

She beamed at him and threw her arms around him. "Thank you!"

Rosalyn remembered that day clearly, it had changed her life. The glass gardens were her refuge away from Lady Stark. She enjoyed every moment she spent learning about each plant, each flower, each herb, and each root. She enjoyed every moment that she could spend away from the watchful eyes of her father's wife.

Lady Catelyn was nothing if not attentive to the needs of her children. She watched over their education like a hawk. She was especially fond of making sure that her daughters were growing up to be ladies. Sansa was flawless at being a lady. Arya, on the other hand, was a little whirlwind in a girl's body. Rosalyn's education was no less important to their father, so she spent every lesson with her half-sisters, under the watchful eyes of Catelyn Stark. Together the girls learned to sew, to dance, to sing, to write, to read, to be virtuous, graceful, and courteous.

Rosalyn was never flawless, but she was very good at dissembling. She had been slapped once for mocking Lady Stark. Ever since that day she had learned to be polite and courteous at all times, no matter how angry she was inside. She also did it for Sansa. Much to the dismay of her mother, Sansa admired her elder half-sister. Sansa liked to ignore Jon and call him her "bastard half-brother," imitating her mother, but her treatment of Rosalyn was kinder. To Sansa, Rosalyn was a role-model.
Being three years older, Rosalyn was much closer to becoming the maiden of romance tales that Sansa imagined becoming.

"Some day a prince could come and take you away," Sansa had declared dreamily one evening when the three girls were whispering secrets in bed together.

Rosalyn laughed. "You are far more likely to marry a prince than I am. I'm a bastard remember?"

The red haired girl frowned. "I know that, but that never matters in stories."

"Ugh, you're so stupid," Arya moaned with a roll of her eyes.

"Arya," Rosalyn's voice was a warning to their youngest sister, but she agreed fully. A bastard girl could never marry a prince. A bastard girl was lucky if she could be more than a whore. "Anything is possible," she said instead.

When she was eleven or twelve Rosalyn had cried to their father that she had no place but to become a whore. Lord Stark was mortified at her declaration and asked her why she said that. She told him that she had heard a baker talking about someone's bastard girl becoming a whore, and another replied that's what all bastard girls were made for. He held her close and wiped the tears from her cheeks.

"You will never be a whore. One day I will find a good man for you to marry."

"How? No one marries bastard girls, even highborn bastard girls."

He looked at her sadly, as if he were seeing someone else in her eyes. "I will find you a husband who will love you and be kind to you."

She had nodded in agreement, but doubted what he said. She knew that if she lived in the south she could be sent off to become a septa, but she was from the North and followed the old gods of her father. She had to trust him, even when the doubts crept inside.

Theon Greyjoy always made her doubts worse. She only had vague memories of his arrival in Winterfell. He and Robb had become fast friends, though Robb also spent a great deal of time with his brothers and sisters. When Rosalyn started becoming a maiden, Theon began to notice as well. He liked to flirt with her. At first Rosalyn had not even realized that he was flirting. She just thought that he was being friendly, like her brothers were. It was not until he started directly mentioning her developing figure that she realized what he meant. She told Jon and he threatened Theon off multiple times, but Theon had no fear of Jon Snow. It was not until they finally told their father that Theon stopped bothering her. Now he would just walk away from her and leave her alone.

This day Theon was in the yard with the other boys practicing their swordplay. Rosalyn was watching them from the window of their sewing room. Currently Jon and Robb were sparring. Jon was better than Robb, in her opinion at least. He tried harder, competed harder, fought to be seen in the shadow of his legitimate brother. They had a good rhythm to their fight. Thrust, parry, side-step, thrust, parry, jump-back. They were laughing as they fought; teasing and taunting one another as they performed a "deadly" waltz with one another. Theon was smirking as always. He was cheering on Robb and disparaging Jon, but the insults seemed to be spurring her twin on. Bran was down there as well. He was cheering for both brothers.

Bran was quieter today than yesterday. Yesterday had been the first execution that the boy had ever witnessed. His dark eyes were sadder and more solemn upon his return than they had ever been before. He was such a sweet boy, and so adventurous. He loved to climb the walls of Winterfell,
much to Lady Catelyn's displeasure. He would be up the walls and across half of Winterfell before anyone knew that he was missing. Arya had often tried to be as good of a climber as her little brother, but she was not as adept.

At least there were the direwolf pups to keep up Bran's disposition. There were six pups and seven children. Jon had told her that there were originally only five that they found. The five grey-black pups for the trueborn children of Lord Stark. Then there was the albino direwolf that Jon found and claimed. He told Rosalyn that they could share the direwolf, but she shook her head and told him that the wolf was his since he found the pup. Jon said that he wanted to name the wolf Ghost, and Rosalyn thought that the name was wonderful. Even Sansa had been excited about the direwolves. She was intent on training hers to be the best behaved direwolf to ever live. Lady Stark had been disturbed at her children wanting to keep the creatures, but they would not be parted from the wolves.

"Do you not want one of you own," Arya had asked her when they were done feeding the pups that night and secured them in their own kennel.

Rosalyn shook her head. "I prefer cats."

Arya wrinkled her nose in displeasure, and they all laughed.

Down in the yard, Robb hit Jon in leg with the wooden blade, but it gave Jon enough advantage to thrust at Robb's center and knock him to the ground. Jon smiled in triumph. The boys laughed and cheered. Jon offered Robb a hand up and the boys stood together again. For the next round Jon and Bran would spar, and Robb and Theon would as well.

She sighed and turned from the window. She was supposed to be sewing with her sisters, though Septa Mordane wasn't watching them for the moment. The septa had gone to speak with Lady Stark about some matter or another. She sat down and returned to her needlework. Sansa and her friend Jeyne Poole were sewing together and chatting about the knights who would some day win their hearts. Arya was making her needle work into a mass of knots. She could never sit still and was fidgeting as usual.

Aside from Jon, Rosalyn's favorite sibling was Arya. Jon was Rosalyn's other half. Born and raised together it was as though they made a whole person sometimes. They were able to complete each other's sentences and always knew how the other was feeling without words. Arya had adopted them as a third part of their duo. Together the three of them made mischief and ran around like wild creatures. Together they would hide away from all their other siblings and make up their own games. Arya was looking to the window with longing. The girl wanted a sword of her own desperately. She wanted to be a warrior queen like Nymeria or Rhaenys or Visenya. Her mother wanted her to be a lady.

Even Sansa seemed to be impatient with her stitches. It had to be the wolf pups. The children had all formed incredible bonds with the animals in just a day. They were adorable creatures, though one day they would become fierce beasts. Ghost's eyes were already open and the others were already beginning to open. They were no fragile dogs even though they were being nursed by some of the bitches in the kennel for portions of the day. The kennel master had been reluctant to allow such a thing, but in the end he relented for occasional feedings.

Finally the septa returned and told them that they were free to play. Jeyne left them. Sansa, Arya, and Rosalyn walked to see the direwolves. Well, Arya ran as fast as her short legs would take her. They walked past the boys in their sword play. Bran was winning, though Jon was just letting him win. Theon was winning against Robb and was not going easy on him. The girls reached the kennel and were welcomed happily by the pups. Even Sansa didn't mind kneeling in the straw to pet them. Not
much later they were joined by Jon and Bran, a short while after that Robb came in with little Rickon. Together the children laughed and played. They played until they were discovered by their father.

"You are all late for dinner," he informed them with a light smile on his lips. They were covered in dirt and straw but they just smiled at him. Each offered a different excuse for their lack of attentiveness to the hour. "Go get cleaned up and then head to my solar for our meal."

They did as ordered, ensuring first that the pups were in their own pen again. When they were all cleaned and dressed they had their supper with the Lord and Lady of Winterfell. For a few moments, they were all content to just be surrounded by family.
Catelyn

Bran was unconscious and his body broken. His direwolf was anxious in the yard. The girls and Lord Stark were to head south that day, despite Bran's injuries. Jon was leaving too, going to the Wall to become a man of the Night's Watch. Catelyn had not moved from Bran's side since he was placed in his bed and she had said her goodbyes to the girls in that room. She knew they had yet to leave, and that she should see them off but she couldn't bear to leave Bran. If he should take a turn for the worse... she had to stay by his side. Jon had come and gone, much to Catelyn's fury. Eddard had not said his goodbyes yet, but she knew it would be soon.

Catelyn was alone with Bran. Alone in her grief and misery. She did not want any of her family to go south. She did not want them to be separated. It was Lysa's letter that made Ned's decision to become Hand so vital... but the girls... she did not want to lose them. She did not want to lose Ned either.

When the door opened again the last person she expected to enter the room was Rosalyn Snow. Catelyn disliked the girl just as much as she disliked Jon. They were a source of continual grief to her and a reminder of her husband's betrayal. Yes, the girl would be no more than a helper. Yes, the girl was polite. Yes Sansa and Arya both adored her, but Catelyn hated her all the more for it. Ned had even promised that he would find a good match for her soon so that she would not stay long in Catelyn's cares. She knew that finding matches for bastards was nearly impossible. She had wanted the girl to go, but Ned had not budged on his assertion that the girl would remain at Winterfell.

"I'm sorry for disturbing you my lady, but with all that is going on I thought that someone should bring you food." She was holding a tray of food and drink that she laid on a table by Catelyn.

"Thank you," she muttered weakly. She anticipated the girl leaving, but instead she walked to the window and looked outside.

"I am sorry that I must remain here in your care, my lady. I know that you would rather not have me as your charge. I just hope that I can help you and not be a burden. We both lose much today."

Rosalyn's voice was soft and sad.

For several long moments Catelyn was speechless. The girl was intently looking out the window, and Catelyn realized that she was watching the carriages being loaded. She squeezed Bran's hands and walked to the window to join her husband's bastard. Down below she could see Arya chasing her wolf around the yard and Sansa clearly scolding her little sister. Catelyn smiled sadly, tears flowed down her cheeks. Oh how she would miss her girls. How she would miss her husband. How much more would Ned's bastards miss one another, the thought flitted through her mind.

"We both lose much," Cat quietly agreed.

For the first time in their lives the two women looked directly at one another. In the bright daylight Catelyn was startled. She supposed it was because she never allowed herself close proximity to her husband's bastards that she had never really looked at the girl, or paid enough attention to her. Cat put her hand on the girl's chin and looked at her eyes. The bastard girl had Ned's hair, but her face and eyes told another story. She had Ned's hair and looked similar enough to her twin that most people would probably never notice. Rosalyn Snow did not have a Stark face. She had almost no Stark features when observed closely. And her eyes...

"Find your father and have him meet me at the heart tree," Catelyn breathed finally, as though she had seen a ghost.
The girl was almost frozen in Catelyn's hand. She nodded slowly, confusion written across her face. "Yes my lady," she said before running off to find her father.

Catelyn looked after her for a few moments. She did not want to leave her son, but her husband was going south and she needed answers. She kissed Bran on his brow. "Be here when I return my sweet boy."

She did not bother straightening her clothes or hair. She did not care how she looked. She just wanted answers. She needed answers. As she walked to the godswood, her thoughts wandered to when she had met the twins all those long years past.

Lost in her reverie of thoughts and pacing was how Ned found her beside the ancient weirwood. "Cat?" He spoke her name gently, and she was unsure if he had said her name more than once.

"Who was their mother," her voice wavered. He stepped closer to her and she repeated the question again but pressed on, needing the answer. "Rosalyn has violet eyes. They are very pale but without bright light they may seem blue or grey, but they are violet. Whose child is she?" A part of her mind still whispered that they were Ashara's twins, but she was not so certain of that.

Eddard Stark froze and his face became so serious and stoically blank that she trembled. He gently but firmly held her arms with his hands. The old fear that he would shout at her again lingered, but he did not yell. Instead he swallowed hard and whispered a single word that made her knees weaken and the world spin. "Lyanna."

It was hard to breathe, but she managed to reply with a question and a statement. "Rhaegar?" He gave a swift nod. She felt bereft, sick, and strangely relieved. She wanted to be angry but also felt like laughing.

His voice was thick with emotion when he spoke again. "She died birthing them and made me promise to keep them safe. I have never been more lost and confused and scared than at that moment. The war, the deaths, all of it... She had run away and married him. Our father and brother were murdered. And my little sister lay there sobbing as she died until I promised to keep her children safe. I had to claim them as my bastards... it was the only way."

"Why did you never tell me?"

"It was treason. I did not want you and our children harmed if anything happened..."

"Oh Ned." She was crying and laid her head against him for support. He wrapped his arms around her.

"There is more my love. You asked once about Ashara Dayne when you were new to Winterfell. In truth I had loved her once. We met and fell in love at Harrenhal. She and I spent a night together at the tournament. I could have been married to her... You were promised to Brandon. It was duty to marry you, though the love I have for you now could never be replaced. Her family stayed with the Targaryen's, she was lost to me and I married you. After Lyanna's death we travelled to Starfall to return Arthur Dayne's sword."

He stopped for a moment, lost in memory. "I still loved her, though I had not seen her since Harrenhal. I dishonored her and myself and married you. I had slain her brother. We spoke for a long time and she took me to their lichyard. She had borne a daughter during the war. The babe had gotten sick and died after a few short months of life. My bastard daughter Rosalyn, for whom the girl we raise is named. The sorrow of all I had told her, and choosing to stay true to my vows to you, drove her to madness and she threw herself into the sea. My choices for duty and honor led to death."
So I swore to keep the children safe, and to never speak the memory of Ashara Dayne again."

Catelyn was at a loss for words. There was so much to take in. Her husband's dangerous and painful secrets. Their son near death. The departure of Ned and the girls for the south... "You send a prince to the Wall?"

He was suddenly angry. "Never speak of it! Jon goes to the Wall for his safety. Rosalyn I leave in your protection but she is still my bastard daughter to you and all the world. Let them live normal lives and never believe themselves anything but Starks and they will be safer for it. We will all be safer for it. If anyone ever learned the truth we would all be killed!"

She nodded solemnly, frightened. The King, Queen, and half their household were in Winterfell right now. They had already tried to kill Bran, Cat was convinced of that. If anyone knew about the twins... "How many people know about them?"

"Myself, Howland and Jyana Reed, and the nurse Wylla who is in Starfall. She kept Ashara's secret and my own as well. No one else can know my love."

"I will never tell a soul. Keep our daughters safe Ned. You take them to a den of lions and I cannot bear to lose them or you." Tears were streaming down her cheeks and he gently wiped them away.

"I will come back to you one day, and our girls will come back to you as well." He held her close, kissing her lips and the hair on her head. She wanted to believe her love but her heart held only dread.
"I want mama," Rickon screamed again. The woman who was trying to dress him was not mama. Mama had gone away before Bran woke up. Bran could not play anymore. Rickon wanted father too, but he had gone away with Sana, Ara, and Jon. Robb always frowned now. Bran always frowned. Rosa always frowned.

"Here, let me help with him." It was Rosa, she wasn't mama either, but he liked Rosa. "My little wolf, what's wrong?"

"I want mama," he said whimpered as he threw himself into her arms.

"I know little one. I know you miss her."

"When will she come back?"

She paused and looked up, away from him. "It may be awhile. She had to go see father about the bad man who tried to hurt Bran. Do you remember where father went?"

"Away with the king and Sana and Ara and Jon."

"Sansa and Arya went south with father. Can you say their names properly for me?"

"San... Sansa. Ar... Ara... Arya."

"Good job Rickon. Jon went north to join the Night's Watch. Your mother will return as quickly as she can. Would she want you to be mean to your maids?"

He pouted at her. "No."

"Alright then. Can I help you get dressed?"

"I don't want to, I want to play with Shaggy."

"Not until you get dressed. Robb needs you to be a good boy and join him and Bran in the Great Hall."

He wrinkled his nose at her but let her clean him up and get dressed. He held her hand and they walked to the hall. The strange short man who came and left with the king was there. Robb seemed angry but Rickon did not understand why. Maybe Robb wanted mama and father back too? He always sat in father's chair now. Bran smiled at the strange man eventually. Then the strange man left the hall.

"Rosa, I was good when the strange man talked, can I see Shaggy now?"

She wiped at her eyes and then smiled down at him. "Of course my little wolf."

He cocked his head at her. "Why are you crying?"

She laughed. "I am happy. Lord Tyrion gave us plans so that Bran can ride a horse again."

"Oohh. If Bran rides again will he be happy again?"

She gave him one of her sad smiles again. The sort of smile that big people all ways gave little
people when they were lying. "I hope so."

She took him to see Shaggy, and he played with his wolf for a while. Shaggy liked her, but he missed his brothers and sisters. The one sister was gone and everyone was so far apart. Rickon could hear Theon start talking to Rosa behind him.

"You should take a walk with me."

She sighed. "Why would I take a walk with you?"

Rickon looked over at them. Rosalyn was backed against the wall. Theon was standing in front of her with one hand above her on the wall. He was smiling. He was always smiling. Rickon never liked Theon's smiles. "A girl like you has to be lonely. I could keep you company."

"I know the sort of company you want from me."

"You would enjoy it." He touched her face with his free hand and then put the hand on her hip. She seemed very unhappy. "Bastard girls are always more eager than trueborn girls."

"Leave now or I will tell Robb."

"And what will he do? Scold me, tell me to stay away from you? I'm your father's hostage remember? One day I will have you."

Shaggy started to snarl, and Theon jumped. He saw Shaggy and Rickon glaring at him, and left. Rickon wanted Bran to play with him again. Rosa laughed and kissed Rickon on the head. "You are a wonderful little brother."

Rickon smiled. "Thanks. Can we play with Bran now?"

She held out her hand. "Of course, I am sure he is lonely."

"Can Shaggy come along?"

"No little one, he is too wild to be inside the castle."

Rickon frowned again. He patted Shaggy on the head and walked with Rosalyn to see Bran. Rickon wanted Bran to really play, but he couldn't. He could just sit and talk. He was so sad, even though the idea of riding a horse again made him happy.

"Will you walk again," he asked his brother.

Bran looked like he was going to cry. "No, never again."

"I wish you could walk again." He was fidgeting beside his brother on the bed. Rosa sat beside them as well. She kissed both of them on their heads.

"We can pray for the gods to be kind my little wolf. The gods wanted our Bran to live, and so he has. Come now, let's get you both ready for dinner."
Sunrise was breathtaking from the Eyrie. That morning the sky turned from dark blues and purples to gray-blue to pale orange and yellow with pink streaking the clouds until the rays of the sun broke over the horizon and the sky was aqua blue streaked with golden sunbeams.

Watching the sunrise all that Catelyn could think was that Tyrion was gone, justice was dead, and that her family in Riverrun was in danger from the Lannisters. Yet those thoughts were pushed aside by the troubled feeling that had risen in her over the last several weeks. She ignored it over and over again, yet now in the stillness of dawn when all she could do was think and wonder she began to count.

How long had it been, truly? She had paid no mind the first month or the second as she thought back over all the travel and stresses and fighting it was no wonder she had not noticed. Yet she ate less the more they traveled and yet her stomach grew and her breasts grew fuller. Nearly four months had passed since Eddard had left Winterfell. It had been longer since her moon’s blood.

Had she not gone through this before with her five healthy beautiful children? Had she not prayed to the old gods and the new that she might bear her lord husband yet another child? Yet she had been too busy to notice the signs that there was another Stark growing inside her.

Now she couldn’t stop noticing them. She looked at herself in a mirror and saw the way her curves had softened again, how her belly was beginning to become a soft shell. She wanted her husband to be there with her. She wanted them to return to Winterfell and let the rest of the world have its own troubles.

Yet even Winterfell held its troubles. Rosalyn Snow was of age to wed and Ned had said that the girl would be married off soon. How could they marry off a girl with violet eyes? How could they marry off a bastard that was a trueborn Princess?

Fear had not left her gut from the day Ned left and told her the truth of their birth. Fear for the lives of Ned and herself and all of their children. Was this truly the best time for another child to be born to the world? A world where Bran had been nearly murdered twice? Where war was inevitable and children were murdered by men calling themselves King?

She shivered in her robe but not from the air outside her window.

She decided not to tell Ned. It would be easy to send a raven, but she couldn’t do it, not yet at least. It was so early and the child might not be born, she had miscarried once before. Yes, she would wait to send a raven lest the child never be born and bring more sorrow and stress to Ned.

For now, she would hide her growing child beneath her long flowing gowns and travel north again.
Winterfell was too quiet. Robb and Theon had just left with the Northern army to free Lord Stark from the treachery of the Lannisters. How could they think Winterfell would not raise an army up to free their Lord? Robb would bring back their father and sisters, he had to win.

Lady Stark was gone as well. She had left shortly after Lord Stark and the girls, when an assassin tried to kill Bran. She went in order to bring news of Bran's would be assassin to Lord Stark. Last news of Lady Stark had been from the Eyrie, where she was holding Tyrion Lannister for the attempt on Bran's life. Tyrion couldn't be the one who hired the assassin, not when he had given them a way for Bran to ride a horse. Rosalyn said nothing though, there was no way the news would reach them fast enough to make a difference.

Now it was just Bran, acting as Lord of Winterfell in place of his father and brother, Rickon, and Rosalyn left of all the Starks. Even Summer and Shaggydog were lonely, they whimpered at the gates to Winterfell, missing their kin as much as their owners did. Sansa's pup Lady had been laid in the crypts with the Kings and Queens of the past, a fitting end for such a gentle creature.

Winterfell had been happy not so many months past. Now there was too much dread and fear and loneliness.

Rosalyn missed her sisters bickering. She missed helping them with their hair. She missed Arya play fighting with her brothers. She missed Sansa dreaming of a beautiful knight who would love her. She had adored being betrothed to a Prince. Now her sisters lives were in danger and Robb was their hope of rescue.

She missed Bran walking and running and climbing. She missed his easy smile and laugh. They were gone with the use of his legs.

She missed her father's gentle strength and the way he found time to be a Lord and yet gave each of his children attention. The way he listened to everyone, great or small, and his children most of all. Now he was in a dungeon for something he could not have done.

She missed Jon most of all. He wrote often enough but he was her twin, half of her being from the womb, and he was gone. Now with father's life in danger as well as the lives of her sisters, Rosalyn felt only dread and she wanted her brother back. She had never wanted him to leave to take the black. She had cried at him, at uncle Benjen, and at their father that Jon might stay. All three told her that Jon had to go and wanted to go. She had been angry with him up until the day he left, but that day she broke down and spent most of it with him. They talked and laughed and cried. He told her that he had given Arya a sword which their little sister named Needle. She got to see her sister with the sword shortly before she went south.

She tried to keep Bran and Rickon happy, yet that seemed to be increasingly difficult with each passing day. How could she keep Bran happy when he couldn't walk? How could she keep Rickon, a child of four years, happy when his mother and father and brothers and sisters were gone? Her family was at war. Robb leading his host to join the Tully's in their fight against the Lannisters in Riverrun. Father was imprisoned in King's Landing. Sansa and Arya were imprisoned there as well. How could Rosalyn possibly keep her young brothers happy when all three missed and feared for the safety of their family?

Rosalyn went to the tree to say her prayers shortly after her brother rode south. She never prayed to the new gods, only to the old as her father did. Osha, the strange wildling woman, was praying at
weirwood when Rosalyn arrived.

The older woman looked at her when she arrived and bowed her head politely. "I will leave if you wish milady."

She laughed. "I'm no lady, just the Lord's bastard girl."

"Bastard?" The word was apparently foreign to the wilding from the look on her face.

"My father, Lord Eddard Stark, was not married to my mother when I was conceived and born. I know not who she is or was, but she was most certainly not Lady Catelyn Stark." She spoke with some bitterness.

Osha snorted a laugh. "You southerners are all strange. In the north a man takes a woman from another village and she becomes his woman. There's no need of titles or ceremonies, everyone knows who is whose. You are the child of the same man as the little Lord, so you are a Lady, at least that's how I see it."

Rosalyn smiled. "Thank you. I was wondering... Bran told me that you told him that the war should go north instead of south?"

She nodded solemnly. "The trees don't live in the south so the gods can't help there. Besides which the dangers are north not south even if your Lord father's life is in danger it's north you need to go or all our lives are in danger. But the army went south because you southerners don't understand the danger. You all think it's safe behind that wall of ice but it's not big enough to stop the evil that's coming."
Eddard

Ned was staring at Varys as they stood in his cell. Ned was sick, tired, and in pain. He felt so lost and alone. Varys was doing a good job of convincing him that he should go along with the eunuch’s plan. *To keep Sansa safe, and go to the Wall. He says he wants peace, and who am I to doubt that? Peace always ends though, and there is always war.*

Varys was about to leave but then he turned back. "There is one more thing Lord Hand, when you reach the Wall, should you choose that wisest path, you should tell the children the truth."

"Children?" He did not understand, but the look in Varys's eyes spoke volumes. *He couldn't know. Five people know the truth about the twins, that's all. "What do you mean?"

His smile was soft and knowing. "When the dragons return, they will come for whomever stood against them. Dorne will grant its support, naturally. What of you?"

"When the dragons return?"

"Will Rhaegar's children be on the throne or will his brother and sister? Daenerys whom you did not want to be killed, will some day return to claim her father's throne. Will we have peace or another dance with dragons?"

Ned felt a chill run down his spine. "How do you?"

"I know many things Lord Stark, much of which does not concern you for now. I was here when your sister met Princess Elia. The brides of the valiant prince who was seeking to overthrow his father... What would you have done if she had lived?"

*This man knows far too many secrets. "Kept her safe."

Varys shook his head. "Would you have done as good a job at keeping her safe as you are at keeping yourself safe?"

"We were all safe in Winterfell. Away from this den of liars."

A gentle smile caressed Varys's lips. "We are all liars my lord, even you." Ned managed the strength to glare venomously at the eunuch, but could not help but see the truth in his words. How many lies had he told to protect his sister? Her children? Even Rhaegar, the foolish prince who started it all? Varys spoke again. "Whose side would you have fought for when the dragons return?"

Ned remained silent. He could did not think he would have been able to choose between his family and his friend. That was why he had lied all along. To keep the peace. To keep his friend and family safe.

"Peace has a price Lord Stark, and that peace is always paid in blood. You and I both know that."

"Why does any of this matter to you? You're a foreigner."

"Am I?" Amusement played on his lips, but not in his eyes. "Perhaps I was born overseas, but for some people home is in the blood."

Ned narrowed his eyes at the plump man. "Who are you?"

"Me? No one, truly. I may have been someone once, but they took what would make me a man
away when I was only a child. Yet here I stand, a spider amongst the lions."

He turned to walk away again but Ned spoke up. "Will you tell anyone?"

Varys regarded him with curiosity. "I have not spoken a word of what I saw to anyone except you. I am no hero and no fool. I told you that I want peace."

"The dragons returning means war. You said yourself that peace is paid in blood. How many will die to restore the Targaryens? How can you be so sure that it will happen?"

"I have my reasons my lord, I have my reasons." Without another word the eunuch disappeared down the dark corridor, leaving Ned alone in the blackness of his cell.

It was days later that the gold cloaks came for him. His thirst was painful, his leg was excruciating. They marched him from his black cell into the bright light of day. It had been so long since he had seen the sun that the brightness of the day hurt his eyes. They put him on a cart and he rode with his guards to Baelor's Sept. He was led up the steps to where Joffrey, Cersei, Littlefinger, and Varys stood amongst others. It was Sansa he saw most of all. His beautiful daughter that resembled her mother.

I have to lie to keep you safe, my sweet girl. A few lies and then to go north again. To Winterfell. To home. Starks were not made for the south.

He spoke the lies painfully. He felt the rocks and debris that hit him. He heard the jeers of the crowd. He saw, almost in passing the small child hiding on the statue of Baelor. Arya... Joffrey was speaking. The words sounded hopeful, and then his hope turned to ashes. They pushed him down on the platform. The marble was warm. He could hear Sansa's screams. He could hear Cersei, Varys, and even Littlefinger pleading for his life to be spared.

He heard the sword being unsheathed. He saw a thousand moments pass through his mind. A thousand lives come and gone. His children most of all, those of his body, those who were his sister's, and the child he had never known.

May the gods protect the children. "Ned... promise me Ned..." I failed you Lya. I failed your children. Cat... my sweet Cat...

The last thing he saw was a little girl with violet eyes and black hair smiling and holding out her arms. Ser Illyn swung the sword, and Ned Stark was no more.
Catelyn III

Your husband is dead.

It felt like a thousand knives cutting into her soul.

Had they not been winning? Was Jaime Lannister not their prisoner?

Did any of it matter now? Her love was dead. The father of the children she had borne and the one she carried. His head taken from him, and their daughters held captive by his murderers.

You promised me that you would return Ned. How can I do this without you?

Be strong for Robb. Be strong and get your girls back. Be strong for your sons who are alone in Winterfell, Bran who never even said goodbye to you or his father. Be strong for the child in your womb. The child who will never know its father. Be strong for revenge.

Robb had been quiet at the news. He was becoming so much like his father, holding his thoughts and emotions to himself. She wanted to hold him but did not, lest his bannermen think that their Lord was weak.

They were going to Riverrun. The home of her childhood. The place where Robb was born. Now he was returning as a Lord instead of a babe. Both times the country had been at war. Both times she lost men she loved. Both times she prayed for peace. Both times the cost was too high.

At least she would see her father and brother again soon. Being with them again would be a sweet relief even in the midst of despair.

It was a few days after learning about Ned’s murder that she went to tell Robb of her pregnancy. She was showing easily enough if her gowns were close enough to her body, but she could still feign otherwise with loose layers. It was late when she entered his tent. He looked as though he had not slept in days.

“Mother,” he sighed upon seeing her.

She favored him with a brief smile. “I have good news that I want to share with you.”

“We will be at Riverrun soon and with family.”

“Yes,” she agreed. “But that is not what I meant.” She swallowed hard as the baby kicked. You gave me a gift Ned... “Your father... I carry your father’s child.”

He stared at her, shocked and confused. “How? When? Truly?”

She nodded and tears escaped from her eyes. “Just before he left for King’s Landing. One last child.” She took his hand and placed it on the swell of her stomach and the baby kept kicking for him. His eyes filled with emotion and wonder as he looked at her. He always was amazed when she let him feel his brothers and sisters kick inside her.

“This child is hope for the North,” he murmured. “Why did you say nothing until now?”

“I did not want to worry anyone.”

“Did father know?”
She shook her head sadly. “I did not want him to worry for me...”

He embraced her tightly as a sob escaped her lips. “I will avenge him mother. I swear it by the old gods and the new. When we reach Riverrun we can announce your pregnancy to all my lords. They will be happy to hear good news in such dark times.”

“Yes, I think that there will be much celebrating.”

Eventually they arrived at her childhood home. It was just as she remembered, though it no longer brought her joy. She was helped out of the boat and onto the docks, if her helper noticed her belly he said nothing. From there she went to see her father. He was lucid, but his health was failing. It broke her heart to see him as he was lying there in abed.

That night Robb held a council. Renly had declared himself King, they had learned. Catelyn urged them to seek peace but her plea fell upon deaf ears, they wanted blood, not peace. Then as one the people declared Robb the King in the North. They learned that she carried Ned’s last child and they cheered for the unborn prince or princess. They sent ravens to Winterfell declaring her sons to be princes, the boys who she missed with all her heart.

She also sent word separately to Rosalyn, charging the secret princess with the safety of her boys. She had almost told Robb that his bastard siblings were in truth his trueborn cousins and lawful heirs to the Iron Throne. She could not tell him now, not with his people declaring their independence. Perhaps Ned had been right; in order to keep the children of Lyanna and Rhaegar safe they could never tell a soul.

Time passed as her father’s health declined and her child grew bigger and stronger within her. The river lords were leaving them one by one to return to their holdfasts, trying to harvest what remained of their crops. Robb decided to send Theon to Pyke to seek the help of the Iron Born, despite Catelyn’s warning that it was a bad idea to have Theon sending the message.

She worried about her daughters in King’s Landing and feared the worst for Arya, of whom no word had been mentioned since before Ned’s imprisonment. The younger of her two daughters was nearly ten. The thoughts of her children made her cry. She longed to hold them each in her arms and keep them all safe. However her children were spread throughout the world now, and there was no way to keep them all with her.

It was about three moon cycles after Ned’s death, and a few days shy of Arya’s tenth birthday, that she went into labor. The day was dreary and rainy, without a hint of sunlight. Catelyn was breaking her fast with Robb and Edmure when she felt the contractions begin. Robb, her young son whom she called king, was suddenly more anxious than she had seen him since he was in Winterfell. He is growing up too fast, she reflected.

“She will be fine to make it there mother,” Robb worried.

Edmure laughed and clapped his nephew on the back. “You sound more worried than she was when she birthed you. Escort your mother to her chambers and I will get the maester and midwife, your grace.”

Her brother walked away laughing while Robb took her arm and walked with her to her rooms. When the maester arrived Robb was asked to leave. He joined Edmure down the hall and paced anxiously, awaiting news of his mother and his brother or sister. Her labor was relatively short. A few hours of pushing and shouting and the babe made its way into the world with a lusty cry.
“A son my lady,” the maester said as he cleaned the child up. When she was delivered of the afterbirth and cleaned up, he placed the baby boy in Catelyn’s arms.

Catelyn smiled down at her new son, with tears brimming in her eyes as she looked at his face. “A Prince of Winterfell. Please, send Robb and my brother in.”

“Of course my lady.”

She studied her youngest son’s face as she waited for them to return. As she watched his blue eyes open and close she reflected upon the births of her other children. Robb’s birth had been the most difficult and longest, Bran’s the second most difficult. The other children had all come in their own times and ways with varying degrees of difficulty. Arya was quiet at birth. Rickon and Sansa cried louder than this new babe. How strange it seemed to her that her first and last sons would be born at Riverrun where she had been born. Both born when the danger of war was upon them. Both born when their father was gone. However, Ned Stark wouldn't return to hold this son.

Robb entered the room and looked at them with a nervous smile. “A boy,” he asked upon entering.

“He has my eyes and your father’s hair,” she replied softly, tears slipping from her eyes. Ned... She missed Ned. He should have been there to see his child. She could see tears in Robb’s eyes as well when she passed his newborn brother into his arms. Her brother Edmure gave her a kiss on her head.

“Have you thought of what to name him,” Robb asked as he laid a finger in his brother’s hand, marveling at the tiny fingers.

Catelyn met Robb’s eyes. There could only be one name for her newborn son. “Eddard, he shall be named for his father.”

Robb smiled and returned his brother to their mother. “A good name. I will tell my people that a new Prince of Winterfell has been born.”

She was soon left alone with her babe Eddard, who would never know his namesake. Over time her youngest son became her best companion. She visited her father, and spoke with her brother and uncle, but Robb was often too busy to talk. About a month after Eddard was born Robb came to see her. He was quiet at first, unsure of what he would say.

“I need someone to treat with Renly. I need it to be you.”

She looked at him incredulously. “Did you not see your infant brother? He is but a month old, and still needs me. Have you not seen your grandfather who is dying? He needs me too.”

He sighed deeply. “I need you. I need you to be the one to treat with Renly because I have no one else who will know what to say to him. You I trust to do this.”

“And will I bring my son with me?” Her voice was cold. She knew that he needed her but so did her babe.

“There is a woman among the cooks who recently gave birth, she can nurse my brother. I need you to do this.”

She had never been more furious with her first born than at that moment. She couldn’t believe that he would do this to her. They fought hard about the matter; however, in the end she went out of duty.
It was three long, hard months from the time Catelyn left Riverrun until she held her infant son again. Her milk had dried up during her travels. When she held her son he cried for his nurse. It took a while before he grew accustomed to her again. Holding him felt so good; she felt briefly whole again as she gently cradled the infant Eddard. She could not help but still feel angry at Robb still for stealing that time away from her. Time that she would never have again.

The wet-nurse who was caring for Eddard was a young woman of common birth. Her name was Daisy; she had borne a child around the time Eddard had been born but the child died. She was a gentle, simple girl, a baker’s daughter and a baker’s wife. Her husband had died fighting for Robb during the battle of the Whispering Wood. She was apologetic to Catelyn for her son being slow to warm up to her again. At first Cat resented her but in time Catelyn found that she didn’t mind the girl’s company. It was nice to have a companion, and the girl was very good with little Eddard.

Daisy and Brienne, who had run with her from Renly’s camp, were Catelyn’s constant companions, they and baby Eddard. Her only time away from the three was when she went to see her ailing father. She found herself wanting news of Robb and her brother Edmure who were away warring. She found her solace with her babe.

Catelyn found that she could hardly pull herself away from the boy for any length of time. He was an easy tempered child but already strong willed and quiet like his father. By far Sansa and Bran had been the easiest of the babes, always smiling and laughing. Arya and Rickon were the strongest tempered and most difficult of the children, how true that was even as they grew. Sansa and Bran were her dreamers, Arya and Rickon her wild ones, and it seemed Robb and Eddard were her noble warriors, born and raised in battle.

She often wondered if Ned’s bones had made it safely back to Winterfell yet. That was the hardest shock of returning to Riverrun, to see the silent sisters guarding the bones of her late husband. She wished the gods would return the dead. She needed Ned back in her arms. She wanted all of her children back, her husband alive and with her, and her Lord father healthy instead of dying.
Rosalyn's heart was pounding in her chest. She kept trying to breathe deeply, to calm herself, but she kept feeling her throat constrict. She paced the room, picking up objects and setting them back down. Her hands were shaking. She threw a vase she was holding across the room and slumped to the ground, sobbing.

All of her life she had been safe and protected within the walls of Winterfell. Lord Eddard Stark, her father, had always kept his children safe. He was gone now, his bones resting in his tomb. Her brothers Jon and Robb had protected her their entire lives. They had teased her, tormented her, as all brothers do, but they always loved her and kept her safe. Robb was warring in the south now. Jon was ranging beyond the Wall. Even the soldiers and guards that had remained behind to guard Winterfell when the armies went south were not enough to protect the castle.

Theon Greyjoy and his men took Winterfell with barely a fight. There were not enough men to fight. When they were subdued, Theon gathered everyone into the Great Hall and gave them his terms. He called himself the Prince of Winterfell and they were not his to do with as he willed. He promised to be a generous lord, but Rosalyn found that statement difficult to believe.

Eventually, Theon had dismissed everyone from the hall back to their homes and rooms, except for her. He had sent her to the Lord’s chambers. She had gone with no protest, save to whisper to Bran that he should stay strong. Rickon cried, but the poor child cried a lot anymore; he needed his mother and had spent far too long without her. Now it was impossible to say if he would ever see his mother again.

She had never spent much time in the Lord's chambers. Lady Catelyn had spent much time there, so she had always tried to find her father elsewhere in the keep. She and Jon had learned from a very young age to avoid their father’s wife. Her cold anger was nearly always present when the twins were around.

The room still held the scent of her father. It was a warm, earthy aroma which clung in the air of the chamber. Her breathing eased finally, and her tears slowed. Her father’s presence in that room calmed her. The ache in her heart over his loss she was convinced would never lessen, but everything he had taught her would remain. She was a Stark of Winterfell, even if her name was Snow. Starks do not bend. Starks do not crumble when life is difficult. Starks endure.

She picked herself up and straightened her clothes. If she was to be a prisoner, then she had better learn how to thrive. She knew why Theon had sent her to the Lord’s chamber. He was claiming her. There was no other reason to send a woman to the bed chamber that you wanted to occupy. Had he not always made comments about her? Had he not always said that he liked the look of her? Had he not always said that he wanted to be alone with her?

Now she was alone. She had no protectors. She had no one around her to defend her. She only had herself now, and two younger brothers that were her responsibility. Her duty was to protect Bran and Rickon, no matter what.

In a strange, twisted way she found the entire situation to be darkly humorous. She remembered crying to her father that she would some day be a whore because she was a bastard. She remembered his insistence that she never would, and he would find her a good husband. Yet here
She was, being held by a man that would surely use her as he would a whore. It occurred to her that she could use herself to manipulate him. Perhaps she could make him want her? If she could manipulate him, then she might be able to keep herself and her brothers safe.

She lit candles around the room, brightening the chamber. After the room was illumined, she stood before Lady Catelyn’s looking glass. She had never spent much time looking at her reflection. Really, she had only seen her face reflected in panes of glass or still pools of water. There were very few mirrors in Winterfell due to how costly they were. A good quality glass was worth at least five hundred gold dragons. Lady Catelyn’s had cost considerably more than five hundred gold dragons. Arya had avoided the mirror as though it was a pox. Sansa had adored staring at her reflection. Rosalyn had snuck a peak at herself once or twice, but not for very long.

She studied her reflection now. Long, dark brown hair, pale skin, strong cheekbones, relatively clear complexion, and round eyes in an oval face. Violet eyes, she realized, startled. Her eyes had darkened from the pale color she remembered from the last time she had looked at a mirror.

“Who was my mother,” she whispered, touching her reflection. Violet eyes were rare, very rare. *My mother’s eyes. Who were you?* She had long suspected that her mother was dead. What woman would let a man take her children away? She also suspected that her father was not the sort of man that would forbid a woman from seeing her children. Those two suspicions led to the conclusion that her mother had died when she and Jon were both infants. He had promised that he would tell them one day, but he was gone now, that promise unfulfilled. Lady Stark had sent word that she knew of Rosalyn’s mother. ‘Keep the boys safe.’ ‘I was told about your mother, and will speak with you about her upon my return to Winterfell.’

*When were you told Lady Catelyn? Why was I never told about my own mother? Why is it such a huge secret? She was just a woman. She had bastard twins, that’s all.*

Rosalyn released a frustrated sigh. *I am Theon’s now. It doesn’t matter who my parents were.* She jumped at sudden sounds outside the door. She feared that Theon had come already, but the voices receded. She breathed again and stood against the warm stone walls of the room. *I need a plan. If he wants to bed me does it really matter? It’s not like I was going to marry up anyway. If I give him what he wants, then I can keep my brothers safe. At least he won’t be the first man I kissed.*

She reflected fondly upon her first kiss. She could not remember his name, but she could remember his soft lips and rough hands. She was twelve and he was fourteen. He was one of the blacksmith’s boys. They had taken a liking to one another for some months before they met in the glass gardens and finally kissed. Sadly, Jon and Robb both saw and scared him off. It was the first time she could remember truly fighting with her brothers. When their father saw their fighting, he demanded to know what was wrong. They all refused to explain the cause of their fight. As a result, they were all sent to bed without their supper, but she was happy with her brothers upholding her honor. She was fairly certain that the boy had gone south with Robb’s army.

*You aren’t here to protect my honor now brothers. Now, when I truly need you, I am alone.* In that moment she hated them all. She hated her father for going away with the king. She hated Robb for not leaving enough people to protect Winterfell, and for being foolish enough to trust Theon. She hated Jon for leaving her. *I need you here Jon. I need you to protect me. We were made to guard each other remember? You and me against the world.*

She could remember watching him from the towers of Winterfell until he faded into the horizon. “I love you. I’ll return for a visit as soon as I can. Write to me,” he had said. “Every day,” she had promised. There had been no response from him in months as he ranged beyond the Wall. She was convinced that he was still alive. She was convinced that she would know if he had died.
I have to please Theon. Be his mistress or paramour or whatever he wants to call me. Keep my brothers safe. She searched through the dressers, vanities, and wardrobes. She found Lady Catelyn’s makeup and a floor length silk robe. Lady Stark was half way across the country, surely she did not care what happened to her possessions as long as her sons were safe.

She took off her clothes and draped the robe around herself. She then experimented with the powders and colors which made up Lady Catelyn’s cosmetics. She was not accustomed to wearing face powders, and it took some time before she was satisfied with the result. It occurred to her that she should have changed into the robe after applying the facial powders, as she had spilled some onto the delicate fabric.

She walked to the window and watched the rain pooling in the yard. “So dreary. I suppose that’s fitting.” She found a book and half-heartedly read the words while seated by the window.

She jumped a little when the door opened. Unsurprisingly, Theon was standing there. Surprisingly, he was holding a tray of food and a carafe of wine.

“No servant to carry your tray,” she condescended.

He walked into the room and placed the tray and carafe onto a table. Then he shut and bolted the door. “I thought that you might be hungry and I did not want to be around the servants anymore.” He shifted awkwardly by the door. He seemed flustered, and though his eyes had widened at her lack of attire, he was avoiding leering at her. He held her gaze for a few moments before he sat at the table. “It has been a long day. I know you must be hungry.”

A long day? A long day betraying the people who raised you. She was furious again, but did her best to bury the emotions inside. She was accustomed to hiding her feelings, Lady Catelyn had seen to that. She was also very hungry and her throat was parched, but she had been far too stubborn to leave the room. She acquiesced and sat with him, pouring herself a goblet of wine and drinking it down. She felt warmth flood her body from the wine, and poured more into the goblet.

“How are my brothers,” she asked sweetly.

“They are safe and sound in their rooms. I am not going to hurt them. I am not doing any of this to hurt them.” There was a pleading quality to the tone of his voice.

She glared at him. “You already killed people who were just defending their city from you. You, who betrayed the people who raised you. And yet you claim to not be trying to hurt my brothers, my family, myself?”

“Raised me? I was a hostage here.” He tore angrily at the bread which was on the tray. “I was a well fed, well dressed prisoner. Kept away from my family so that my father would not fight against the Iron Throne again.”

“My father never treated you like a prisoner. Robb treated you like a brother. It’s Robb you are betraying!”

“Robb was never my brother!” He shouted the words at her but seemed pained at saying them. “My brothers were killed by your father in battle. My father is King of the Iron Islands and I am his heir. I have taken Winterfell for the glory of my people! Robb can be King of the Riverlands. The north is mine!”

“Don’t you think that Robb will reclaim Winterfell?” She clenched her fist beneath the table, digging her nails into her palm to remain calm. “The North belongs to the Starks, you know that just
as much as I do. Do you really think that you will be able to keep the North?”

He glanced down at his food, trying to hide his uncertainty. “If we cannot hold the North we will sack Winterfell and return. That is the way of the Ironborn. Besides which, Robb will never attack Winterfell while his brothers are here. I will ransom them to him when the time is right.”

*Ransom them... but what about me? Sansa and Arya are captive in King’s Landing. Bran, Rickon and I are captive here. Brothers have more value than sisters, but bastard girls mean nothing, nothing at all.* She nibbled quietly at the food, pondering over her own fate. Her head was already beginning to swim from the wine. “What will you do with me?”

He looked at her strangely and placed a hand on hers. She was proud of herself for not flinching. “I would have you be my claim to Winterfell.”

She gazed at him incredulously. “In what way? I already assumed that you want to make me your... mistress.” She did not like to think of other words that could be used for her current situation. “You would not have sent me to these chambers otherwise. Taking me to your bed hardly makes me suitable to be your claim to Winterfell.”

He held her hand with both of his and smiled nervously at her. “I would have you be my Queen.” She was so floored by his statement that she nearly laughed, but his somber expression made her hold her tongue. “I asked your father once if he would allow us to marry, but he refused. He said that you were not the right one for me. I never knew what to say to you after that.”

She pulled away from him and walked to the windows, draining her goblet again as she wobbled her way across the room. *Not the right one? A marriage to between the bastard of Lord Stark and the heir to the Iron Islands, it was a better arrangement than she could have dreamt. Why did you refuse that match father? You promised me a marriage and yet you refused the only one ever offered.* She doubted his words. She could not believe that Theon truly had always wanted to marry her. “You really expect me to believe that tale? You constantly teased me. You slept with all the whores and many of the other women in town, yet you expect me to believe that you wanted me as your bride?” She could not keep the venom out of her voice and she stared out the window, into the dreary black of night.

“I did not know how else to speak to you. The other girls never meant anything. They were just amusements to pass my time. You were denied to me, but now... now things can be different. We can rule Winterfell together.” The earnestness to his voice was tangible. She turned to face him and could see how vulnerable he was.

She narrowed her eyes at him. “For how long? My brother will return and take off my head as a traitor if you take me as a Queen.”

He stood and walked to her, grasping her hands again once he reached her. “When he marches north we can take my ship and sail the seas, conquering towns and cities until I take my place as King on Pyke.”

He really did love her, she realized in shock. Love was the only way a man could believe that the words which he had just spoken were sensible in the slightest. *“Some day a prince could come and take you away,” Sansa had told her once, when they were younger. *The princes are the monsters sweet sister, you know that and so do I. Sansa, Arya, please be safe from the monstrous men that surround you. A prince is better than any bastard girl could hope for.* Father, would he have betrayed Robb if you had let me marry him?”

“Why did you come here, truly,” she questioned gently.
His lips pressed together tightly. “To prove to my father that I am not weak.” He sighed deeply. “Can we not talk about my father?” Favoring him with a smile, she agreed. “What do you say to my proposal?”

To be his mistress? To be his Queen? She realized that part of her wanted to do it, not to protect her brothers, but to defy what was expected of her. “Yes,” she answered eventually. “I will be your Queen.”

He pulled her into his arms and kissed her. She shivered at his touch, but told herself that it was just the feel of the silk against her skin. They kissed deeply and she could taste the wine on his tongue. His hands roamed her body and her body treacherously responded to him. He even managed to elicit a moan from her, to which he smiled.

“Shall we go to bed my Princess?”

A rational part of her mind, the good, obedient, proper daughter, protested. I am just a bastard, my maidenhood doesn’t matter. I’m protecting my brothers. The not so rational, quite intoxicated, and aroused part of her, did not particularly care what the rational part of her mind wanted or did not want. Another breathy moan escaped from her lips and she led him back toward the bed.

He gently moved her robe aside, kissing her body as he undressed her. “You haven’t done this before have you,” he questioned as his lips reached her abdomen.

“No, never,” she felt a little anxiety return, but his smile strangely relaxed her.

“Then I will make this special.” He pushed her robe away entirely and trailed kisses from her neck to her breasts to her hips. He kissed her between her legs and a sound between a gasp and a moan escaped from her throat.

She had seen men and women hiding in various corners of Winterfell, doing precisely what Theon was doing now, but she had not known what pleasure it could bring. Her body burned with need as he moved his mouth. He was able to coax sounds from her that she was quite sure could be heard clear across the Keep. She clawed at the bed, and at him.

“I love a screamer,” he laughed when he lifted himself from between her legs. She was panting, staring back at him, and needing more. He lifted himself above her and kissed her again. She kissed him back hungrily, pulling at his clothes.

When they were both fully disrobed, he knelt between her legs and prepared to enter her. “This might hurt,” he muttered. Strangely, she did not care, she only knew that she wanted more. When he entered her she did not feel any pain, but she did not find his movements as pleasing as his mouth.

After finishing, he kissed her gently and lay behind her, curling around her body. He whispered ‘I love you’ into her hair as they drifted asleep. In her sleepy, drunken, blissful haze, she was too confused to know what she thought.

Chapter End Notes

Revised 9/10/14
Mother, I want to fly. Rhaegal flapped its wings uselessly against mother’s legs. She lifted Rhaegal and stroked its back and head affectionately. The hatchling called out its frustration, and she smiled down without understanding.

Mother was a young woman and she was draped in the white lion skin again. Rhaegal thought that the color of her hair was like clouds and her eyes were like amethyst stones. Dragon memory was strange. Rhaegal was hatched knowing things that it had never seen, and not knowing simple things like flying. I am made to fly. I want to fly. We should fly away from here.

Rhaegal did not like the city they were living in. There were too many untrustworthy people around mother. Especially the man with the shiny nose. Rhaegal did not trust the man’s smiles.

‘Where is this,’ Rhaegal heard a confused voice ask. Looking around, the dragon saw that there was no one in the room except for mother. Upon hearing the voice again, it realized that the voice was inside.

The marble city. That was the best description that Rhaegal could think of for the city. The rooms were large and airy with marble floors and columns and silks hanging from the ceiling. There were gardens as well, and pools of water. The kin were in the sunlight of the courtyard, warming in the sun. I want to warm in the sun with the kin. It flapped its wings again in vain. Who are you? Why are you in my mind?

‘Rosalyn, I’m in Winterfell, asleep I think?’

Why are you in my mind girl?

‘I... I don’t know... what are you?’

Dragon. My kin are in the sun. I want to fly.

‘There are no dragons.’

Mother finally got the hint and lifted Rhaegal and placed the dragon in the courtyard with its kin. Rhaegal could sense the girl’s shock at seeing the black and cream dragons. I told you we are dragons.

‘How?”

Mother hatched us.

‘Who is mother?’

Daenerys... Khaleesi...

‘Targaryen?’

Yes.

Mormont entered the courtyard to speak with mother. Rhaegal liked Mormont. The man liked
mother and kept her safe. The girl inside seemed to recognize something about him, but she faded away before Rhaegal could ask anything more.

Rosalyn awoke with a throbbing headache, a dry mouth, and a very urgent need to relieve herself. With a groan pulled herself out of the bed and used the chamber pot. It took her awhile to realize that she was quite alone in the room. On one of the tables a tray of food and drink was laid out for her. Upon cleaning herself off, she drank the tea and water quickly. Her thirst faded, but the throbbing of her head had not lessened.

A note had been left on the tray, written in Theon’s hand. “The tea to prevent anything from happening too soon.” She smiled at that. He was thoughtful at least, perhaps too thoughtful. Rosalyn knew about moon tea, but she had not tasted it before that day. She found that she rather enjoyed the flavor.

A pitcher and wash basin had been brought to the room as well, and she used them to clean herself. She did not really want to think upon the previous night’s activities, and yet she realized that she would very much like to do them again. As a matter of curiosity, she looked at the bedding to see what her blood would look like. She was surprised to find that she had not bled from their coupling at all.

She had been a maiden. She assumed that all maidens bled when they were first bedded. Although, maybe that was just the story the Septa had told them to frighten them? She had overheard many a conversation about the various sizes of men’s parts, and occasionally of women’s as well. She wondered if those various sizes had something to do with bleeding.

In the looking glass she could see various marks that he had left upon her skin. She felt a burn of shame while looking at them. She felt a burn of pleasure while looking at them. She was troubled and confused by the conflict she felt about her agreement to become Theon’s bride.

“Some day you could be a princess,” Sansa had said. But my Prince is trying to take away our brother’s kingdom.

She dressed and sat down to eat, picking worriedly at the food. She was nearly finished eating when she remembered her dream. A green dream, a dragon dream. I need to speak with Bran and Jojen. She brushed through her hair, leaving it loose to hide the marks upon her neck. When she was presentable, she left to speak with her brother and his friend.

Chapter End Notes

Revised 9/10/14... this chapter brought to you by sex education...
So I chose Talisa Maegyr over Jeyne Westerling for a few different reasons. The biggest reason being that I did not feel like involving the Westerling side-plot. The other reasons being that I found Talisa more interesting, and I am going with the assumption that she is related to the Triarch. However, her story is different than the show...

This chapter's context comes from the chapter in Storm of Swords where Robb returns from the Crag with his new bride and talks with Catelyn about her releasing Jaime.

Revised 9-28-14

Talis… The girl’s name was Talisa Maegyr. She was a noble girl from Volantis with olive skin and almond eyes. She seemed smart, polite, and kind. It was not a challenge to see why Robb had fallen in love with her. It was not difficult to see why he had fallen into bed with her. Catelyn however, failed to see why he had married her. It was foolishness. Robb needed men to fight with him in the war, and they had lost too many with this marriage to a foreign girl. Catelyn was also well aware that Lord Walder Frey would not take the sleight of a broken betrothal easily.

What could Catelyn do? Her son was a king. He was making his own decisions and ruling as he chose. He was just a child though. He was so young and impulsive. He was a good military commander, but that did not make him skilled in the game of politics. Not that she could say much, not now. She had released Jaime Lannister, hoping that he would return her daughters; disobeying the wishes of her son and king. Her sons were dead in Winterfell, she needed her girls back. Then Robb forgave her. How could she possibly show anger toward him for his foolish actions when he forgave her own foolish decisions.

Robb walked with her down the halls of Riverrun so that they might speak privately, and so that he might visit his baby brother. Catelyn realized that she must tell him her secrets. She needed him to see the error of his ways. She could not help but see how similar to his father Robb was. Yet where Ned had chosen duty over young love, Robb had chosen lust and love over duty. How like Rhaegar and Lyanna they were; running for love and hoping to escape any consequences. Catelyn prayed that they might be able to mend the relationship with Lord Frey. Without the Frey’s the war might be lost. If the war was lost, then they would all die.

She realized that she was too quiet by the way he was looking at her. He looked so much like a young, confused boy that her heart ached for him. This boy, this son of hers, was a King and a man newly wed. ‘Winter is Coming,’ those were the words he had to live by. There were no children in winter.

“Is something wrong mother? I know that this was not wise. I know that we needed the Freys.”

She sighed sadly and gently caressed her eldest son’s cheek. “I am afraid Robb. I am worried that we will lose this war. I am terrified that every child I have brought into this world will be taken away from me. Bran and Rickon are dead, slain by Theon whom you trusted. The gods only know what has become of Arya. She may or may not be in King’s Landing or even alive as we have heard no word of her since your father’s imprisonment. Sansa is a prisoner of the Lannisters. Every
time you go out to battle I fear that you will die. The only one I can keep safe is little Eddard.”

He pulled her into a trembling embrace. She could see that her lack of composure upset him. She took several deep breaths, calming herself so that they could continue speaking. “I am so weary of these wars. I hold so many secrets that my heart breaks from the weight of them. You are so like your father that sometimes it frightens me, now more than ever. When he married me it was not for love but duty. We learned to love as you would have with whichever Frey girl you chose.”

He looked at his boots. After a few moments, she realized that he was blushing. “I didn’t want to father a bastard.”

She breathed in sharply. “Your wife is with child?”

He nodded and gave her a nervous smile. “She refused to marry me when we first…” His voice trailed off and he flushed with embarrassment. “We married after she told me that she was with child. I didn’t want a child to have the life that Jon and Rosalyn did.” He spoke the name of his assumed half-sister painfully. “I never thought that she would betray me.”

Rosalyn’s betrayal, she realized as she released a long breath. “Why don’t we continue this conversation in private?” He agreed, and they walked in silence until they reached her chambers. Baby Eddard was asleep, and when they dismissed his nurse they were alone. They both slumped tiredly onto cushioned benches in her sitting room.

“I do not believe that Rosalyn betrayed you. She and I may have had our differences, but she loves you and she loves your brothers and sisters.”

Robb’s cheeks reddened with anger. “Then why does every report say that Theon plans to wed her and that he beds her nightly in our father’s bed!”

“Hush Robb, your brother sleeps,” she scolded gently. “How many women have a choice in whom they wed? I had no choice in being betrothed to your uncle or marrying your father and I was no prisoner. Theon took Winterfell. Everyone who was there is now his prisoner, including Rosalyn. If she did consent, it may well have been to avoid pains to herself.”

He looked abashed and said nothing. “I also promised to tell her about her mother when I returned to Winterfell. If nothing else, that promise would keep her loyal.”

“You know who their mother is?”

She nodded slowly, lacing her hands together and wondering how to phrase everything that he needed to know. “The day your father went south he told me about their mother.”

“Then why did you not tell Jon and Rosalyn?”

“Do you think that your father was keeping some simple secret when it came to their mother?”

He moved his mouth to speak and then stopped, utterly confused. “I… I do not know what I thought. Why was their mother such a secret?”

“Jon and Rosalyn are not your brother and sister. They are your cousins.” She paused for a few moments to let him absorb that information.

“Whose…” The words died on his lips as the shock of realization flooded his face. “Aunt Lyanna?”

“Yes.” Telling her son the truth seemed rather harmless. He was her King. He was her son. Now
was as good a time as any to tell him of the mistakes of his forbearers. “She ran away with the Dragon Prince and married him. She died birthing the children.”

He paled. “They have a claim to the Iron Throne. We could have gathered all the armies of the south around them.”

“The armies of the Riverlands and the North proclaimed you King. The armies of the south proclaimed for Joffrey, Renly, and Stannis. The Ironborn proclaimed themselves free. From what I have heard the children of Aerys Targaryen still live across the Narrow Sea and seek the Iron Throne as well. All your father wanted was the twins to be safe. A crown doesn’t make a person safe, as you well know, it makes the one who wears it a target if they don’t have enough support.”

“We need to appease the Frey’s.” He muttered, knowing full well what she meant about needing support.

She nodded. “Maybe we could marry my brother Edmure to one of the Frey girls, then they would have inheritance to Riverrun.”

“Will they consent?”

She smiled grimly. “You are King in the North, command your lords as you will and hope that Walder Frey is appeased with the offering.”

He nodded and stood. “I will do that mother. I will also send some of my people north to reclaim Winterfell.”

There was a paused before she spoke again. “Your father told me another secret, one that I am unsure he would have told any of you. However, I believe that you may learn from his mistakes.”

She exhaled tiredly, the weight of death and years weighing heavily upon her. “Your father loved a woman before me. She gave him a natural daughter whom she named Rosalyn. The girl died in infancy and the mother killed herself out of grief.”

“I had a different half-sister named Rosalyn?” He stared at her in confusion.

“An older half-sister. Your father never knew until he visited her mother at the end of the war.”

“Where is she laid to rest? Who was her mother?”

“Her mother was Ashara Dayne and they are laid to rest at Starfall.”

He bowed his head solemnly and then stood to leave. “Thank you for telling me everything mother. I will have much to think upon.”

She caught his hand and met his eyes. “Do you understand why I have told you these things?”

He chewed his lip, looking so very much like Arya for a moment, and shook his head. He was smart, but apparently her object lesson had not been quite detailed enough. “Your father loved a woman and let her go. The only people who died were the woman and her bastard child. Your aunt loved a prince instead of the man she was promised to wed and it tore a kingdom apart. I just worry about what consequences your actions will have.”

His eyes and voice turned to ice but there was fear in them. “She is my wife now. Let the gods deal with us as they may.”
Sansa

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Lady Sansa," she heard his voice call. She was hiding, as usual, in the godswood. She supposed that she should be polite and respond to Lord Tyrion. He was hideous and a Lannister, why did he have to bother her? She just wanted to be alone. She prayed every day for home, but she was a prisoner still. She had heard that Lord Stannis was sending a fleet to attack King’s Landing soon, so now she prayed for Lord Stannis’s victory.

Lord Tyrion called her name again. With a sigh, she stood up and walked up the path. "My Lord Tyrion." She replied softly when she saw him.

"How fare you this day?"

"I am well my Lord, how are you?" She didn't care how he was, even though he was always kind to her. Courtesy was her armor, the only armor she had.

He smiled lightly. "Busy as always. There are many things to prepare before Lord Stannis lays siege to King’s Landing. I found you because I have received news of your family, some good and some bad."

"Bad for whom?" The only good news would be Joffrey’s head on a spike, but she knew he was still alive. She also knew better than to say that particular thought out loud.

He laughed mildly. She remained serious. She had to be serious and quiet to not be hit. She steeled herself for the worst. He ignored the question and continued. “Here, please take a seat.” He indicated a bench nearby. She complied with his request, sitting delicately on the bench and smoothing her skirts. He continued with a gentle smile. "It seems that your father gave your Lady mother a gift when they parted and some months ago she gave birth to a son at Riverrun."

The sadness and happiness shown on her face at the same time. She did her best to mask her emotions, but she was so surprised by the news that she could not really contain her surprise. A baby brother, truly the gods are good. I hope mother is still well. I hope he is healthy. I want to go home. I want my family back. She longed for her family every day. She prayed for them all to be safe and for the Lannisters to die. "Thank you for telling me. Is there anything else?"

Then he became solemn again and sighed. "Yes, it seems that the Iron Islanders have decided to attack the North. The last report I received was that Winterfell captured by the Ironborn."

She clasped her hands behind her back to keep him from seeing them shake. "My brothers?" She was so afraid of the answer.

He shook his head. “They are reported as having been slain by Theon Greyjoy. I am sorry for your losses Lady Sansa.”

She nodded but couldn’t speak, how could she when all she loved was gone or dead? A new brother, but two dead brothers, two dead sisters and a dead father. She assumed her half-sister was dead at least. Home was gone, her family gone, her hopes swiftly fading.

Tyrion left her with a polite bow a few moments later. She returned to her prayers. She prayed long that day, for her mother and living brothers, for Arya that she might still live and be safe. She even
prayed for Jon Snow to be safe, the brother whom she had never bothered to get to know. Most of all though, she prayed for death, the deaths of those who wronged herself and her family.

Her prayers were almost a list. People to live and be healthy and strong, and people to die. She prayed for life at both the sept and the godswood. She prayed to the Father for justice for her father’s murder. She prayed to the Mother for the health of herself and her family. She prayed to the Maiden for protection. She prayed to the Warrior that Robb would win his battles, and now she prayed for Lord Stannis as well. She prayed to the Smith that Robb’s weapons would stay strong. She prayed to the Crone for wisdom, for herself and her family. She dared not pray to the Stranger in the sept, for fear that people may report on her to Queen Cersei, or worse yet, to Joffrey. Only in the godswood did she pray for death.

*Old gods, those to whom my father prayed, please bring my father justice. Please bring to justice those who killed my brothers Bran and Rickon, and my half-sister Rosalyn. At least, I assume she is dead too. End the lives of those who work against the North, against my family who has prayed to you since the world was young: King Joffrey, Queen Cersei, Ser Ilyn, Ser Meryn, Ser Boros, Ser Mandon, Ser Jamie, Lord Tywin, Theon Greyjoy. I thank you that Ser Preston has met his end. Though I love him not, protect Ser Arys as he guards Princess Myrcella. Protect Princess Myrcella and Prince Tommen, they are both kind and innocent of the sins of their family. I do not know what to ask for Lord Tyrion, but may he come to whatever end you should choose. Protect my brothers Robb and the new baby. Protect my mother and keep her safe, though she does not pray to you. If my sister Arya lives, keep her safe. Keep me safe as well. May Stannis take the capital away from the Lannisters and put their heads on spikes.*

Chapter End Notes

Revised 9-28-14
Rosalyn reflected upon her failures as Winterfell burned. She was hiding high in the heart tree. In the distance she could hear the screams of Winterfell’s people resounding against the walls of the city. *I couldn’t save the city. I couldn’t save my people. I couldn’t help anyone.*

She had succeeded in keeping her brothers safe as she had sworn to do. It had taken merely three weeks of preparation. Rosalyn, Osha, and the Reeds were able to gather supplies and hide them in the crypts. Then, in the dead of night, Osha, Hodor, Bran, Rickon, Jojen, and Meera all escaped into hiding. Rosalyn remained by Theon’s side, proclaiming her ignorance and fearing for their safety.

Theon was furious at the disappearance of her brothers. He blamed her of course, but his doubts faded when she pulled him into bed. For several days the plan worked. Then Reek wormed his way into Theon’s head. It was Reek who convinced Theon that he should kill boys in the places of Bran and Rickon. It was Reek who butchered the farm boys and called them her brothers. It was Reek who became Theon’s confidant.

She raged at Theon and wept bitterly. Partly as an act and partly because she was so drained by the whole of the situation. They did not share a bed after that day. She refused him and he was too moody to try.

Asha Greyjoy’s visit did little to improve Theon’s ever darkening moods. She told Theon to his face how foolish killing his hostages was. She urged him to sack Winterfell and leave. She encouraged him to take his “trophy wench” with him, just in case Robb Stark actually cared about his bastard half-sister. Asha told Rosalyn that were their places reversed, she would have slit Theon’s throat.

With few more words, Asha returned to Deepwood Motte.

Rosalyn blamed herself for not keeping Theon loyal to her. She doubted every word that he had said about loving her, but knew that she was wrong. He did love her, she knew that in her head, though her heart had not softened much to him. He had brought her moon tea every morning so that she would not be with child before he married her. He had learned to make her smile in pleasure and in return he smiled back. She knew that he was lost and lonely. She knew that he only wanted his father and their men to see him as strong. She knew that he listened to men over women and in the end that was his downfall. Reek had worked his way into Theon’s head while she had only managed to capture Theon’s heart.

That morning, when they knew that Winterfell was surrounded, she urged him to flee. Maester Luwin urged Theon to flee. He insisted upon staying. He saw only his death, but wanted his death to be memorable. Rosalyn ran to the godswood to pray and hide.

It was evening when the screaming began. When the fires began to blaze, the sound of steel sang through the air, and the scent of blood and smoke billowed across the whole of Winterfell. She climbed the heart tree as swiftly as she could. Higher and higher she climbed until she was surrounded in a world of white and red.

In the morning the world was quiet again. She climbed down and found Maester Luwin dying at the base of the tree. He told her that the Bastard of Bolton was responsible for burning and sacking the city. He explained that the man they had known as Reek was in fact Roose Bolton’s bastard son. Maester Luwin told her that he had last seen Theon unconscious and strapped to the back of a horse.
Rosalyn found food, water, and medicines to try helping the Maester. He told her that it was no use, his wounds were too serious. It was not much later that she was reunited with her brothers. They had managed to escape from the crypts and find supplies a short while past.

Rickon ran to her. She scooped him up and held him close, supporting him on her hip. She gave Bran’s arm a gentle squeeze when Hodor brought him close. Meera and Osha left them to find supplies. A short while later they returned with enough supplies for the entire group and a blade for Rosalyn to carry.

Maester Luwin warned them to split up the boys for safety. He then asked Osha for a mercy. Bran seemed to be suspicious of what “a mercy” was, but said nothing as all but Osha left the Maester. It was but a few moments later that she rejoined the group, cleaning her blade subtly.

Jojen and Meera looked to Bran for their next course of action. Osha and Bran looked to Rosalyn. Rickon snuggled tightly against her shoulder. Hodor was looking around at the walls muttering “Hodor” sadly. Rosalyn swallowed thickly, wiping at the tears that were falling from her eyes. Her home was destroyed. Everything she had known and loved was gone. She told herself that she was not allowed to cry. She was the ward of her two brothers. She had to make hard decisions to keep them safe. Crying like a child would not protect the ones she loved.

“Bran,” she began. “Your mother commanded me to be your guardian until she returned. I have done my best to ensure your safety. Although it seems as though my best was not enough. I believe that we must follow Maester Luwin’s suggestion. You and Rickon must be separated. If the two of you are apart, then it is less likely that both of you can be captured.”

She held onto Rickon tightly, feeling her heart break with the weight of the choices she was making. “Osha, take Rickon north and west to Bear Island. The Mormont’s are loyal to House Stark, they will keep him safe. Avoid Deepwood Motte as it is held by Asha Greyjoy. Be a mother and a son, blend in and let the world think that you are no one.”

The wildling woman gave a brisk nod of the head. “I will keep him safe milady.”

She gently coaxed Rickon’s face off of her shoulder and looked into his eyes. His eyes were so sad and angry. He was a child that had seen more pain than the sum of his years were made to endure. “Be brave my little wolf, be brave and strong. Behave for Osha and never tell a soul that you are a Stark. Remember always that you are loved.”

“I’ll be good Rosa,” he said in a trembling voice. She slowly lowered him to the ground and Osha firmly took his hand.

“We will go with Bran,” Jojen announced. Somehow, Rosalyn hand known that would be their choice. They also knew that Hodor would be the one to carry Bran, there was no choice or question in that matter.

“Where will you go Rosa,” Bran asked gently.

“North, with you. I must reach Jon. The last word he sent to me was that he was going ranging beyond the Wall. He may or may not have returned by the time we reach the Wall. He will keep us safe.” She wished that there was a way to send word south to Robb, to warn him about the Bolton’s betrayal. The ravens were dead and unreliable even if they were alive. There was no safe place to go now. There was no way to get word south.

Jojen spoke up in his quiet but firm voice, “The three-eyed crow is in the North too.”
The matter was settled. They split up their provisions and readied themselves for their journey. A short while later, Osha herded Rickon toward one gate while Rosalyn and Bran’s group walked out another. They just had to hope and pray that they would all remain alive and meet again one day.

Chapter End Notes

Revised 9-29-14
They liked to tell stories as they walked North. Meera especially enjoyed teasing Bran when he learned something new. She was still surprised that he didn't know about the Knight of the Laughing Tree. Really, not even she knew who the knight was, she had always assumed that it was her father. Rosalyn had laughed and said that she could imagine Arya becoming a mystery knight, so she was betting on the wolf-maid of the tale being the knight. She said that the wolf-maid was clearly Lyanna Stark and Arya was Lyanna come again. Meera laughed at Bran's surprise that Rosalyn was right on who the wolf siblings were. Bran then wondered whom the woman that their father had danced with had been. Meera said that the girl was named Ashara Dayne, the sister of Arthur Dayne who died fighting their fathers at the Tower of Joy. The half-siblings mulled over the information but the conversation on the topic died out after a few hours.

It was a long, hard journey North. Their bodies ached; their clothes wore thin, and their food was in short supply. Meera hunted and fished wherever she could find anything. Rosalyn's study of plants helped in the finding of roots to eat. The roots were often bitter, and they cooked them until the roots were soft and forced themselves to eat the broth it made. The stories kept their spirits up, especially when food was in short supply.

Meera loved to listen to the three seers.

Her brother whom she worried about. He never told her much of what he saw, though usually it was bad. She could tell by the distant look in his eyes when he was thinking about something that he had seen. She wondered about what he saw, what he knew and would not speak. He would keep them going North, saying that the three-eyed crow was waiting for them.

Bran, the sweet prince with a broken body, the boy who could only run in his wolf. She could not blame him for wanting to remain in Summer, running free and hunting game. She wondered if the three-eyed crow could really make him fly. If the crow could do that, could he make Bran walk again? She could see his unspoken jealousy of his sister being able to dream as a dragon, though it was lessening with time. He would speak of Summer, the longing to run seeping into his words. He would talk at length with Jojen about being a warg and the three-eyed crow.

Rosalyn, the girl who kept her heart's desires buried deep within. She seemed haunted by her experiences in Winterfell but never spoke of them. She never once mentioned Theon Greyjoy; barely spoke of Ramsey Snow and that had only been in the first few days after they left Winterfell. However she would tell them her dragon dreams and about the girl with silver-hair and violet eyes whom the dragons called mother. Her dragon dreams were different than Bran's wolf dreams. Bran always spoke as if he became Summer, controlling his movements and actions. Rosalyn spoke about the dragon as if she were only seeing through its eyes and hearing its thoughts. She told them about the dragons learning to roast their own food. About the city of red stone where the dragons set men on fire while people cheered for freedom. The dreams from that day on varied between hopeful, saddening, or terrifying. The dragons would fly and see the vastness of the army that followed their mother. They watched the yellow city fall to their mother as the Red city had, it was in the yellow city where the dragons ate human flesh the same as any other flesh. From the yellow city the army of Daenerys marched again until they reached a multi-colored city of walled pyramids.

The dream of the pyramid city was the night before they reached Queenscrown. It was so beautiful to look out over the hills and mountains, fields and forests, the way to the Wall would be much easier from then on. It was also nice to be indoors again, especially when the rain started lashing down from the sky. Then the storm picked up as the night went on and woke them all. Hodor had picked
up his sword and was calling out in his fright. It took Bran doing… something… to calm the giant boy down, and Meera took away his sword. Bran said he didn’t know what happened, but Meera could have sworn that he had warged into Hodor. The moment passed, and then, to make sure the strangers in the cabin would leave, Bran warged into Summer to chase them off.

It didn't work. While Summer had killed some of the wildlings, he had been injured as well. Bran left his wolf's body with a soft cry of pain. Then he looked straight to Rosalyn. "They hurt Summer, but I think he ran off after. Jon was there Rosa. I helped him escape, he galloped off on a horse. But I... I think he was injured."

There were swift tears upon Rosalyn's cheeks, but she said no words, choosing instead to hug her brother close. Meera could only imagine the pain of loss that they had gone through these past months. To be so close again to a brother must be a worse torture. They all spent the rest of the night huddled close, whispering softly to one another and waiting. At dawn the wildlings were no closer to leaving than they had been at night. It wasn't until the afternoon that they left, taking whatever they could scavenge with them. Later that afternoon Summer came limping to them. He had an arrow in his leg that Meera removed and tended with some of the plants that were growing around the tower. They were about to set out themselves, when they noticed a young wildling woman with bright red hair seated in the ruins of the Inn.
The tiredness started before the Wall. The nausea started a day or so after the climb down. If Jon noticed he said nothing. He seemed too preoccupied with planning to escape that he didn't notice how her mood changed and her appetite as well. He didn't tell her that he was planning to return to the other crows; he didn't have to, she knew him. Ygritte told him he knew nothing, quite often really, not even that his woman was gonna have his kid. The others in the group started to notice, but she silenced the chatter by threatening them with her knife.

The storm was coming when they came to the ruined town. A watchtower, Jon called the tower in the middle of the lake, she had thought it a castle. They fought then, about how wrong he was concerning freedom and stealing. She was always right in their fights, he knew nothing. Yet his smile made her blood run hot and she loved him more than the sun and sky.

When they found the man in the ruins, she knew there would be trouble. However they left the man to the rest of the group while she and Jon escaped for a few wonderful moments to the lake. He knew the tower in the center, he told her that a queen had lived there once, for a day. She wondered what it would be like to be a queen, living in a castle with fancy clothes and food, telling people what to do all the time. Jon said that the queen who had been to that tower rode a dragon. She wondered what it would be like to see a dragon, the beasts were legends, but had not been seen in many lifetimes. Dragons could destroy the hated wall and get the free folk safely away from the Others, she was sure of that.

He was going to tell her more when they were called back to the group standing above the old man. They wanted Jon to kill him. She was sure that Jon would do it, he had to kill the man, to prove his loyalty. He was loyal; he had to be loyal. She was wrong though, she had to kill the man for him. She cursed his crow blood. Then things changed swiftly. Lightning struck, a wolf, huge and grey attacked and Jon ran off. She followed him and put an arrow in his leg as he rode away on the horse. How could he do this? Why?

Ygritte left the group fighting off the direwolf and hid on the opposite side of the tower. She didn't trust that the other free folk wouldn't try to kill her for being his spear wife and carrying his child. Tears came to her eyes unbidden as she crawled beneath a bush. She hadn't even told him she was carrying his child, maybe he would have stayed if he had known. She felt the bile rise in her throat again and spat it out. She was shaking, terrified. She had never felt fear before, not like this anyway. She realized that it was fear for the child within her. He left me. Why did he leave me? Why did I trust a crow?

She drifted off uneasily in her shelter. In the morning, she waited until the free folk left to come out of hiding. She warily looked for the direwolf. A direwolf was death, she knew. However she saw no sign of the beast and went to where the old man lay dead. She was hungry and in her haste to hide had neglected to take food for herself. She picked up and ate some of the wormy apples which lay all around and rested in a dry corner of the inn. She threw the apples up within the hour. She wondered if she could hold anything down anymore. This child never seemed happy with her choices in food and made her tired. How can I fight if this babe won't let me do anything?

As she sat in the ruined building she saw people leaving the tower. They walked in a strange pattern across the water and made it to land again without falling in. A strange group they were, a large man with a boy strapped to his back. A smallish boy with green clothes. Two brown-haired girls, one tall and the other short, both in trousers and carrying swords. Last of all the large direwolf.

A boy with a direwolf... She thought of Jon and Ghost. She remembered him talking about his
brothers and sisters. Two sisters who went south with their father, held captive when men in the south chained his father. A brother who went to war to defend their father, but he failed and their father lost his head. Then that brother crowned himself king. In the north there were two young brothers, one of whom was crippled. Most important to Jon was a twin sister who shared their father's hair. Each sibling had a wolf except for his twin. The crippled brother with a direwolf and his twin sister without a wolf, she couldn't help but think of them.

The strangers from the tower saw Ygritte and stood in front of the ruined inn. The girls stood to the front, pulling their swords from their sheaths. Ygritte could see it in the face of the taller girl; she had to be Jon's twin. She ran through their names in her head: Brandon, Arya, Sansa, Robb, Rickon, Rosalyn. She couldn't remember the order though, Rosalyn was the twin; he had mentioned her the most other than the little tomboy Arya. Rickon was the cripple. Or was it Robb? No, it was Bran, like Brandon the builder and the hundred other Brandons throughout the long history of the Starks.

"Rosalyn and Bran?" She ventured the words as she stood before them. The two she suspected as being Jon's brother and sister looked to one another. She pushed further, knowing that her suspicion was correct. "Are you Jon's brother and sister? Jon Snow, of Winterfell?"

The girl stepped forward again. She was holding her blade protectively, though by her grip she clearly didn't know how to use the weapon. "I am Jon's twin Rosalyn. Who are you? Why did you stay behind?"

"I'm Ygritte. I travelled with Jon from beyond the Wall." She tried to hold back the bitterness, but she was furious at him for leaving her and the words just all tumbled out. "He was a spy for the bloody crows. He ran off back to his castle and his crows. They would have killed me for being his woman. They know I'm carrying his babe, even if he doesn't. That's reason enough to kill me." She didn't see the reactions of Bran and Rosalyn at first. She didn't realize how shocked their expressions were; how wide their eyes were.

Rosalyn sheathed her sword and stepped closer to Ygritte. Jon's twin's face shone with delight and hope. "You are pregnant? With my brother's child?"

"Aye." It was the first time that Ygritte had truly admitted that fact out loud. The threats she made against the people who teased her weren't the same as just stating the fact. Yet here, with Jon's kin she could safely say the truth. "Why are you out here? Jon always said that Winterfell was a great castle."

They Stark children looked to their companions and it was Bran that spoke. "Winterfell was sacked and burned. We have to go north, for safety. Rosalyn is planning to seek out Jon." Ygritte mulled over what the boy wasn't saying. He wasn't planning to seek out Jon that was the clear message he said without words. Why she wondered; what could a boy so young be trying to do on his own in the North?

"It won't be safe. The free folk are going to attack Castle Black and take down the Wall." She informed them simply.

"They won't succeed." It was the boy dressed in green who said that. Ygritte regarded him coolly.

"What do you know?" Ygritte challenged.

"I am a greenseer. I have seen many things, many faces, many times, many places. The Wildlings will not take down the Wall." Jojen said softly.

Ygritte glared at him but said nothing. She looked again the Jon's brother and sister. "If you are goin'
to Jon I'm comin' with you."

She watched them plan silently amongst one another before Bran spoke up again. "You may come with us if that is your wish, but you must swear that you will do us no harm."

She laughed lightly. "I swear it. I would never harm Jon's kin, he spoke kindly about all of you. Besides which, I'm carryin' his child; makes you kin."

She was favored by smiles from Jon's brother and sister while the other two regarded her cautiously. So it was that Ygritte followed Bran and Rosalyn, Jojen, Meera, and Hodor, along with Summer on their way north. She wouldn't hurt Jon's kin, but she made no promise that she wouldn't hurt Jon when she saw him again. He had left her and that was a hurt that she was not sure if she could ever forgive.
Chapter Notes

Fair warning- Red Wedding, though modified but still...

Thank you to everyone who is following this story! You are all wonderful!

Also, Sansa I, was recently expanded.

King Robb found his mother in a large sitting room which overlooked the confluence of the Tumblestone and Red Fork rivers. His baby brother Eddard was trying his hardest to walk by pulling himself along the couches. His mother and Eddard’s nurse Daisy were laughing and encouraging the boy. Robb loved to hold his little brother, and was overjoyed that soon he would have his own child with his wife and queen, Talisa. Though the new babes didn’t ease the losses they had felt.

He missed his father terribly. His father was the rock of their family. He was wise and sure, and would have known the wisest course of action to take. He hated Theon passionately, a person whom he had once seen as a brother. Theon, who had taken Robb’s presumed half-sister into Lord Eddard Stark’s bed and murdered Bran and Rickon. He could still remember the smiles of his little brothers. He worried about his sisters. Sansa was now married to Tyrion Lannister, putting her beyond his reach unless the Imp was killed. What had happened to Arya, and why did no one speak of her? Had Rosalyn been slain in Winterfell? Was she guilty or innocent of the crimes she was accused of committing? His mother seemed convinced that Rosalyn was innocent, but still the doubts lingered. Rosalyn wasn’t even his sister but his cousin. She and Jon should have the Iron Throne by right of blood. He was sorely tempted some days to try giving Jon a crown. That wasn’t the wisest course though, his mother and father were right about that. He wanted this war to be over, to take his people home, and to keep what remained of his family safe. A crown can’t make you safe.

Daisy bowed low to the ground when she saw him. “Your grace.”

His mother bowed her head politely and smiled at him. “Robb, how are you today?”

He smiled at her. She didn’t seem angry at him finally. He still felt guilty for sending her away to treat with Renly so soon after Eddard was born. “I am well mother. I had hoped to speak with you alone.”

She nodded. “Daisy, would you mind leaving us for a while?”

The girl nodded politely. “Of course milady, I will be in the kitchens.” With that, the girl was gone.

When she left, Robb sat on one of the couches in front of his mother. Little Eddard crawled to him, and Robb tossed his brother in the air before holding him close and kissing him on the cheek. “I will be sending you away again soon.” He said, a hint of sadness in his voice.

“Where?” His mother’s voice had gone cold he realized, and he cringed internally. He hated the rift that had come between them.
“To Greywater Watch, I have a plan to take Moat Cailin, and will be sending you with the Mormont’s, Jason Mallister, and Galbart Glover. Father trusted Howland Reed, and I will trust Lord Reed with you and my baby brother. I will be telling them more of this plan after we set out next week for the Twins.” He breathed deeply, worried that she wouldn’t like his plan. To his relief, she smiled.

“You have been quite busy planning haven’t you?” He nodded, and set his squirming brother down. “Will I be taking my infant son to meet the Frey’s? What of Queen Talisa?”

Her question was simple, but she was asking something deeper without words. “Your party will be sent off before we ever reach the Twins, I will not endanger your life or my wife’s. Talisa is heading to Volantis tonight with a hundred of my truest men. She and I have discussed this at length, though she was not happy with me sending her away. She will be safer. I am heeding your advice mother and not fully trusting the Frey’s. I will not have either of you at your brother’s wedding.”

“The Frey’s will see it as another insult if I am not at the wedding. And Volantis? You send your wife across the world where it will take months for news of home to reach you? I urged caution, but this seems as though you believe everything to be lost?” He could hear the worry in his mother’s voice.

He shook his head. “She will go to Volantis until our child is born. Then she will return to me once she has recovered from the birth. This may be the last time that Talisa’s family sees her and only time when they may see her child. As for the Frey’s, I know that you will not be parted from my brother again, and I would never part you again. I will not have my heir apparent anywhere other than a place that he is protected. Greywater Watch from what I have heard is nearly impossible to find. If you and he are there, no harm will come to you.”

She stood, walked to him, and kissed his head. “I am proud of you.”

He smiled up at her. “There is more. I intend for you and Eddard to continue north to Bear Island with the Mormonts. You will be isolated there, and therefore safer. I want as few people to know about this plan as possible. Only you, myself, and Talisa know these things.” He breathed deeply then. There was one more thing to tell her. “If... If anything should happen to me, I have set my line of succession in writing and it will go with you. My child with Talisa should come first, then Eddard. If both children should die I want Jon to become my heir.”

Her eyes widened, and she started to protest, but he cut her off. “I know that you told me the truth of his parentage, which does make him a legitimate heir. But... If I die, tell Jon the truth. If he doesn’t want a throne then no one can force him to take it. I know that father wanted Jon and Rosalyn to be safely ignorant of their parentage, but he needs to know the truth. If I am dead and he wants to be king, then raise the banners of the North around him and give the south all the fury of the Starks and of Jon’s father. Give them fire and blood.”

He was surprised by the passion in his own voice. To his greater surprise, his mother agreed.

Robb’s wife and the child within her were safe. His mother and baby brother Eddard were safe. He hated parting with both women and his brother. He had kissed his wife passionately and held her close for nearly an hour when it was her time to depart. He had sent her to Saltpans with a hundred loyal men. There was a Volantene ship waiting there for her. His wife and their child would be safe in her homeland, they were both sure of that. She was the granddaughter of a Triarch, and a member of one of the oldest and richest families in Volantis. No one could harm his wife and child there. Talisa had left Riverrun two days before the main army departed for the Twins.
His mother and her men had left the main army heading to Greywater Watch a week before he reached the Twins. They left in the dark of the night so that no one noticed their departure until morning. He told the men that little Eddard wasn’t feeling well so Lady Catelyn was taking him back to Riverrun. The story seemed to go over well enough.

He hoped for the best from Lord Frey, though his mother had left him with doubt. She had given him many warnings and cautions. He knew she was afraid for him, they had lost so many family members that it was difficult to bear. They needed the Frey’s back to avenge his father and keep the North free. He couldn’t stop until his father’s murder by the Lannisters was avenged. Once the war in the south was won, they would avenge themselves against the Ironborn. All they needed was the Freys. He could feel victory and retribution the closer they were to the Twins.

He missed his wife already. Her fire and passion focused him and directed him. She spoke honestly and openly with him about every matter. Her beauty enraptured him. He prayed for her safety at sea, and for the safety of his mother and brother. This was for them, for their future.

They were greeted well when they reached the Twins, though somewhat sullenly. There was the awkwardness of apologizing to the Frey girls for not choosing one of them to marry. He also apologized for the absence of his wife and mother, claiming that he had left them at Riverrun as they were not feeling well. A lie, but one his mother had bade him make. His mother did not trust Lord Frey, and he respected her wishes.

His uncle seemed delighted with Roslin Frey. She was a lovely young girl, the same age as Robb. There was something off about her though, she seemed anxious and upset. Perhaps it was just anxiousness at being married off, especially to a man so much older.

The mood of the wedding was festive and cheerful. His uncle and Roslin Frey said their vows, and feasted. The mood changed later, after the bedding. A few moments after his uncle was gone the music altered. It was no wedding song they played, no joyful tune on their instruments. It was the 'Rains of Castamere', the song of his enemies, the song of the Lannisters.

He felt the arrows strike when he stood in anger. Each quarrel felt like a piercing flame. He stumbled but pulled himself up again. His people were fighting, dying. He heard Grey Wind’s howls. Kill them Grey. He thought of his pregnant wife, safe. He thought of his mother, safe. His brothers Eddard and Jon, safe. I’m sorry Sansa, sorry that I couldn’t save you. I’m sorry mother that I didn’t listen to your warnings. I’m sorry Talisa, so, so sorry. I will be with father, Bran, Rickon, Rosalyn, and Arya soon. Give them fire and blood Jon, for me. He felt regret, rage, the chasm of despair and failure. He heard a man say "Jamie Lannister sends his regards" and for a brief moment felt fire pierce through his body. Then the darkness took him, and it strangely felt like being welcomed back into his father’s embrace.
This isn't going to be easy, Tyrion thought as he walked back to the rooms he shared with his young bride. Why did he always have to bring the poor girl bad news? At least he could give her some hope with this tragedy, as he had when he told her about Winterfell. His father had spoken of the murder of his wife's brother and the need to get her pregnant in the same conversation as if both were casual matters. As if murderous betrayal and taking advantage of a child were both ok.

Tyrion wished that they could get out of the city and live elsewhere, anywhere that would make her smile. But why would she smile when her family has been murdered and she was forced to marry the enemy, and a hideous imp like me at that. Wishes meant little when they were compelled to stay until the royal wedding. Soon, it will be over soon and we can leave this den of horrors, my father, sister, and nephew behind us.

He found her in their sitting room, reading on a window seat overlooking the sea cliffs. She was such a lovely young girl, and her life was far too filled with pain. He had seen tales of knights and fair maidens among her books, but she never touched them. He could tell that the books had been well read at one time, probably when she still believed there was good in the heart of everyone. A girl's dream that Cersei and Joffrey had ripped away from her. Now when she read it would be histories and tales of Westeros, Valyria, Essos, and Sothoryos. They were his books, though he did not mind her reading them at all. He hoped that one day it would give them something common to discuss. When she was not reading, more often than not, Lady Sansa could be found in the sept or the godswood. What she was praying for Tyrion feared to guess. The death of every Lannister no doubt. Well now she can add the Freys and Boltons to that list.

He cleared his throat softly and she turned to face him. She didn't quite have her usual mask on, not yet anyway. "My lady, I fear that I have some bad tidings to bring you."

He noticed how she tensed at his words and her face becoming an impenetrable wall. He didn't want to tell her, but he also didn't want her to hear the news from someone else. "There is no easy way to say this... Your brother Robb was killed at the Twins. The Freys, acting with the Boltons and my Lord father, conspired together that at the wedding of your uncle Edmure to Roslin Frey, Robb and his men would be put to the sword. Your uncle still lives, but is held as a prisoner."

She stared at him blankly. He wasn't sure what was going on inside her mind, but he wished that he could help her. "What of my mother?" She asked softly, as though her brother's murder was as common a topic as the weather.

At that Tyrion smiled, he couldn't help it really. His father had been furious at the news, though he had hidden it quite well. The Lions had not yet captured all of the wolves, and purely out of spite toward his father the notion that Lady Catelyn had escaped amused Tyrion greatly. "Your mother, Lady Catelyn, and her son Eddard were not at the wedding, nor are they at Riverrun. Your brother, it seems, had things quite well planned out. From what I have learned, when Robb and his men set out from Riverrun he sent his wife with some men Saltpans to take a ship from there, presumably to her home in the Free Cities. Just before reaching the Twins, another party left those accompanying your brother Robb. That group included your mother and baby brother. No one knows where they went, though I fear my father will send people to search for them."

My father sent as many men as he could to seek out your mother, but that you do not need to hear
sweetling. He noticed the slight smile upon her lips, even through her mask. "My lady, I hope that you can find comfort in knowing that your mother and youngest brother are alive. I know that you have faced more hardships from my family than any person should endure. Your mother, she is one of the strongest and most stubborn people I have ever met. She will refuse to die so long as one of her children lives. You may not believe me, but I pray for her safety."

He did pray for her safety, as strange as it seemed. Catelyn Stark had taken him prisoner and thrown into a farce of a trial for crimes that he didn't commit, but she had done it all for her children. Now that he was married to one of Lady Catelyn's children and he couldn't help but wish her well, if only for Sansa's sake.

She nodded politely. "I am grateful to you for bringing this news to me. I think I will visit the godswood now if you will excuse me."

"Of course my lady. I understand wanting to be alone right now."

She gave a polite curtsey and swept out the door. He wished that he could say more, but he knew that he should leave her alone to grieve. She always wore her mask so well that sometimes he wondered if she was even listening, but he was beginning to realize that she heard everything but chose to never respond. He supposed that it made sense, responding before she married Tyrion would always get her beaten.

He sighed deeply. He needed to find Shae and let her help him relieve his tensions. It had been too long since he had been with Shae. He also needed her to rub out the knots in his legs and neck, being Master of Coin and being around his father had succeeded in making his usual knots worse.

Later that day, after being at work he returned to his rooms. He could hear Sansa's sobs through the door of their rooms. He wished that he could comfort her, to hold her as she cried. However, knew that he was the last person that she wanted. He waited until the rooms were quiet again to enter. As he waited he thought about his wife.

At least I spared her the details, as I did when I neglected to tell her that her half-sister was apparently Theon Greyjoy's lover. There was talk that the bastard girl of Lord Eddard Stark had even helped kill her trueborn half-brothers. They say she died in the sack of Winterfell, and that no one mourns her loss. This time though, they aren't rumors. They took off the poor boy's head and gave him his direwolf's. The gods, should they exist, will avenge the Starks against the Freys. To kill a guest in your house, I don't even think my lord father would do such a thing. Although it would seem he is quite alright with arranging such evilness.

Later still, when they slept, he heard her cry out from her nightmares again. Your mother yet lives, my lady. Hold on to that and one day, one day I promise you that you will be safely with her again.

Chapter End Notes

UP NEXT- Talisa

Thank you for everyone who has commented, follows, or given kudos to this story!
I figure this is a good place to state where the name of the story comes from :) 

This story, and the meaning of it's name relate to the choices each generation makes. The Never-Ending Sacrifice, which comes from Star Trek, is a story about seven generations of a family that must make the choices about serving themselves or the future, themselves, family, or the nation. That's why I chose the name for this story. Each generation has made it's own decisions for love or honor, duty or family. Brandon and Rickard Stark chose family and it cost their lives. Aerys and Robert Baratheon chose themselves and it cost their lives. Lyanna and Rhaegar chose lust and died for it. Eddard Stark lived and died for honor. Robb dies because he married Jenye for honor or Talisa for love, in this story it happens to be both honor and love. Catelyn and Rosalyn make choices for family. Jon tends to make choices for honor. So on and so forth, it's the sacrifice each generation makes, a never-ending sacrifice.

I came to the conclusion this week that Lyanna Stark is a variation of Helen of Troy, apparently I'm not the only one, but I felt like sharing.

Also Oberyn... Game of Thrones... just ugh....

While writing Catelyn's future chapters, I came up with an idea for her story that would be different from what I have already planned. When I reach that chapter I will mention this again. However, I want to ask what you think and help me choose which path she will take. Choose A or B.

A- is the story as I planned it for her

B- is a new variation that I am pretty sure has not been done in fanfictionland, not that A has either as far as I am aware?

No I won't make a notes section this long again.
"Change course to Pentos," Talisa told the captain less than a day after they left port from Saltpans.

"My lady, we are due in Volantis and a trip to Pentos will put us behind schedule." The captain was old. He had only three teeth, his sparse hair was gray, and his skin looked like wrinkled leather. He spoke politely, but seemed rather frustrated by her request. "It was a kindness to take you and yours aboard, but I can't change everything for you."

Her eyes flashed with a controlled fire. "Pentos is on the way south, hardly out of the way. Also, you are being paid well for our passage, not in gratitude but in gold. Do you know who I am?"

He shrugged. "A Volantene girl who found a rich man in the Sunset Kingdoms. He's in some trouble so he sent you away home."

She laughed. "I am Talisa Maegyr, granddaughter of Malaquo Maegyr Triarch of Volantis. Take me to Pentos or you may find trade back home much more difficult to conduct."

His eyes widened a little. No Volantene would claim to be a Malaquo’s child who wasn’t, not when it was so easy to prove. Besides, even if she was lying it wasn’t worth the risk. The discussion was quickly over and the captain ordered the changed course to Pentos.

In Pentos, the Maegyr family owned a moderately sized, by Pentoshi standards, manse by the sea with a central tower high enough to see the whole of the city. It also had marble pools and flower gardens on the roofs.

The family, though belonging to the tigers of Volantis and dealing primarily with warfare, owned a few docks in Pentos and a small fleet of trading vessels. Talisa’s younger brother was being groomed to take over the family business in Pentos. She had lived there with him for three years before heading to Westeros. Volantis was home, but now so was Robb. Robb, whom she loved but feared for his fate. In Pentos, she knew, news of the Seven Kingdoms would reach her much faster than in Volantis. News of Robb most importantly of all.

It was a short journey, thankfully for those northerners whose stomachs were not made for sea travel, with strong winds and fair skies for the voyage. Her men were sworn to house Umber, and she traveled with their Lord and his heir, both named Jon. She enjoyed their company, even though the Smalljon did not have a stomach for sea travel. They anchored at her family’s docks and her family’s men came out, wondering whose ship was docking, her brother Bevalio was amongst them. He was tall and well-muscled, with the same dark Volantene looks as his sister. As owner of the dock, he went out to greet the ship, and his face beamed when he saw his sister standing on the deck. Once the vessel was safely secured, she was the first person off and she jumped into her brother’s arms. He spun her around and set her down gently.

“What brings you back home so soon sweet sister?” He asked as he took her arm and they walked toward land, the others disembarking behind her.

“Safety. I am married now Bevalio, and my husband fights a difficult war.” She looked at him sadly.

“How unlike you to marry a warrior. I remember how you fought with father to be trained as a
healer and to save the slave who saved my life. Very un-like a tiger and yet you marry one.”

She smiled. “I married a wolf of Winterfell, not a tiger of Volantis. They have no slaves. Robb may be a fighter, a king, a warrior, but he is brave and noble and kind.”

He laughed and they stepped onto the granite paths that led to the manse. “So it was love that won my sister over?”

She punched him lightly on the arm. “Love changes minds, and hearts. Although it doesn’t win wars. So here I am. Home, safe, and carrying my husband’s child.” She gave him a sly grin and laughed at the wonder in his eyes.

“You have had quite the adventure.” He backed away before she hit his arm again. “Congratulations Tali, I am sure our parents will be happy with the news as well.”

She nodded. “Will you pay the captain well for escorting us here? He may need more food, water, and wine as well. Can you find rooms for my people?”

He laughed. “Of course, anything that is needed. This is your home and these are your people. I am so glad that you are home. I have missed you terribly.”

“And I have missed you too. How have you been?”

“Well, father is arranging a marriage for me and wishes to send our uncle here to run the business so that I may spend more time back in Volantis. I am sure father and mother will be quite speechless upon learning that you have married.”

Talis wrinkled her nose in displeasure. “I have always been the difficult child, running away to Westeros instead of settling for whatever they wanted me to do. I am sure that mother will forgive me, and that father will too in time. I am certain they will love my child instantly. They still have you and our little sister to arrange marriages for. Besides which, I married a warrior who was chosen to be king by his own people, surely our father cannot disapprove of that?”

He kissed the top of her head and smiled. “You were always the clever one sweet sister. Come, let’s get you settled into your old rooms again.”

So the Queen in the North, and her men, settled into the manse in Pentos. It took time for her men to grow accustomed to the city. Many of them had never left the North before the war brought them to the Riverlands. Most had never sailed in a ship before she had taken them to Essos. They were fighters, but not soldiers by profession like the warriors of the free cities. They were farmers, carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, and a few knights. Many had families and farms back in the North. When the men had grown accustomed to their new home, their Lord had them begin training so that they would not grow weak and fat from resting and feasting. From the men the best listeners who told no secrets were sent to the taverns and inns to seek out regular bits of news from Westeros. Talisa knew there was no way to keep over a hundred Westerosi men a secret in Pentos. She told Lord Umber as much, and he fully agreed with her that letting them be known amongst the people would bring less harm than keeping them all locked away in her family’s manse.

It was a little over a month later that the news of the Red Wedding reached them. The man who brought the news was so drunk that he could barely stand, a sight that Talisa had never seen from him. He demanded to see Lord Umber and Queen Talisa straight away upon returning to the manse, even though it was the middle of the night. When she was awoken and dressed, she met with the men in her solar.
She saw the men seated on the cushions in her solar. The northermen had never seemed quite comfortable in Pentos, especially seated on the silk cushions of that room. They were of the North in Westeros, where there was stone, forest, and snow aplenty but no sand and silks as there was in Pentos, Volantis, and the other free cities. They had all laid aside their warm furs and leathers and settled for the new linen clothes that they were given. The Greatjon and Smalljon seemed quite alert for being awoken from their sleep, dressed uncomfortably in their soft linens. Their man, named Torrhen, was quite drunk and half weeping across from them. The men bowed to her when she entered.

“What has happened,” she asked as she took her own seat.

Torrhen looked at her, distraught. “Your grace. The King... King Robb is dead. Murdered at a wedding all the people are saying. Oh there’s talk of wolves and wargs, the usual nonsense, but too many told the tale for me to believe it false. A few of the men were from Westeros, said that they heard it from Maidenpool to King’s Landing. Roose Bolton has been declared Warden of the North.” He sobbed again.

Greatjon Umber stood up and swore so fiercely that his son cowered. “That bloody traitor, I’ll have his head. I should have been there to fight for him. Should have protected King Robb.” He reached for the sword he did not carry and, upon finding that it was not hanging from his back, clenched his hands into tight fists.

Talisa looked at him, bereft. She answered him softly. “You would be dead too then and not able to fight back.” He sat down again and waited for her to continue. “Robb sent you and your men with me so that if anything were to happen to him I would have loyal men with myself and his child. Without you his child would lose his or her claim to the North. With you, Robb...” Her voice caught. She didn’t want to believe Torrhen said but the thought of Robb being truly dead... “Robb made plans for if he died. Torrhen, leave us and return to your room. When we have our steps planned out we will tell you.”

The man stumbled when he bowed and took his leave of them. “My Lords we must learn the truth of what happened to my husband, our King. In the morning I want the truth of what happened.”

“Aye,” both men agreed.

“I can tell you that Lady Catelyn and Prince Eddard were not at the wedding.” They were both surprised at her saying that.

“I thought Lady Catelyn was to go to her brother’s wedding and that Prince Eddard was to remain at Riverrun?” Smalljon asked.

“Just as Robb sent us here for my safety and the safety of his child, he sent his mother and brother away for their safety. Lady Catelyn was sent to Greywater Watch with some of Robb’s men. She was to go to Bear Island after Moat Cailin was captured for her safety. The Prince and his mother were not to be parted again, Lady Catelyn would never have stood for that. I would have two ships sent to find her, one to Greywater Watch and the other to Bear Island. One or the other should be able to find and locate her and the Prince.”

“A sound idea.” Said Greatjon. “Where are we getting the ships?”

Talisa smiled. “Have you not seen the docks? My family owns a fleet of ships and can have men supplement your own. We are Tigers of Volantis, we have warriors aplenty to help. I will speak with my brother first thing in the morning and have the preparations made, if that is what you believe is best as well?”
Both men nodded and Greatjon stood again. “If we take one of the ships all the way north and land at Eastwatch by the Sea, we can travel along the Wall until we reach the Shadow Tower. From there we can sail to Bear Island if the Watch will lend us a ship. I will lead that group your Grace. My son can lead the other.”

Smalljon shook his head thoughtfully. “No father, I believe that we should have a different man lead those heading to Greywater Watch. One of us must remain here to prove our loyalty to King Robb and his heir.”

“Aye, stay here with some of our men and I’ll have one of our men lead those going to Greywater. We will raise up an army to crush the bastards who killed Robb and Ned Stark and put this child on his own throne in Winterfell!”

Talisasa smiled at their enthusiasm and retired to her bed chamber again. She found that she could not return to sleep and could not cry so she just sat on her balcony and watched the night. She watched the stars and torches as they dimmed and the sky grew lighter until it became brilliant blue. She told her brother all that needed done, and the preparations were made swiftly. The Umber men heard over and over again about what was called the Red Wedding. The details varied but there was no doubt that King Robb and his men who had gone to the Twins were murdered. Yet Talisa still couldn’t cry, she couldn’t feel at all.

Within the week two ships set sail for Westeros to seek out Lady Catelyn. One was led by Greatjon Umber to the far north where they would travel the Wall. The other to seek out Greywater Watch was led by Torrhen who had sobered up and was fiercely devoted to the Starks. Smalljon Umber was the leader of the men who remained behind with Talisa. He kept the information flowing into the manse so that they would know what steps they should take beyond waiting.

The men who remained rejoiced with her when the news of King Joffery’s death arrived not many weeks after learning of the Red Wedding. She knew that some of the men, even amongst those who had returned to Westeros, grumbled against her in private. Some of the men saw her as the reason that Robb had died. Though none of them would ever say so to her face, especially with the Great and Small Jon Umbers supporting her. However most were waiting for her child to be born so that they could rally behind a new King or Queen in the North.

Once she accepted that Robb was dead she sometimes blamed herself for his death. If they had not married, the Frey’s would never have betrayed him. She had to stop herself from thinking that way; she couldn’t change the past. Eventually, she grieved. She grieved for Robb, the man she loved and lost. The man that their child would never know. She cried into her pillows until they were stained from her tears, she would miss Robb with all her being. She grieved and vowed vengeance. Some day their child would know the North, the land of his or her father and live in peace. Until then, she had to wait and listen to news of Westeros and learn how to bring about revenge.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone for your support!

Up Next: Arya!
Arya Stark was sick and tired of the Riverlands. Over a year she had spent wandering to and fro with one group or another without getting any closer to home and family, no matter who tried to ransom her. The Hound had brought her the closest to family. They had ridden up to the Twins, having heard a rumor that her brother would be there for a wedding.

Rumors and whispers were her lifeline to home. Someone had told her once that Sansa had married the Imp. There was another person who had said that her mother had released Jamie Lannister from Riverrun. There was the story that Robb had betrayed the Freys by marrying a foreign girl. There was the tale that her brothers Bran and Rickon were killed and Winterfell was burned. There was a story that her mother had birthed a new son, and that he was already holding a sword. The story that Robb became a wolf in battle and feasted upon the flesh of his enemies. A story of her half-sister being Theon Greyjoy's mistress or wife and helping to kill Bran and Rickon. Then the Red Wedding...

Arya scarcely believed any of the stories. She believed that Jamie Lannister was free, but her mother could not have freed him. She sadly knew that the stories of Winterfell's ruin were too numerous to be lies, and that her brothers and half-sister must have died there with everyone else. She did not for one moment believe that Rosalyn would betray the family. She decided that the story of her mother having another child was not impossible, but he would not be wielding a sword already. Robb couldn't become a wolf, but he did have Grey Wind, Arya knew. Sansa would never marry the Imp, so clearly that was a lie.

The Red Wedding was true though, she had seen some of the death, at least before the Hound had knocked her out. Her brother had been betrayed by the Frey's and, as she would learn later, the Bolton's. She found herself wishing that she had killed Lord Bolton when she had been his cupbearer. She added the Freys and Boltons to her nightly prayer. The ghost of High Heart had said that that there was to be a wedding at the Twins, and her brother would be there instead of Riverrun. The ghost also said that her mother would be in the snow far away. The ghost seemed to be right. Her brother had gone to a wedding. Her brother's wife had taken ships from Saltpans, so the people said. Of her mother the stories were conflicted. Some said that her mother had taken a ship north. Others said that Lady Catelyn lost her mind with grief when she learned of Robb, that she killed herself and the last child of Lord Stark so that their family could be together again. Some said that Catelyn Stark had run off with Roose Bolton and that she had killed the young wolf herself at the cursed wedding.

Arya told the Hound that he should take her north. She knew her mother would never have done half of the things people were claiming she had done, but her mother just might have gone north. He laughed at her and told her that it was a dumb idea. He said that the North was too large to find one person and he wouldn't get enough gold for his trouble.

So still the Hound dragged her around from place to place. Arya didn't really care anymore, there was a hole inside of her, and she was lost inside its depths. The dreams made up for the hole where once had been Winterfell and her parents and her siblings. She dreamt that she was a wolf, running with her own pack, and hunting. The wolf belonged and felt loved.

He eventually told her that he was going to ransom her to her Aunt Lysa. They even reached a town
just outside the Vale, but snows blocked their path and they could go no further to Aunt Lysa. So they continued wandering. Arya realized that the Hound didn't know what to do with her. Then again, Arya didn't know what to do with herself either. She couldn't find Acorn Hall again if she tried, and that was the last place she had ever felt safe and wanted. The Brotherhood without Banners had tried to ransom her off when she met them last; nothing would stop them from trying to sell her again.

They reached the Inn at the Crossroads, and fought Polliver and the Tickler. It was there that she learned that Sansa had truly married the Imp. That the two were considered guilty of King Joffrey's death, but that Sansa had escaped. Then the Tickler and Polliver started fighting with the Hound. The Hound and Arya won the fight, and Arya retrieved Needle from Polliver's corpse. It was pure joy to have Needle again.

That night Arya had fewer names upon her list, almost omitting the Hound. He was dying, wounded in their fight at the Inn. By morning he begged her for a mercy, but she refused him, he deserved to suffer for killing Mycah. She made her way to Saltpans, leaving the Hound to die.

When she reached the town she sought out information about northmen who would have sailed from the port a few months earlier. She gleaned that a ship had gone to Volantis with the "the wife of the dead young wolf" aboard, the ship was named Mermaid's Folly, but the ship was not due to return for a year at least. No other ship had northmen aboard as far as Arya could tell, but the where was her mother? Surely if her mother had gone north she would have used a close port? Arya approached another captain of a ship named Titan's Daughter from Braavos. Braavos, though she had never been there, reminded her of being safe. Braavos was Syrio and the coin of Jaqen H'ghar. They were her teachers. One had taught her to wield a sword and the other to give death. The captain refused her passage until she showed him the iron coin. He then gave her free passage and a cabin.

She had wanted to go north, but it seemed that her only way out of the Riverlands was to Braavos. Braavos wasn't home, but maybe it could be a new beginning. Winterfell was gone. Her father, Bran, Rickon, Robb, and Rosalyn were all dead. Her mother, Sansa, and the baby brother she had never met were all missing. She had never met his brother's wife, and had no way to find her. Jon was alive, she hoped, but so far away that it made no difference.

She had wandered the Riverlands for a year, and been left by the people she had trusted to keep her safe. Yoren had died. Hotpie and Gendry had abandoned her. The Brotherhood without Banners had sought to ransom her, as had the Hound. She had run from the Brotherhood and left the Hound to rot. She remember Jaqen H'ghar though. She had trusted him to help her, and he had killed for her. Now she just had to see where the iron coin he had given her would lead.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for your support!
I'm posting this early because I know that I will be busy later this weekend. I'm excited for this story. The next chapter is 100% original, which was really fun to explore, finally, something that is very divergent from the novels. I also recently wrote future chapters for Azor Ahai and the Heart of Winter.

Next: Catelyn
Catelyn V

Robb gave her a tight hug and a kiss on the cheek when they parted. "We'll see each other again soon. After the wedding, when we've secured Moat Cailin. Then we will go home again."

She smiled sadly at him. "Just be safe Robb, I cannot bear to lose you."

"I know mother. I love you."

"I love you too."

Then they parted. He returned to his tents, and she left with her party to travel up river to Greywater Watch, if they could find it. Finding the castle of Lord Reed would take some work. Greywater Watch moved, like all the dwellings of the crannogmen. They sailed the rivers and swamps in shallow drafted boats, it was nearly a week into sailing when they were met by some of the crannogmen.

"Who are you and why have you entered our swamps!" A voice shouted at them from somewhere in the trees.

Catelyn threw back the hood of her cloak and stood at the center of her boat. "I am Lady Catelyn of House Stark. I am seeking Lord Howland Reed."

"He has been expecting you," the voice replied. "Follow us." From seemingly nowhere a group of twenty men came out and stood among the reeds of the swamp. They were each armed with bows, and spears. They pulled their canoes from behind some rushes, boarded them, and began to paddle. Robb's men followed. They rowed their vessels until they came to a large structure in the swamp that looked like a fortress built within a tree. There were clear signs of stone walls amongst large trees, vines, and moss. The crannogmen paddled their boats into a cavern under the fortress, and Robb's ships followed. It was there that the crannogmen moored their boats and showed the visitors how to do likewise.

They were shown off the boat and led up a slick, algae covered walkway that was made from slate and tree roots. They reached a landing a short walk up and in that led to a door that was formed of weirwood. Upon being escorted inside they found themselves in a surprisingly dry hall with a ceiling that was a few feet above the tallest man's head. They were led down corridors that were made of wood and stone, carved and fitted as though it were always a single unit. Eventually they were all led to a large double door that was made of weirwood with lizard-lions carved facing one another on each door. They walked through the door and entered a large, open, circular room with benches and tables around the perimeter. Inside they were seated and given food and drink.

Lady Catelyn accepted the wine after all of her people were accommodated, but did not sit. A few moments later, a short man with greying brown hair and a slim blonde haired woman of the same height entered the room. The man knelt before Catelyn and the woman curtseyed politely.

"My Lady Catelyn Stark," the man said, standing again. "I have wanted to meet you for a very long time. I am Howland Reed, Lord of the Greywater and the crannogmen. This is my wife, Lady Jyana."

"It is a pleasure to meet you," Catelyn said, grasping their hands in turn. "My husband often spoke of how much you meant to him."

A shadow passed over the faces of the Lord and Lady of House Reed. "He was a true friend. I was
greatly distressed to learn what happened to him in King's Landing. My son and daughter went to Winterfell for the Harvest Feast so that your house may know our loyalty still stands."

Catelyn looked at the pair with great empathy. Their children had to be dead as well, she knew. "I thank you for that kindness, and am sorry for their loss."

"Thank you my lady. What brings you to my humble home?"

"My son, King Robb, has a plan that he discussed with myself and his commanders Lady Maege Mormont, and the Lords Jason Mallister and Galbart Glover." She indicated the three as she spoke, and each in turn stood and bowed respectfully.

Lord Reed acknowledged each of them as they were introduced. "I will gladly speak with all of you on the morrow after all of you have had the chance to rest."

Catelyn smiled. "Thank you my Lord. I would also like to introduce you to my son, Prince Eddard Stark, current heir to Winterfell." Daisy stood with baby Eddard and walked to Lady Catelyn. The Lord and Lady of Greywater Watch smiled at the child.

"It is truly a joy to meet this child. Would you be kind and take a walk with me, my Lady wife will see that your people are comfortably housed."

"Of course my Lord." He offered her his arm, and she accepted, kissing her son on the head before walking away. They left the Great Hall behind them and walked up a granite staircase. When they had reached the top, Lord Reed opened a door, and they walked out onto a balcony overlooking the inner courtyards of the castle. Catelyn gasped, and stared in awe. The castle was built on and around a massive weirwood tree. Its roots had been twisted and formed around the pillars, columns, and walls of stone. Over the many long ages since the weirwood was planted and formed into the island, smaller trees of various varieties, as well as grass and vines, had taken root there as well.

"How does this all float?" Catelyn gasped.

Howland shrugged. "We don't know. There are stories of course. It is said that the castle was built as a keep for a lesser noble in the Age of Heroes. The owner planted a weirwood in the garden of the keep and it grew over time. Terrible rains came one spring, or fall, and the keep began to sink. They cried out to the gods for a way to stop the keep from sinking, and the weirwood pulled up its roots, wrapped them around the keep, and pulled the whole structure from the riverbank. The keep floated until they came to the marshes and bogs around us and it was here that the owners decided to stay. So the story goes."

Catelyn smiled, she almost laughed, but given the structure of Greywater Watch, she felt that it was possible. The Age of Heroes was long before magical Valyria and Asshai were born. That was when the Wall and Winterfell were built. That was when the oldest families of Westeros were founded. That was when the Long Night happened and Others walked the lands. Who was she to argue with the tales?

"Thank you for your kind welcome. My husband spoke well of you, though you never came to Winterfell."

He sighed. "I wished to, but I couldn't look upon my Lord's Lady and lie to your face if ever you asked me of the time I spent with Lord Stark."

His eyes sought hers and she knew what he meant. He would have told her about Jon and Rosalyn's parents. "Ned told me about the twins just before he left for King's Landing. He bade me not tell
anyone as it could mean our lives. I have only told my son Robb the truth, and had meant to tell the twins…"

Her voice trailed off sadly as she thought of Winterfell's destruction and her children that were killed there. He nodded. "I am glad that he told you. It would have been uncomfortable if my wife and I had ever gone to Winterfell and you asked us about the war, or about how she and I met. We always told our children that we met in King's Landing. For them it was enough, but for you… You may have asked for details and neither of us lies very well. Lady Jyana was born a common girl, but on our journey northward we came to love one another. We married here when we arrived, and she swore the same oaths of secrecy to Lord Eddard that I did. With the children I would just tell them of the Tourney at Harrenhal where I met the Starks for the first time. A good tale, and more interesting than how ones parents met."

Catelyn laughed, how true indeed. "You met all of Lord Rickard's children?"

"Indeed, Lyanna I met first. Some squires at the Tournament at Harrenhal were unkind to me, and she beat them with the flat of a sword, shouting at them that I was her father's bannerman so they should leave me alone. They left us, and she introduced me to her brothers. Brandon who was bold, charismatic, and charming to women. Eddard who was quiet and thoughtful. Last of all Benjen who was young, worshiped his brothers and adored his sister. I sat between Ben and Ned at the welcome feast. Prince Rhaegar sang and played the harp so beautifully that Lyanna cried. However, Ben made fun of her, so Lyanna dumped her wine over his head." They both laughed at that, Howland remembering, and Catelyn envisioning the scene.

"Then what happened," Cat asked, holding back her laughter.

"There was more music and dancing. Lyanna danced with many a handsome man while Ben went back to the tent to sleep. I stayed a bit longer before joining him. The Starks were kind enough to share their tents with me. Brandon danced with many women. Ned just sat quietly looking at them. Brandon eventually got Ashara Dayne to dance with Ned and the two danced the rest of the night, long after I went to sleep."

"Did Ned love her?" Howland shifted uncomfortably and looked away from her. "I won't be offended. I was promised to Brandon then and had never met Ned. He told me about Ashara and their child. I cannot be jealous of a girl so long dead or at my husband who is now gone too. I just want answers." Catelyn was weary of heart. These wars had taken so much from them all, and she needed to understand why. There was a natural curiosity too, to know about her husband before they had met, about the things he never told her.

Howland nodded and continued. "He adored her. Ned was never one to make rash decisions, but she was beautiful and she adored him too. He never spoke to us about her, the two were so secretive and discrete. I admit that I was more curious about Lyanna then anyone else. I had never met a woman like Lyanna before. She was beautiful, outspoken, passionate, and kind."

'He had a crush on her,' Catelyn realized, by the way he spoke so wistfully of her attributes.

"She had Brandon's impulsiveness, Ned's courage, and Ben's kindness. She and Ben had offered to find me armor to joust against the knights, but I am no jouster. Then a mystery knight appeared in the jousts and defeated the knights whose squires had attacked me."

"Lyanna?"

Howland laughed in affirmation. "She was skilled, not as one properly trained, but she still knew how to hold the lance. I used to tell my children this tale as though I could be the mystery knight, but
it was her. King Aerys thought that the knight was conspiring against him and the next day Prince Rhaegar returned to his father saying that all that he could find of the knight was the shield."

She raised an eyebrow at that. "Do you think Prince Rhaegar got the shield from her?"

He shrugged. "The only two who could know are long dead. When the tournament was over, he gave her the token of the tournament as you know. What you don't know is what happened afterward. Her brothers escorted her back the tent we shared, and I went with them. She was furious, crushing the crown of roses in her hands. The four of us guarded the entrance to the tent while she fumed. She said that she would throw the flowers at Rhaegar's face. She also said that he wouldn't hurt her if she did. I remember that more than anything else she said. Now, in light of everything that happened, I have often wondered what transpired between them at the tournament."

He paused thoughtfully, remembering. "Months and months later, after you and Ned married and we had taken King's Landing and ended the siege of Storm's End, we learned where Lyanna was held. We fought the kingsguard and only Ned and I survived. Ned raced up the tower to her and I followed behind. We had heard her screams as we fought. I think Ned believed she was being hurt. When I entered, Ned was holding her hand as she lay dying. She told him that she had run away with the prince, that she had married him. She was so young, too young to die. I had to pry Ned away from her when she passed. He was so distraught. He prepared all of the bodies himself, and I let him as he wanted no company."

"Jyana was tending the twins. So small and helpless, having just been born and losing their mother. I helped her by milking one of the goats that was in the pens there, and we gave the children goat milk. My wife told me much of what truly happened between Rhaegar and Lyanna. It is a strange tale, and I have told no one."

Catelyn swallowed the lump that had formed in her throat. She had never met Lyanna, but could always hear the love Ned had for her whenever he spoke of his little sister. His lovely, spirited, foolish sister, who died giving birth to twins who would never know a mother's love. There were days since she had learned the truth of Rhaegar and Lyanna that she found herself angry at their foolishness and all the lives that were lost because of them. Then she remembered how she had already taken that anger out every day since she had arrived at Winterfell and seen the twins. 'I should have been kinder to them. They had no mother. Even if their mother was Ashara, she was dead. Oh Ned, I am sorry. What a wretched woman I have been.' "I would like to hear it if you would tell me?"

"Jyana was a maid to Princess Elia. After Rhaegar took Lyanna and married her, he had his wives meet in secret somewhere in King's Landing. My wife accompanied the Princess. She told me that the two women spoke for a short time, and that Elia gave Lyanna her blessing. Elia sent Jyana with Lyanna as a maid for the time she would spend in hiding. Apparently Prince Rhaegar had read a prophecy at some point in his youth, about the Prince who was Promised. I do not know much of the prophecy, though I have heard it mentioned that the Targaryen's believed for generations that this Prince would come from their bloodline. He apparently thought he had to have a third child, and Elia could bear him no more children, so he married Lyanna. He thought that he would have a daughter to name Visenya."

"He did have a daughter, though Ned named her Rosalyn." Catelyn pointed out.

Howland smiled sadly. "For the daughter Ashara bore him. Ned never told me. Jyana learned from the wet-nurse Wylla about Lady Ashara's child. I almost believe he named Lyanna's girl Rosalyn to remind himself of his sins. I think he didn't know how to accept everything he had seen and done. To kill the brother of the woman you loved. To have lost father, brother, and sister for youthful
foolishness." He quieted, lost in the emotion memory. "Where were we, oh yes, Rhaegar's three children."

"He had four though."

Howland nodded. "He did, though two or more may be dead now. Prophecies are tricky things. They are told by one person who may or may not have been thought mad at the time they lived, and then passed down through all the long ages of time until they are obscure. What I do know, is that Rhaegar was planning a coup."

"What?!" That was something Catelyn had never heard before.

He nodded again. "That is why he told his father nothing of Lyanna. He was planning, with some of his loyal knights to overthrow his father, but the plans all got muddled once Aerys killed Lord Rickard and Brandon. Rhaegar needed to fight for his crown, and the rest is history."

"History that would have been quite different if Rhaegar had just told his father that he wished to marry a second wife." Catelyn's voice was tinged by bitterness.

"He might have, but the King might have refused him. Even if he had already married her and then told King Aerys, the King might have killed them as traitors."

Catelyn sighed, weary of wars and loss. "Thank you for telling me all of these things. I may have questions later once I have had time to think upon all that you have said. For now though, I am tired and wish to rest."

He smiled at her and offered her his arm. "Of course my Lady, I will find out where your son and his nurse have been quartered and escort you there."

"Thank you Lord Reed."

She accepted his arm and they walked down the staircase and returned to the meeting hall where some of Howland's people were setting the tables for the evening meal. He asked one of them where Catelyn's son and nurse were, and upon learning the location, escorted her to the room.

The room was located at the end of a hallway on the same level of the castle as the dining hall, at least as far as Catelyn could tell. The halls twisted and wound around the castle so that it was often difficult to tell where one was oriented. "I will take my leave of you here my Lady. My Lady Jyana and I have our chambers on the floor above if you have any needs. I hope that you will attend the evening meal with all of us, though I do understand if you need to rest. After the morning meal I will meet with you and King Robb's captains to discuss his battle plans."

She favored him with a smile. "Thank you."

She entered the room and discovered Daisy sitting on the floor, playing with Eddard. She was rolling a wooden ball to him, and he was almost succeeding in rolling it back. He smiled when he saw his mother.

"How does Eddard like Greywater Watch?" Catelyn asked with a smile. She picked the boy up and spun him in her arms.

Daisy stood and grinned at them. "He enjoys being off the ship milady. This is a most unusual castle."

"It is indeed. How do you like our rooms?"
"We have four rooms here, and a door that leads into the central courtyard. Eddard's room is set up with yours and all of our things are put away."

"Thank you Daisy." Catelyn had grown quite fond of the young woman and considered her more a friend than a servant. They had much in common for coming from such different places in life. Both had lost husbands and children. It was a year since Ned had been executed in King's Landing. In a few short weeks it would be a year since Daisy's husband had died as well. Catelyn had resented the girl so much for her care of Eddard, at first. Now she had grown accustomed to their life. Daisy fed and tended Eddard and helped Catelyn with anything that she needed. She never interfered with Catelyn's time with her son. The Lady of Winterfell considered Daisy a friend. Cat wondered if the girl had ever thought of remarrying, she was only twenty and pretty.

"You should go to the feast tonight Daisy."

"If milady wishes."

Cat laughed lightly. "It isn't a command, and please call me Cat, or Catelyn if Cat is too informal. We know one another too well for constant formality. I wish that you would find happiness. I am glad for all that you do for myself and my son, but I must also think of your future. Have you considered marrying again?"

The younger woman flushed red and seemed sad at the same time. "I... I assume some day I might but I still mourn Martyn. It... it seems wrong to seek another man. Would you marry again mi... Catelyn?"

She pressed her lips together thoughtfully and stroked her son's hair, playing with one of his curls. "I am highborn, I assume one day men will seek to marry me if for no reason other than to be stepfather to my children. Most men that I have been around respect my husband and son too much to think upon such things, at least as I have been made aware. Some day though I think that I would enjoy a man's arms around me again, even though they will not be my Ned's. You are young and lovely, and there are men here who may be kind to you. I only say, as a friend, that it is good to have your eyes open to possibilities."

She blushed again. "Aye Catelyn. I will go to the feast tonight. Will you not?"

Catelyn shook her head. "No, tonight I will spend resting here with my son."

"As you will Catelyn."

It was not long before Daisy changed and brushed out her strawberry-blonde hair, which she then pulled back in a simple twist. Catelyn told her that she looked lovely before the girl headed out to the evening meal. A while later a servant brought food to her. She ate after she put Eddard to bed. As she ate her mind wandered back to Winterfell. To the husband who had kept so many painful secrets from her. To the children she had borne and lost.

Catelyn's eyes filled with tears as she remembered Ned and how their love for one another had grown. Her husband had had his faults, but he had been true to his promises. He had never betrayed Catelyn, and he had protected Lyanna's memory. Catelyn hoped that Jon yet lived, so that he could learn the truth of who he was. She worried for her son at the Twins, and prayed that all would go well. That night she slept uneasily, worrying for her son.
Catelyn VI

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Five days after arriving at Greywater Watch the news of the Red Wedding arrived. Two crannogmen who were scouting the southern marshes close to the Twins reported what they had seen and heard the night of the wedding. They tried to keep details back from Lady Catelyn but she insisted upon knowing the whole truth. So they told her all. They told her of the destruction of Robb's army. They told her of the betrayal of Roose Bolton. They told her that her son's head had been removed and replaced by his wolf's with a crown atop its head. Catelyn didn't cry, didn't offer a sound. When they were finished telling all she excused herself to let them plan for whatever the future may hold. She didn't care. There was no future now.

She found herself, after some time, in front of the massive heart tree. How she got there she could not remember. The tree was carved with four faces, each a different emotion. One was happy, one angry, one sad, and one seemed blank, each face wept red tears of weirwood sap. She fell before the blank face and screamed.

"Do our prayers mean nothing?! Ned prayed to a tree like this every day and they took off his head! Robb prayed to the trees and the Seven and he is dead too! Did you watch as Winterfell burned and my sons inside were killed? Did you watch as my daughters were taken away? Do you know where they are? Do you even hear?! The Seven have deserted me and you have abandoned the Starks if ever you lived! Why?! Why was I even born if all I love must be murdered?"

Finally, she broke into great heaving sobs. She fell to her knees and wept and raged. Then she heard a soft voice on the wind. "I have lost my mind," she whispered. "To hear my Bran's voice again... I must have finally gone mad."

"Mother, I'm alive. You haven't gone mad. I didn't die at Winterfell, some other boys died, not us."

A sound, somewhere between a laugh and a sob, escaped her lips. "How? If you are real and not of my mind then tell me how?"

"Rosalyn protected us." The wind whispered. "She distracted Theon while we went to the crypts. When Winterfell burned we separated. The Boltons mother, do not trust them, they burned Winterfell."

She sobbed harder. "It's too late my sweet Bran, far too late. How do I hear your voice?"

"Osha took Rickon to Bear Island, at least that was where they were to go. The rest of us went north, all the way to the Wall. Rosalyn went with some to Castle Black to find Jon. I went with the Reeds beyond the Wall. I'm a greenseer mother. I can see through the trees from the day they were planted to the end of their days. I have been here a long time."

"Oh Bran..." She whispered.

"I love you mother... I... I am fading now... goodbye..."

"Bran? Bran! No... my sweet son... don't leave... please..." There were no more words from the boy in the tree. No more words from the son she had thought dead. She could not have said how long she remained kneeling on the cold ground. She remained there until her tears had watered the earth and dried, until her bones ached and her skin grew cold.
"Milady?" Daisy stood above her, cradling a cup something that steamed. "I brought you tea milady. Please, drink it, you need to eat too. Eddard still needs you." The girl spoke gently, the concern showing in her voice.

She gazed sadly at the girl. "I must remember that I have him, and that I have you. I have the Reeds and my Lords who remain here. I have a daughter by marriage across the sea who carries my son's child. I have a daughter in King's Landing who was forced to marry against her will, but she is my daughter still. I must remember that I have two sons who live in the North."

Doubt flickered across the girl's face. "Milady?"

"Didn't I ask you to call me Cat? I am not mad sweet girl. I know that my sons Bran and Rickon were lost to the world, but they went into hiding and are not dead. I know that now, though it may seem unbelievable. I must find Lord Reed, and Lady Maege." Catelyn stood and brushed herself off, taking the cup gratefully from Daisy.

Daisy looked at her skeptically. "Cat, you should rest."

She shook her head. "I have rested and mourned enough. I have cried more tears this year than Alyssa's Tears have in a thousand. Weeping will not bring back my sons, my daughters, or my husband. I am a Lady of Houses Stark and Tully. I must speak with my Lords to plan out the next course of action."

"It is near meal time. I think they may be in the Great Hall."

"Thank you."

With no further words, Catelyn walked from the courtyard to the hall. They were precisely where Daisy had said they might be found. There were many people eating, but there was no merriment in the meal. Everyone was somber and grim. Some seemed to be drowning their sorrows in fermented drinks, while others stabbed their knives into their meat as though it was a man they meant to kill. She could feel their eyes upon her as she entered. She could see their pity, but wanted none of it. They had all lost ones they loved in this war, but she could only think of her husband and children, her father, brother, and uncle.

"Lord Reed," she said once she reached his table. "Can we talk, I have much on my mind?"

He nodded and stood, excusing himself from the table. "Lady Maege," Catelyn continued. "Please remain here, I will have plans I need to discuss with you." When Lady Mormont agreed, Catelyn and Howland left the hall and went up the tower where they had gone when she arrived at Greywater Watch.

"Do you believe in greenseers?" She asked with no preamble when they arrived on the balcony.

He nodded slowly. "I do. My son Jojen was one."

"So is my son Bran." He gave her a confused look. "Bran lives. Rickon lives. Your children may yet live, Bran said they went beyond the Wall with him." She shivered in fear at the thought.

"How did Bran speak to you, when?" He was speaking to her carefully, as though he was unsure of her mind.

She gave him a sad half-smile. "I found myself before this tree of yours and when I cried out, a voice replied. It wasn't a god though, as some may believe who pray to the trees. Neither did I lose my mind, though I feared it. The voice was my Bran, a voice in the wind of the weirwood tree. He is
beyond the Wall and Rickon was to go to Bear Island. I must go north. I must seek the truth. Even if I learn nothing of what happened to my sons I must fulfill a promise to Robb. Robb wanted me to tell Jon the truth. I said that I would do it. I promised Robb that we would give fire and blood to the south. So we will. We will destroy the Freys, and the Boltons, and the Lannisters if it is the last thing I do. First though. First I must keep my son safe." She paused and tears filled her eyes at the thought of what she must do. "Going north will be dangerous. There will be no way that is wholly safe for travel. Land would take too long and I am sure there will be people searching for myself and my son. I would ask that... I must leave my son with you... I know this place is difficult to find and that you will protect him..."

He held up a hand to stop her flow of words before the tears overtook her. "I will protect your son with my life until he can be returned safely to you. I would never let harm come to Ned's son."

She nodded a silent thank you and walked down the steps. He trailed behind her and they returned to the hall to make preparations. The journey north would be very dangerous, for there were no safe routes to travel. The Ironborn held Moat Cailin to the north. To the south lay the Twins and the traitorous Freys. Between the two were Bolton forces on the King's Road.

If they could get to Jason Mallister's seat at Seagard they could take a ship easily, though they would be too close to the Twins and Iron Islands for comfort. Lord Mallister was contemplating returning home to ensure the safety of his son and heir. That too would be risky, as he knew where Lady Catelyn and Robb's brother were. He was persuaded to wait until Lady Catelyn was safely away before pursuing any course of action that would take him back to Seagard.

Three options lay to their east. One was to make their way to White Harbor and travel along the White Knife all the way to Long Lake and then take the King's Road north. The plan had merits but they did not know where Lord Manderly's allegiance lie and they had no way to know where Bolton forces moved in the north. Their group would be too small to fight any size army that the Bolton's might have.

The second eastern option would be to take small ships from one of the marsh outlets in the Bite. From there they could tempt the difficult voyage north on the Shivering Sea and land near Eastwatch by the Sea. Either that, or they could land by the Last River and follow that river to Last Hearth and then north to the Wall. Catelyn knew that the Umbers guarded Talisa and could be trusted, but they were far away in Essos. She did not know if she could have as much faith in the Umbers who remained at Last Hearth as those who had gone with Talisa. The plan put them very close to the Dreadfort, but the chance of being seen by Bolton men there seemed the slimmest. Roose Bolton had betrayed Robb, most likely for the North. To take the North he needed Moat Cailin and Winterfell, both far away from the Dreadfort, and both were the opposite direction of where Catelyn and her people would travel.

The third of the eastern courses held the best options in that direction. The hardest part would be the sea travel. Catelyn however, had her heart set on another option altogether. Rickon was supposed to be on Bear Island, and if he was there that was where she wanted to be. She had to find him. He was so young, and he had to be found. The best way to reach him would be to capture an Ironborn ship moored near Moat Cailin in the Fever River and sail it north to Bear Island. If they could pull it off, that option would be the fastest. Aside from stealing the ship, it would also pose the fewest hazards.

Lady Catelyn Stark, Lady of the North until her son or grandchild came of age, debated with her Lords and Lady Mormont for many hours. The plans had taken several days to devise, and they all feared deliberating too long. The final decision was reached with much grumbling and Catelyn stating that her way was the final word on the matter. All of the forces who had gone to Greywater from Robb's army would depart on the same day. Each would take a separate path. All were told that
little Eddard would go with Catelyn. No one would doubt her word on where her son would go when she had spoken so often of how she refused to be parted from her last remaining child. Galbart Glover would lead his men on one of the easterly routes. His goal was to get to Last Hearth and ensure their allegiance. Jason Mallister would take some to Seagard, with the word that all who followed Robb had lost heart. He would speak sorrowfully of Catelyn killing her last child and herself so that her family would be reunited again. Catelyn would travel with the Mormont women, their men, and some of the crannogmen. Daisy would remain behind with little Eddard, safe and protected, until the North was the Stark's again.

The Mormont's were the last to set out, which gave Catelyn some time to say goodbye to her son. She rocked him gently as he snuggled against her bosom. She sang to him and kissed his cheek head repeatedly. "Take good care of him and do not let him forget me." Was what she had commanded Daisy as well as Lord and Lady Reed. They all agreed to her command.

The group traveled quietly and quickly through the swamps with the crannogmen guiding their steps when they walked and rowing small canoes in the marshes when needed. Their goal was to hijack one of the Ironborn ships anchored anywhere from the Fever River to Blazewater Bay. Some of their men would sneak aboard, kill all the crew, and they would sail north to freedom. It was a dangerous mission, and none of them knew what would happen if they failed. If they failed and were lucky, the Iron Born would have some wealthy hostages. If they failed and were unlucky, they would all have a watery grave. Though really they may have been luckier dead in case of failure, it was difficult to say one way or the other.

There were a dozen ships in the Saltspear, anchored and waiting. They were a mix of warships and former fishing vessels. They watched the ships for three days. Three ships left when three more came on the second day. It seemed likely that the new ships were filled with fresh supplies and that the ones who left were returning to the Iron Islands for supplies. The decision was made to steal one of the fresh ships.

The third day five of the original ships left, leaving seven in the inlet. One of the fresh ships was anchored closer to the bay and mostly away from their other seven. It was that ship that they chose to claim as their own. It was a double masted warship, and looked newer and meaner than any other in the bay.

They waited until after nightfall to row their canoes to the ship. The moon was just a sliver but the sky was clear and the lanterns of the vessel cast a glow upon the water. With any luck no one would see them coming. Dacey Mormont was assigned as Catelyn's protector in one of the canoes they kept farthest from the ship. They watched with bated breath as their men climbed the vessel with stealth and swiftness. They disappeared above the railings and then there was nothing. Only the sounds of water against wood filled the night air. A half hour or less later, there were splashes all around the ships. Catelyn gasped and clenched her hands into tighter fists than they were previously. She felt her body clench and an icy chill run down her back. Then a series of whistles broke the stillness of the night air. The crannogmen had taken over the ship.

The rest of their people boarded the ship as quickly as they could and the crannogmen who were remaining behind began paddling the canoes away. True to their beliefs, the ship was well provisioned. They had enough food, ale, and water aboard for their voyage north. When Catelyn boarded she could see glimpses of how her people had taken over the ship. There were pools of blood scattered throughout the decks of the ship, and some of the hammocks were stained with blood. The crannogmen were not warriors, it was a fact none would dispute. They were skilled, however, in the art of stealth killing. They had slit the throats of every Ironborn aboard and thrown their bodies to the sea.
Quickly Maege Mormont took command and was ordering everyone about. They raised the anchor, lowered the sails, and set their course out of Blazewater Bay. When the land finally disappeared behind them they all breathed sighs of relief.

"Home is near my Lady," Maege said to Catelyn as they sailed.

She gave her friend a sad smile. "Your home. I have no home anymore. I only have dreams of what was and what could be. Even if we take back Winterfell, I will have no husband and no children."

The Lady of Bear Island laid a friendly hand on her shoulder. "I am sorry for all that you have lost. You have said that Bran and Rickon both live, and we know that your little Eddard is safe. When we have Winterfell you will have your home and some of your children with you. I know that none are replaceable, but it will get easier in time."

Catelyn wiped away the tears that were escaping her eyes. "Thank you. Thank you for everything."

The journey to Bear Island was met by a single storm that lasted two nights. Catelyn was grateful that she grown up on boats when she saw how sick some of the men became. They sent a longboat to port when they were close to the island so that the people would not try to fight them. They were met with cheers long before they reached the docks. Lady Mormont had brought most of her people home, and those who had been left behind were anxious to welcome back their men.

They tarried several days on the island. Parties were sent to search for little Rickon, but no trace of him or a direwolf or a wildling woman had been spied on the island. Catelyn was reluctant to leave but forced herself to accept that her son may not have ever reached the island. She didn't want to believe him dead, not when she had just learned that he had survived the burning of Winterfell. She ordered that parties would keep searching for Rickon as Catelyn and some of her people set out again to Castle Black. She had a promise to keep to Robb, she had to tell Jon Snow the truth.
Sam had thought leaving his sisters was difficult. He had cried about it for days as he made his way to the Wall. Watching Jon’s brother and sister part at the Nightfort was worse. Coldhands was waiting for Bran, but Rosalyn Snow seemed determined to reach her twin.

“If your dreams are true my sweet brother, then you are Lord of Winterfell.” She had said with a gentle hand on her brother.

“King in the North,” Meera said solemnly.

Rosalyn nodded. “You must go where your destiny leads you and I must follow my own. You know what Ygritte has told us about the Others, it seems Sam and Gilly here confirm those stories. I must bring the dragons here to defend the Wall, the North, and the World.”

Sam watched as the boy cried silent tears and Summer licked them away. Jon’s sister didn’t cry, though her expression broke Sam’s heart. Ygritte, the girl who had stared daggers at Sam when he mentioned Jon, stood impassively by, though he could see that she was bothered.

“I have to find the three-eyed crow.” Bran said finally. “Get me on Hodor’s back.”

Sam watched as his sister held him close and helped him into the basket that they attached to the tall man. When they were ready to depart, the brother and sister held hands for a moment. “I love you Bran. Make father proud and come back home one day.”

The boy trembled. “I will. I love you too Rosa.”

“Meera, Jojen, help him reach the three-eyed crow. Keep him safe.”

“We will.” The two said in unison.

With that, Sam sighed and started to lead them down the stairs to the Black Gate. After the four travelers and one direwolf made it through the gate, Sam trudged his way back up the stairs. He heard the women fighting before he was close. He forced himself to hurry up the stairs, puffing and panting as he reached the top. At least the repeated climbing was not as difficult as his hike from the Fist.

“You should kill that thing!” The fiery one named Ygritte was saying, with a knife drawn at Gilly.

“Don’t you dare hurt him!” Gilly yelled back. Sam had never heard Gilly raise her voice or look like she could kill someone, until then.

“Wha... What’s going on?” Sam panted at them, trying to seem commanding.

Rosalyn grunted in frustration from her position between the two women. “Ygritte learned that Gilly was one of Craster’s? Girls and for some reason she now wants to kill the baby.”

“It’s a vile thing!”

“He’s just a babe!”
Rosalyn looked very confused and irritated. “Would one of you explain why?”

Gilly looked at her babe with the saddest expression on her face, but she wouldn’t talk. Sam stood beside her and placed a gentle hand on her back.

“Her father gave her that babe,” Ygritte spat. “It’s cursed by the gods to bed kin.”

That moment Rosalyn looked exactly like her brother Jon, her face hard as stone. “You would blame her for that? Do you think she had a choice?” She let out a bitter laugh. “If every woman had a choice there would be no rape. Would you kill her child for something that was no fault of his?”

Ygritte glared at her. “Women should learn to fight.”

Rosalyn laughed again. “Oh if only killing solved all our problems. Kill off all the people in the world and there would be no more war! Nor any other evil!”

“Can we all just sit, and not fight?” Sam suggested. He really wanted to sit and sleep. “And not try to kill anyone?”

Rosalyn nodded her assent and stared at the fiery girl. She sat suddenly and sheathed her knife. “I won’t kill any of you, but that doesn’t mean I want that thing near me.”

That night they all eventually drifted off to sleep. In the morning Rosalyn shared some of her rations with each of them. She also made a brew of some roots boiled in melted snow that she gave to Ygritte. It smelled awful, and from her expression it tasted worse, but she drank it all the same.

“What are you drinking?” He asked as he watched her force the liquid down her throat.

“It takes away my sickness, though it tastes terrible.” She muttered with a sigh. She then rested her hands protectively on her stomach.

Sam’s eyes widened as he looked at her. “You... you’re not... are you expecting a child?”

She favored him with a roll of her eyes. “Yes, your wonderful friend Jon Snow got me with child, and then ran back to your crow friends. Great man he is... I hope the free folk have Castle Black when we get there.” She laughed at the fear in his eyes. “What sort of crow are you? You seem terrified of your own shadow.”

“Leave him alone.” Gilly said tiredly. “He killed an Other. I doubt you can claim the same.”

He smiled at the pride in Gilly’s voice when she told that tale. Sam would have corrected her, saying that it was the blade and not him if it weren’t for Ygritte. She quieted and seemed genuinely impressed by the knowledge. Within the hour they were on their way east to Castle Black. It was a long, slow journey. Gilly was still recovering from her son’s birth and they stopped whenever she nursed. Sam had always been slow, though he thought he may be getting faster. Rosalyn and Ygritte were both strong and made for travel, but Ygritte was moving slower than she would admit. The tea Rosalyn made her each day helped with her nausea, but the pregnancy seemed to make her slow and tired. Thankfully Ygritte had not threatened Gilly’s son since the evening they had met.

They beheld a strange sight as they neared Castle Black. They had been joined by a group of men from the Shadow Tower as they traveled. The men told tales of great battles that had been fought at Castle Black. Ygritte stiffened when she heard that Mance Rayder was being held at Castle Black. The men wondered why Sam was traveling with three women. They teased him, asking if he was forsaking his vows for the pretty things. He told them about Gilly, that she had survived Craster’s
Keep. Rosalyn and Ygritte told the story that they were from a town to the south that had been burned to the ground and they wanted shelter. It seemed a good enough tale for the men.

They also spoke of a small party that had travelled from Bear Island and was headed to Castle Black as well, they were a day or so ahead on the road. When they finally reached Castle Black, Sam could see the changes. There were banners flying from the towers, each one from a different house he had known when he lived with his father. Amongst the banners was a firey heart that Sam did not recognize. Then, almost defiantly, there stood a bear of house Mormont and the grey and white direwolf of house Stark amongst all the banners.

Sam noticed Jon standing in the yard, speaking with a red haired woman. They turned at the same time, hearing the commotion of new arrivals through the gate. Gilly was hiding behind Sam, never in her life had she seen such huge structures and so many people. Even Ygritte was gazing solemnly and quietly at her surroundings, though her face hardened when she saw Jon.

Sam heard a cry of joy spring from Rosalyn’s lips when she saw her brother. “Jon!” She raced ahead of everyone else and flung herself into her brother’s arms. It brought tears to Sam’s eyes. He had never seen so much joy in Jon before. They held onto one another so tightly it was as though the world had disappeared outside of them.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your support!

Next: Jon
Jon

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Rosalyn, my sister, my twin. Alive, you’re alive!* Never before in Jon’s life had he known joy like he did the moment he saw his sister alive in front of him. They held one another so tightly that he was convinced she was leaving bruises, but he didn’t care. His sister was alive. “How did you get here? When I heard about Winterfell... I... What happened to Bran and Rickon? You were there. Rosa, I’m so glad you are alive.”

She burrowed her head into his chest and sobbed. “You left me. You should have stayed to keep me safe.”

“Shh... You are here with me now, no one can hurt you when you are with me.” He hugged her fiercely, and over her head noticed Sam and Gilly standing there. Then he saw her; the beautiful wildling that he loved. “Ygritte?” He questioned in disbelief.

His sister detached herself from him and nodded. “We were all at Queenscrown.”

He looked at Rosalyn and finally understood. “Summer saved me?”

“Yes.”

“Then Bran...”

“No, it’s not safe.” Came a voice beside them. Both Jon and Rosalyn cringed as they had so many times in their childhoods from the sound of Catelyn Stark’s voice.

“My Lady.” Rosalyn said with a hushed tone and a polite curtsey. “I... I didn’t betray Robb... I don’t care what rumors may have been told. I...”

Lady Stark interrupted her step-daughter’s explanations. “There is much that we three must discuss, though we will need to find a place far away from prying ears.”

“Well if you are going somewhere to talk then I’m going with you.” Ygritte growled with defiance when she stood before them.

Catelyn seemed concerned that a girl she did not know wanted to join their conversation. “I am not sure that is wise.”

“For who? I got a lot to say to him too.” Ygritte said, her jaw clenched tightly.

“She’s trustworthy.” Rosalyn interjected. “Just don’t let her have a knife around Jon.”

Jon looked to his twin with concern but her face betrayed nothing of what she was talking about. *Why does Ygritte want to use a knife on me? Well, other than leaving, but she gave me arrows for that.* He nodded solemnly, rubbing his still aching leg at the memory of Ygritte’s arrow. He then turned with a smile to Sam. “Sam, I’m glad that you managed to get back, and with Gilly too. It seems I have three women to speak with. We’ll talk later.”

Jon walked away from his friend and Craster’s daughter, and was followed by his sister, step-mother, and lover. He had done his best to avoid Catelyn Stark since she arrived, it had not been difficult.
She had said that she needed to speak with him when she arrived, but had been otherwise occupied until now. She spent the first two days in discussions with Stannis. He didn’t know what they were discussing exactly, but sometimes their yelling could be heard down the hall. This was her third day at Castle Black, and she had just walked up to him moments before his sister and companions arrived.

He wondered at the wisdom of where he was taking them, but he honestly had no other ideas. They walked toward the Wall. He planned to take them to the weirwood grove where the men of the Watch swore their vows. He had ridden there more than once, though it was only a couple miles away. There were enough King’s men outside the wall that he did not fear the straggling wildlings. As they walked, Lady Catelyn’s shadow, Dacey Mormont, appeared. She had come all the way from the south with Lady Stark, and swore her sword to protect her and avenge King Robb.

“Do you have need of me my Lady?” She asked Catelyn.

“You can accompany us, but we may need you out of our hearing at times.”

“Of course my Lady.” She replied with a polite bow of her head.

Jon was glad for another sword on their walk. He and Ygritte could both kill a man with ease, but unless his sister and step-mother had picked up new talents since he had last seen them they couldn’t wield a sword. He trusted that the remaining wildlings had been pushed back, but he still wondered how many lurked in the forest.

Jon and the women made their way through the gates. They were cracked and broken, and blood had frozen into the ice as a grotesque reminder of the price that was paid for survival. The last gate was raised for them and they walked across the battlefield. There were men tending Melisandre’s flames that burned outside the Wall.

“What happened to your face?” Rosalyn asked him as they walked along the trampled ground, far enough away from Stannis’s men that they wouldn’t be heard.

“Orell’s eagle didn’t like him and tried to kill him.” Ygritte replied, mocking amusement playing in her voice.

“Orell was a skinchanger,” Jon explained. “I killed him while he was inside his eagle, so he tried to gouge my eyes out the first chance he got.”

His sister nodded solemnly, and he noticed Dacey and Lady Catelyn shiver from the story. “Skin changing is a dangerous thing.” Rosalyn murmured.

“Aye,” he and Ygritte agreed.

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“Do the Reed children live too?” Catelyn asked Rosalyn.

The girl smiled briefly. “Yes. They all made it safely from Winterfell. Hodor is with them, he is Bran’s legs.”

“Brandon Stark lives?” Dacey inquired in shock.

Rosalyn nodded her head fiercely. “Rickon too. I got them both out of Winterfell. I told Osha to travel with Rickon to Bear Island.”
“He wasn’t there,” Catelyn interjected. “And Bran is here in the North.”

“I tried my hardest to keep them safe!” Rosalyn snapped. “I used myself to distract Theon. I walked all the way to the Wall with Bran and he had to follow his destiny. He couldn’t be persuaded otherwise. I had to find Jon, to tell him that his brother’s and I were alive. I couldn’t get word south to you or I would have.” Jon grabbed his sister’s hand to comfort her. She was shaking with anger and sorrow. He wanted to kill Theon Greyjoy.

“I believe you.” Lady Stark replied calmly. She seemed to notice how surprised both of her late husband’s bastards seemed to be at her calm demeanor and continued. “Neither of you would ever hurt my children. They have been brothers and sisters to you for your entire lives. Do you know any news from the south?”

Rosalyn shook her head. “The last news I heard was before Winterfell burned and I escaped with the boys.”

Jon held his sister’s hand tighter. He knew about Robb, and the murders at the Twins. He knew about Sansa’s marriage to Tyrion Lannister. He knew about Joffrey Baratheon’s death. Rosalyn had been walking north before any of those events had taken place and knew none of them. He could hear Catelyn inhale deeply.

“Robb is dead. He was murdered at the Twins by the Freys and Boltons. We think that my brother Edmure and possibly some others may have been kept as hostages.” Her voice was eerily calm and detached as she spoke of her son’s murder, it was unnerving.

Jon could feel his sister clench his hand tightly in her own at the news. “If I had gotten word south... maybe...”

“Maybe you and my other sons would already be dead.” Catelyn finished sharply. “Robb died because he chose love over duty and the Boltons and Freys are evil and treacherous. Bran will reach his destiny. If Rickon lives then we will find him. Sansa may be a prisoner, but she is alive. My son Eddard is also alive and safe.”

“How do you know that Bran will succeed?” Rosalyn pleaded in wonder and hope.

“He spoke with me from a heart tree. He will reach his destination.” Catelyn Stark’s voice trailed off at the unspoken thought that although Bran would safely reach his destination there was no way to guarantee his return or that of his companions.

“Rickon is alive.” Jon affirmed. “Well, at least Shaggydog is. Ghost can sense his brothers and sister. He felt when Lady and Greywind died.”

“Where is he, Ghost?” His sister asked.

Jon shrugged sadly. “Close. I left him ages ago, before we climbed the Wall. I told him to come back to Castle Black.”

“Bran said that Summer felt when Greywind died.” Rosalyn nearly whispered. “I am a warg too.” She said even more quietly.

“Without a wolf?” Jon inquired, confused and happily surprised.

Ygritte rolled her eyes. “You know nothing Jon Snow. She’s got a dragon across the water.”

Catelyn gasped audibly, and held her hand to her mouth. Dacey’s eyes went wide. Jon stopped
dead in his tracks and stared at his sister. Ygritte was giving him a condescending smirk. Rosalyn smiled gently at him, suddenly shy.

“Daenerys Targaryen lives across the sea. She is the last living child of the Mad King. She hatched three dragons. Ever since Theon took Winterfell I have dreamed in the one dragon.” She stated it all so simply and wistfully that they all stared at her in wonder.

“Dragons?” Dacey whispered in fear.

Lady Stark held up a hand to stop the conversation. “Where are you taking us that we may speak on these things more privately?”

They were just at the edge of the forest, it was not much further to walk. “An ancient weirwood grove. It’s where the brothers of the Night’s Watch who keep the Old Gods swear their oaths. We are almost there.”

They walked in awkward silence the rest of the way. When they arrived, Lady Stark had Dacey walk a perimeter a few paces from the grove, which was hard to convince the northern woman to do when near the ancient sacred grove. Dacey had wanted to pray there. Rosalyn insisted that Ygritte stay with them, which worried Jon and clearly bothered Catelyn.

Upon entering the grove Jon, Rosalyn, Ygritte, and to Jon’s shock, Catelyn knelt before the trees. After a few moments of silence, Catelyn spoke but did not yet stand. “In Greywater Watch, when I learned of Robb’s murder, I fell before their heart tree. I felt my will fade and my mind slip away. I heard Bran’s voice and thought that I had truly gone mad. He spoke to me and I knew what I needed to do. That day I realized why Ned prayed to the trees, because the trees hear and listen and remember. What have the Seven ever done for me? They took from the North and they took from me, but the trees in the North stand and remember, and hear, and speak.”

“Osha told me when Robb went south that he needed to go north, because the danger was to the north. She said that the trees weren’t in the south so they couldn’t help him.” Rosalyn murmured gently. Then added with fright in her voice. “She also said the Wall was not big enough to stop the evil that is coming…”

“Then I thank you for sending such a sensible woman away with my son.” Lady Stark said as she stood. She breathed deeply, as though pained. “I have much to say to both of you that will be hard for you to hear.” With that, the other three stood as well. “Ned told me of your mother the day he departed for King’s Landing.”

The twins both drew sharp breaths and looked to one another. “Why were we not told!” Jon seethed.

Their step-mother gave them both sad, kind looks. Her kindness to them was still unsettling. “He wanted to keep the two of you safe. He wanted to keep all of his family safe. If the truth was known… Each one of us would have been executed for treason. Ned was wrongfully executed for treason to one so called king, but he was truly a traitor to his own friend.”

“Treason?” Rosalyn questioned. “Father was no traitor!”

“We all were once,” Catelyn continued, unfazed by the outburst. “Long ago when the Mad King executed Rickard and Brandon Stark. The kingdoms all rose up to war. The Starks were the leaders of the Rebellion, and the cause of the war.”

“How dare you!” Jon nearly shouted at her.
Cat sighed wearily. “Do you think that I loved him less than you? I knew all the Starks of that time and married Ned Stark. Well, I knew all of the Starks, save Lady Lyanna. She was about the age the two of you are now when she died in Dorne. Have you never wondered how she died? Ned loved his sister so dearly that he had her likeness carved and placed beside their father in the crypts, but he never spoke openly of how she died. Did you never hear that there were three knights of the Kingsguard at the tower where she died?”

She paused for a moment, and that was all it took. Rosalyn looked as though she had been doused with ice water and kicked in the gut. She put a hand to her mouth and sank to the earth; tears flooded her eyes. Jon knelt beside her, for comfort, but he did not yet understand. He looked between his step-mother and sister, lost.

“Lyanna is our mother.” Rosalyn whispered eventually. Her voice trembled with emotion. She looked up at her step mother and the older woman gave the girl a nod of her head. “Rhaegar Targaryen is our father... not Eddard Stark... I see, I see dragons because I am...”

“Targaryen,” Catelyn whispered solemnly.

As the shock faded, Jon suddenly started to laugh. It was so jarring that his sister and aunt gave him worried glances. He eventually quieted some and gazed up at Ygritte, who had been quietly observing the trio. “You were always right. Truly I knew nothing.”

The other three joined in his laughter then, for a moment. “How stupid are all of the people of Westeros that no one ever questioned why Lyanna Stark was being guarded by the three last members of the Kingsguard. The Queen and Prince Viserys were still alive, that was their duty, but they guarded a woman that was the mistress of the Dragon Prince.”

“No,” Catelyn interrupted. “She wasn’t his mistress. She was his second wife. You are the trueborn heirs to the Iron Throne.”

If Jon had not been seated he would have fallen to the ground. He did not know what to think or feel. “I would have been king? Father? Do I still even call him father? He let me take the black and he knew... To be sworn for life... I swore here, in this grove, that I would live and die for the Night’s Watch. I swore to take no wife, father no children...”

“Well you broke that vow.” Ygritte muttered.

“What?” He breathed. He didn’t even notice his sister’s smile or the dawning realization in Catelyn’s face. All that Jon saw was Ygritte.

“I carry your child.” She stated, almost shy, though that disappeared quickly. “I knew before Queenscrown. Then you left me and I had to hide for fear that the others might kill me because they knew. You’re crow to your very bones Jon Snow, no matter whose blood you are.”

“He isn’t.” Catelyn declared firmly. “Robb Stark was King in the North. I told him of your parentage. He worried that he might fall in battle, and he wanted me to tell you the truth. He granted you termination from service to the Night’s Watch. He said that he wanted you to have the choice. He knew how difficult it was to be king, he did not want you to feel forced into anything. I think he felt almost forced to be king, he did not want his brother to feel that as well. He also said... If he died...” Catelyn paused, pained at the memories. “He wanted you to raise all the banners of the North and give the south all the fury of your fathers... He said to give them fire and blood.”

He laughed bitterly. There was no choice in her words. He would have to betray the Night’s Watch to honor his brother’s request. “How? I would kill every man who harmed the man I love as father
and Robb who was brother to me if I could. A King’s declaration means nothing. The realm had five kings and only Stannis came north to help against the Others. I know that Robb would have as well if he could have come. I know that he was surrounded. Still, Stannis Baratheon is here, with thousands of men at arms. House Stark doesn’t have its castle anymore. House Targaryen has even less.”

“We have dragons.”

“Where, Rosa, where?”

“The pyramid cites where the slaves were until Daenerys freed them.”

“Slaver’s Bay?” Catelyn questioned.

The girl shook her head. “Possibly. I only know what Rhaegal knows. There was the city of red pyramids, then the city of yellow pyramids, then the largest of them all where the pyramids had many colors. Each city held thousands of people in chains until Daenerys came. The people and the dragons call her mother.”

“She is your aunt.”

“As are you.” Jon said, coldly. Her newly discovered gentleness towards himself and his sister did not change the past.

“I am.” She replied, reproach in her voice. “The way I treated you both as you grew up was wrong. I do not deserve your forgiveness. I only wish to work for the future for all those we have loved and still love.”

“You knew by seeing my eyes, didn’t you?” Rosalyn asked, shifting the topic abruptly.

Catelyn nodded. “Violet eyes. I was so afraid. Ned promised your mother that he would keep the two of you safe. To do that he needed to keep the secret from everyone, even me. Forgive him, and the parents who gave you life.”

“Why did Rhaegar and Lyanna...”

Rosalyn’s questioned trailed off, but Catelyn still understood. “Lyanna, I believe wanted freedom. She was so young, and a prince came along to whisk her away, how could she not adore him? Rhaegar, while we may never understand all of his motivations, believed that he was fulfilling a prophecy. He thought that Lyanna would have a daughter, and she would be named Visenya. He thought that his son Aegon was someone called ‘The Prince who was Promised’. An ancient prophecy.”

“Azor Ahai?” Jon questioned. “The one who wields Lightbringer? Born amongst salt and smoke?” He let out a scoffing laughed. “That’s who Melisandre thinks Stannis Baratheon is. Shall I tell her that they are wrong? That Prince Rhaegar thought that Azor Ahai must be his blood, and well here I am?”

Ygritte slapped him across his face. “You know nothing! Would you get yourself killed because you want a different life? The somber, angry, hurt bastard boy of Winterfell was easier? If you can be more, be more. For the child if for no one else.”

“My own bastard...”

“You still know nothing! Do you not remember what I told you? You stole me, makes me your
“Like Rhaegar did with Lyanna.” Rosalyn breathed with wistful realization.

“By the customs of the people here, beyond that cursed Wall of yours, we are married. So my child isn’t a bastard but your heir.”

“Would anyone else see it that way?” Jon questioned, as he finally stood up from the ground, pulling his sister with him.

The young fire-kissed woman tossed her head in anger. “Are you not the King? Truly the heir to the whole of the south? You kneelers bow before anyone with power and authority. Get your sister to bring the dragons, kill the Others, and win the respect of the people. You can’t be a conqueror with kindness or doubt.”

Jon stepped to her and caressed her cheek. “Do you want to be a queen? It would not be easy, and you couldn’t kill everyone who lied to or angered us.”

She contemplated the idea for a few moments. “Aye. I am yours. This babe will be King or Queen of the world.” She pressed her lips to his and he returned her kiss fiercely. He had spent too long without her kiss. He wanted her, needed her. He blushed with embarrassment when his sister cleared her throat, interrupting them.

“What will we do about Stannis?”

Catelyn smiled slyly. “I have sworn that House Stark and House Tully will serve the rightful king if all is restored to us. By the time that happens, we will just need the dragons to convince the people to give you a crown.”

“You want me to lie? You said that this is a choice, but there is none is there? I have to choose the path that leads to war. Robb did not stop until they killed him. Father took his secrets to the grave. Rhaegar, Rhaegar made the country bleed. Must I do it again because I am his seed?” He clenched his fists and gazed at the trees. They stood as silent witnesses to his betrayals. He had sworn to be a man of the Night’s Watch before these trees, now he was planning to break those vows in the same place.

“No Jon,” his sister said kindly. “We need the country to heal. Do you think that Stannis can heal this country? What about the Lannisters? A Stark and a Targaryen tore this country apart. Maybe their children can heal it. You do not have to break your vows. I can win Daenerys to our side and bring the dragons. After that...”

“After that is too far ahead for us to plan.” Catelyn finished. “The Night’s Watch takes no part in wars or politics. A man of the Watch you will remain, safely. We will just need to keep your wildling bride and child safe.”

“What story shall we tell everyone when we return?” Jon asked. “We may all be rather dead if we tell varying ones.”

They paused quietly and then Catelyn spoke up. “That I needed to speak with my husband’s children about the war. That I had to ask Rosalyn about Winterfell, and she told me the truth.” She looked upon Rosalyn with unspoken questions in her eyes.

“The truth.” She half whispered. “I became the mistress of Theon Greyjoy to protect my brothers. When I helped them escape I hid the truth from Theon. He killed two farm boys in their stead at the urging of Ramsay Snow who was posing as a man named Reek. Ramsay betrayed Theon. I ran to
the godswood and hid when the fighting started. Hours later the boys and their companions came up from the crypts. We split up and came north. Winterfell... it was smoldering when we left...” She paused, swallowing the tears which threatened to spill from her eyes. Jon wished that he had been there to protect her from everything.

“Tell them that I was held prisoner by him and raped as he willed. He killed my brothers in front of me. He was in league with Ramsay Snow, but was betrayed. The Bolton’s set Winterfell ablaze and killed Northman and Ironman alike. I escaped by hiding in the godswood. I made my way north to find my brother Jon, and protection. I met Ygritte on my travels. She threatened to kill me, but decided that it would be better to kill me in front of Jon. Eventually we met Sam and Gilly, and traveled the rest of the way here.”

Rosalyn Snow was a convincing liar. They all agreed that the parts with Ygritte may seem unlikely, but the rest was convincing enough that Jon and Catelyn were both clearly bothered. Catelyn shuddered at the tale. “I think that story will be satisfactory for any who may question what we were discussing here.”

Jon nodded solemnly. “We need to return, and we must speak with someone.”

As they were ready to leave, Ygritte stopped. “There is another way to marry in the north.” He looked at her with curiosity and waited for her to continue. “To swear a vow before the gods.”

She took his hands in her own and the other two stood near them, watching. “I swear before the gods of the North that this man is mine and I am his. From this day, to the end of our days. That’s all. Now you say it, unless you are a coward?”

With a shake of his head he held her closer. “I am no craven. I swear before the gods of the North that this woman is mine and I am hers. From this day, to the end of our days.” The kissed again, fervently and eagerly. “I love you Ygritte, but if they think you are mine at Castle Black they will kill me.”

She swatted away his hands. “No worry, I’ll hate you in front of them the whole time. Tell them that I was yours and that you left me because you were loyal to your crows. A good enough lie.”

They all agreed, and walked from the grove. Dacey Mormont rejoined them, and together they walked toward the Wall. Their walk was utterly silent, aside from their footsteps in the crunchy snow. As they walked, a white shadow bounded to them and stopped on the path before them.

“Ghost.” Jon said in disbelief, waving that Dacey should remove her hand from her sword. The direwolf approached him and licked his hand. “You are still mine then?” There was no doubt of that. He fell to his knees embracing the wolf and was licked all over as though the direwolf were a simple dog. When they were recovered, the direwolf walked beside him on their way back. They could see the southern men who guarded the base of the Wall worry at the sight of the direwolf, but the northerners said nothing. On the other side of the Wall, Jon spoke again.

“I will need to find lodging for the two of you. I am not sure where Sam had Gilly placed, though she may be with Val and Dalla’s babe.”

“Where’s Dalla?” Ygritte wondered.

“She died giving birth to her son.” Jon replied softly, giving her a worried gaze. If a woman like Dalla could die birthing a child, so could Ygritte. She smiled worriedly, but said nothing.

“The two of you can stay in my rooms.” Catelyn offered. The younger women nodded their
agreement to the offer.

“I need to take them to a friend.” Jon informed Lady Stark. “I will return them to your rooms later.”

“A friend?” Rosalyn asked as Catelyn and Dacey walked away.

“An ally.” He replied. “Maester Aemon. He was the brother of Aegon V.”

His sister’s eyes widened as she realized who Aemon was to them, but she was smart enough not to speak. He gave his sister his arm as they walked. Ygritte and Ghost trailed behind them. I never set out to be a traitor and yet a traitor I am. I have a wildling wife. I have family who wants to give me a throne. Is this how it was for you father? You wished for peace and found war. You wanted to keep your friend happy, your sister’s children safe, and your own children as well. You failed father. People have killed, destroyed, and taken all that we hold dear. What would you have done? At least you won’t be alive to see me fail.

“I am glad that you are alive.” Rosalyn told him, breaking him from the downward spiral of his thoughts.

He chuckled a bit at that. “There were days that I wasn’t sure I would wake the next. I burned my hand killing a wight, was attacked by an eagle, and was shot with arrows. When I finally returned and learned about Winterfell... When news reached me about Robb... I had nothing left. Then you came back to me.”

“I can’t stay.”

“I know. For now, we just need to wait until everything settles here. Lady Stark’s presence here will be as contentious to the south as King Stannis’s presence is.” With a deep sigh he told her more. “I have no duties now. They do not trust me since I joined the wildlings, though I did it under orders, though I saved them all.” His voice was bitter.

“Then prove to them you are not a traitor or turn cloak sweet brother.”

Am I not? The Night’s Watch takes no part, but I have, I am choosing a side. When the time comes, I will fight for you, for Ygritte, for the Starks and the Targaryens. “You have too much faith in me.”

“No, I have enough faith in you. I have faith that you won’t fail us.”

He favored her with a kiss to the top of her head. He had forgotten their height difference, she stood only to his shoulder, or perhaps he had grown taller since they had last seen one another. He had also forgotten how determined she was. You have too much faith in me dear sister. So does my bride. So will my child if ever we meet. A child...

She squeezed his arm. “We just need to be careful. We need to choose our allies wisely. We need to keep our secrets close.”

He nodded. They reached the Maester’s chambers, and knocked. They were admitted by Sam, who greeted Jon with a hug. “Come in! Maester Aemon will be happy to meet your sister.”

“Thanks Sam. Is anyone else inside?”

“What? No, just me and the Maester. Gilly went with her boy to feed Dalla’s boy. She’s going to stay with Val and the babes. Ygritte can stay there too... but she wants to kill Gilly’s son.”

“Lady Stark offered to share her rooms with Ygritte and my sister.”
Sam’s eyes went wide. “Have you gone mad? Put her with your family and they’ll say they know for sure that you are a traitor. Have her stay with the other wildling girls, it will look less suspicious. I may be a craven but I’m no idiot. You love her and she loves you. So keep it quiet.”

Jon had to laugh. Sam was smarter than he could ever realize. He clapped his friend’s shoulder warmly. “No worry about that; I don’t want to die.”

With a nod, the round man of the Night’s Watch wandered off. With a deep breath, Jon and the two women walked inside the Maester’s room.

Chapter End Notes

So I feel like I need to mention that in "Game of Thrones" we are told that the sacred grove is only half a league from the Wall, meaning only a mile and a half away. In "A Dance with Dragons" it takes them hours to get to and from on horses, although there is snow to slow their passage. I don't know about you, but I can walk two miles in forty minutes without much effort (I said walk, not jog or run) and I am not really that fit, so I think that all these people could easily walk the mile and a half back and forth no issue in decent time. And the horses taking hours is kinda crazy because we were told it's only a mile and a half away, even in snow it would not take that long.

Thank you for all your support!

Next: Rosalyn
Maester Aemon was older than Old Nan, at least from Rosalyn’s perspective, quite possibly in truth. A frail, shrunken man whose hair and sight had left him long ago. A distant uncle to me. Rosalyn mulled the thought over in her mind. She needed to process all that she had learned. A brother, who was not truly a brother, dead. A father, who was not her father. The truth seemed more difficult than the lies. This was in some ways harder than Winterfell.

Winterfell had been hard, and painful. She had yet to fully come to terms with all that had happened there. She found herself pitying Theon, even missing him. Missing him bothered her. Yet when she tried to hate him, she found only pity. She had gone to him willingly, even though he had sent her to her supposed father’s room. She was not even certain that he would have touched her without permission. He had respected her refusals after he killed the boys. He wasn’t the one who killed the farm boys, that was Ramsay. He betrayed Robb though, his friend, his king. She did not know why her mind wanted to excuse him. She was frightened by occasionally wanting him, craving his touch. He should have fought and died for Robb... My dear brother...

Parting the younger boys had torn her apart. She could only pray that Rickon was alive and safe. She could only pray that Bran and his companions would one day return alive and well. She could only pray that Jon, Ygritte, and herself could be safe at Castle Black. We are the trueborn blood of kings... Forgive me brothers for sending you away...

“Oh Jon... “She will be staying with the other Wildling girls and accompanying my sister when she leaves. We are to guard the realms of men, and these women who came to us for protection are no different.” Jon sighed heavily. “There is more that I would tell you. Lady Stark told my sister and I of our parentage... We... I think that you should know our blood.”

He gave a gentle nod of the head. “Forgive my rudeness, to you both dear ladies. I fear that I am forever scolding the men here and have grown quite unaccustomed to women.”

“Thank you maester.” Rosalyn replied.

“It’s alright,” said Ygritte. “Jon can use it every now and again.”

He smiled at them, and Jon rolled his eyes. “Now what have you learned of your parentage Jon?”

Jon looked into the fire that burned behind the Maester, lost in thought. “Do you remember when I
learned about Lord Stark being imprisoned? You told me of how you were tried. You told me your
name.” Aemon was staring directly at Jon, somehow seeing him, though his eyes were useless.
“You told me that we must all make choices. I lost my brothers, sisters, and the man I called father
while serving the Watch. I made my choices. This... This is not a choice.” Jon took a series of deep
breaths. “Your family line is not gone Maester. House Targaryen lives. Aside from you there are
four.”

He gazed at them shrewdly and shook his head. “What do you mean?”

“Lyanna Stark and Rhaegar Targaryen.” Rosalyn answered. “Were our mother and father.” She let
him register that information, and could see tears beginning to brim in his weary eyes. “Daenerys
Targaryen, the daughter of King Aerys lives across the sea. The fourth, has yet to be born...”

“We are your blood.” Jon continued. “I did not plan to father a child. She will be kept safe, and so
will the child. If King Stannis were to know who we are...”

“Stannis Baratheon would burn the four of us as a sacrifice to the god of his red woman. Are you
truly the Prince’s children?” He seemed afraid to believe.

“Yes,” Rosalyn said fervently. “I have dreamed of dragons, and they are real and alive. Daenerys
has three dragons across the sea. My eyes are pale violet. Three knights of the Kingsguard were at
the Tower of Joy when Lyanna Stark died giving us life. Lord Stark raised us as his own to protect
us.”

The old man stood and shuffled his way over to them. He very gently touched each of their faces.
“Rosalyn, your face reminds me of my little sister, gone so long ago. Jon, you look very like a
Stark.”

“Yes.”

“The dragon must have three heads...” He muttered. “You must bring Daenerys and her dragons
here. To fight the night and the dark... Stannis Baratheon is no Azor Ahai reborn. His sword is not
real. Yet maybe...” He trailed off with a pensive sigh. “My children, your secrets are safe. Blood
protects blood. Leave me for now, I must be left with my thoughts.”

Jon nodded his head solemnly. “Of course Maester.” They stood to leave, and by impulse, Rosalyn
hugged Aemon. “Thank you for hearing us, and believing.”

He favored her with a smile. “Thank you for giving this old man hope when all hope was a fading
dream.”

The trio left the maester’s rooms quietly. Jon looked as though he had a great weight leave him. She
grasped his hand. “We have allies and friends, now we just need to plan.”

He smiled grimly. “May we not die in the process.” They walked in silence, Jon leading the way,
then Rosalyn, Ygritte, and Ghost. They eventually arrived at the tower where Val, Gilly, and the
two babes were being housed. King Stannis’s guards stood aside for Jon when he said that Ygritte
was to stay in the rooms with the wildling women. Gilly let them in when she knocked, and retreated
when she saw Ghost. Inside, with the door shut behind them, Jon embraced Ygritte. “I won’t be
able to speak with you often or alone. I love you. Don’t fight or hurt Gilly’s babe.”

She gave him a soft smile. “I won’t. I love you, don’t get killed.”

“I will try my best.” With a last longing look at Ygritte, Jon led Rosalyn back out the door. “I won’t
be able to see you much either. There is so much chaos here...”
“I understand. This place looks as bad as Winterfell did when I left.” She stared into the distance, remembering. “I can’t believe Robb is really gone. I think if I fall asleep inside this castle tonight I will wake up thinking it’s Winterfell. Father could be there, alive, talking with us, laughing with us. You and Robb dueling in the yard. Bran climbing the walls. Rickon clinging to Lady Catelyn’s skirts. Arya and Sansa fighting over silly, petty things. There would be no war, and we would be happy again.”

This time Jon reached for her hand and squeezed. “A beautiful dream. There has been no word of Arya since father was imprisoned. Sansa was married off to Tyrion Lannister. Joffrey was poisoned and the murder was blamed on Sansa and Lord Tyrion, but Sansa went missing.”

Rosalyn shut her eyes to fight off the tears that she anticipated, but there were none, she couldn’t cry any more. “Then someone helped Sansa escape, maybe she did kill him, he deserved to die for killing father.”

He nodded slowly. “She may be safe. If she did it or not, I don’t know, but she may be safer than the rest of us, wherever she is. Are you truly alright sharing rooms with Lady Catelyn?”

She had to laugh. After all the things she had been through, sharing a room with her step-mother was the least of her worries. “I shared a bed with Theon Greyjoy. I think sharing a room with my evil stepmother is not quite as intimidating as the idea may have been once. Like, when I was a child of ten planning to run away with my twin to the free cities.”

“I wish we had gone.”

“We tried remember? We did not make it past the first gate, and were promptly returned to father. It was the worse escape attempt in the history of escape attempts.”

They both burst out laughing. Truly, heartily laughing. It felt so good to laugh, and had been so long for them both that it felt strange and exhilarating at the same time. They didn’t even care that it seemed to startle the men in the yard.

“I had thought you dead. When I came back here, and they fixed up my leg. I heard about all of it and wished that the infection would kill me so that I could see my family again. I had no reason to live, no hope, no purpose. Don’t die on me, not until we are old.”

“If I die young, I will die beside you in battle.” He gazed down at her solemnly. “I swear it, we will not die until we are old and grey.”

“When did you become such an optimist Rosa?”

She favored him with a gentle smile. “If I don’t see the future as being hopeful I will despair, and that does no one any good. What all did you do beyond this wall of ice?”

She slipped her arm through his as they walked, and he told her of his ranging beyond the Wall. They walked slowly to her rooms, enjoying the company of each other. It had been too long since they had seen one another. With all the information that had been thrown at them in one day, it was nice to ignore everything and just speak with one another. For a few brief moments they could be Jon and Rosalyn, as they had been from the day they were born. A brother and sister whose world was separate from everyone else, even from their other brothers and sisters. Eventually he left her with Lady Stark.

Lady Catelyn was writing when Rosalyn entered the room. Dacey Mormont was apparently elsewhere. Rosalyn curtsied to her out of habit. “You don’t have to curtsey to me Rosalyn.”
“It’s a reflex.” She muttered. Rosalyn slumped onto a bench in exhaustion.

The women stared quietly at one another for a while. Rosalyn did not forgive her for the past, or know what to say to her, but maybe they could learn to work together.

“With Stannis on our side we should be able to regain the North.” Catelyn said eventually. “Though I do not care for the man, he needs me and needs the North. When our plans are finalized, I will be sending letters to the northern lords telling them that House Stark is still strong.”

She nodded tiredly. “What is Stannis waiting for?”

“He wants to set up men at various towers of the Wall, but needs permission from the Lord Commander to do anything, and there is no Lord Commander. The men of the Night’s Watch are gathering to vote and decide who will be their next leader.”

“Can we trust these men?”

“Not all of them, but we can trust Lord Stannis because he needs the North to support him. If anyone has questions about your loyalties or past conduct they will answer to me. I thank you for all that you did for my sons.” Rosalyn gave her step-mother a wan smile in response. “You look exhausted. I’ll have a bath drawn for you and then you can sleep.”

“Thank you.” Rosalyn waited on the bench while Lady Catelyn left and returned with some of her serving women. They brought up a tub and heated buckets of water that they poured into it. The tub was placed in a side room. The rooms consisted of two bed chambers, a privy, the main room, and the side room. Lady Catelyn, Dacey Mormont, and Rosalyn shared the rooms. The serving girls had a separate set of rooms beside them. There were Mormont men stationed outside their doors to ensure that no men disturbed the women.

When the water cooled a little, Rosalyn stepped into it. She had not bathed since Winterfell. There had been rains that rinsed them on their journeys, but no baths and very little warmth. She realized in the water that she probably smelled terrible. One of the serving girls left her a fresh set of clothes, and she was finally left alone. She sighed as the water covered her to the chin, it was beautiful to feel the warmth of the water surrounding her. She scrubbed a little with the sponge she had been left, and could see the water change color from clear to muddy grey. She resolved to herself that she would bathe every third day while she was at Castle Black so that she could remain clean and free of filth.

In the bath she had time to finally think through everything. There had been no time to think that day, no time to wrap her head around everything. She had to mourn and reflect and figure out what to do. The whole of her life had been spent as a ghost. She was daughter, sister, friend, helper, bastard of the Lord of Winterfell. She learned to sew, dance, sing, read, write, and be courteous because those things were expected of her as a high-born girl, even though she was a bastard with no future. She had always tried to be an obedient step-daughter because it was expected of her, even when she hated Lady Catelyn. She became a mistress to Theon Greyjoy because he wanted it and she felt it was her duty. Her life had always been determined by other people and she had no reason to ever anticipate any other course. Even coming to find Jon was out of duty and hope of protection, of course she had wanted to see him again, but she also needed him to know about Winterfell and their brothers. Only in the glass gardens of Wintefell had she ever been herself, free to learn and be more than what was expected of her. Her knowledge of plants, in turn, had helped them to survive on their trek north and helped Ygritte with her child sickness.

Now, again, she was expected to be Princess without any idea of how to be a princess. She was a bastard, had always been a bastard, and had known nothing else. Now she knew that she had never
been a bastard, but the trueborn daughter of Prince Rhaegar. If her brother or his child were not
given the crown, by right it was hers. That was an overwhelming idea. She was not made to be a
queen, not made to lead. Then there was Daenerys, her aunt, whom she had watched through
Rhaegal’s eyes for months. She was planning to be Queen of Westeros and saw it as her right.
Could Rosalyn find and convince Daenerys to join her, or would the young woman hate her for
claiming right to the same throne she wanted.

Duty, family, loyalty, Rosalyn did not know what course was the best. She understood why Lord
Stark, her father, had kept everything a secret. Secrets were easier than truths. Secrets can protect
but truth can kill. Yet secrets can kill too. Secrets killed Rickard, Brandon, and Lyanna Stark.
Secrets would protect herself, Jon, and Ygritte. Until they told the truth.

Rosalyn scrubbed away more of the dirt, cleaning her hair and face. She poured the scented oils that
had been left for her over her skin and hair. The scent was soothing and she soon drifted asleep.

Rhaegal was worried. Mother spent too much time away, too much time with her people. The black
kin she called Drogon was often ranging far away. Drogon was trying to make a den. The pyramid
city was bad for them, they needed to move forward. Mother did not want to leave, but she grew
sadder and distant every day.

Viserion, the cream kin, grew quieter, more secretive. It was a secret the three kin shared. ‘Secret?’
The girl asked. ‘You will learn in time my friend.’ Rhaegal told her.

The dragon and girl had grown fond of one another, learning of each other. Rhaegal had learned
to see through her eyes sometimes, seeing the snow in the land far away. Most times though, she
looked through Rhaegal’s eyes to see the deserts and mother.

‘Mormont is gone.’ Rhaegal told her.

‘Where did he go, why?’

‘Mother no longer trusts him; she sent him far away.’

‘He loved her though; he would never have hurt her.’

‘They are not kin. Your kind is harder to understand.’ Laughter filled Rhaegal’s head.

‘You are right about that. Protect Dany, please, she is my kin.’

‘Mother spends much time away from us now. She worries too much and your kind fill her with
troubles. She forgets who she is.’

‘Blood of the dragon, like me, that is who she is, even if she forgets.’

‘Come to us. Tell her who she is, she forgets.’

‘Soon, I will find a way to you soon.’

“Rosalyn, Rosalyn, wake up.”

Rosalyn groaned and blinked, for a moment dazed and confused as to who and what she was. Lady
Stark was standing by her, gently trying to wake her. The water had gone cold and her skin was
wrinkled. “I must have been more tired than I realized, thank you for waking me.”

“I would not want you to drown in the tub.”
She smiled wryly at that. "No, that would not be the best way to die."

Catelyn gave her the same smile back, and then left the room so that Rosalyn could dry off and get dressed. The clothes she had been given were slightly large on her, but were warmer and better fitting than the trousers and shirts she had worn all the way from Winterfell. She realized after she had dressed that she had no brush for her tangled brown hair.

She found Lady Catelyn sitting at the desk again, writing. "Do you have a brush my lady?"

"Of course," she said kindly, almost motherly. It was unnerving to see her so kind to herself and Jon, so suddenly. She walked into the one bed chamber and came back with a brush and some scented oil. "May I brush out your hair?" She asked Rosalyn, startling her. Lady Stark had often brushed out Sansa and Arya’s hair, but never in her memory had she touched Rosalyn.

"Why are you being so kind to me?" She asked suspiciously.

The older woman’s eyes looks incredibly sad. "Because for your entire life I treated you as though you were worthless, and that was wrong. I had my own children to look after and I never gave you or Jon a second thought, even though you needed a mother too."

"I am sorry about your children."

"They are your brothers, your sisters, and I never let all of you just be brothers and sisters in the short years of happiness you could have had."

"I would have done the same thing." Rosalyn’s words clearly shocked Catelyn, but they were true. Rosalyn knew in the deepest part of her that she would have acted no differently.

"Really?"

"Truly. To be married to a man and then have him raise his bastards next to your own children. To never tell you about their mother. You poured your jealousy and insecurity onto us. Jon isn’t a woman, he will never understand. I would have done the same thing."

That knowledge passed quietly between them, and Rosalyn sat down where Lady Catelyn had been sitting. "If you want to brush my hair, you may. I know that I am not Sansa or Arya, but I know that they would be happy if they could see you care for me even a little."

Catelyn nodded, and proceeded to do just that. She poured a little of the oil onto her hands, and spread it through Rosalyn’s hair. Then she gently worked through all the knots. "I did this for you when you were very little. After your nurse Wylla returned to Dorne. Sansa was almost two and all four of you were in the nursery still. Jon and Robb were playing on one side of the room and I was brushing out Sansa’s ever growing hair. You were so happy to have a little sister, and you wanted to help. You missed your nurse terribly and the maids who replaced her were not the same to you. You sat at my feet, a child of five with your beautiful large eyes and dark hair and begged me to brush your hair too. I wanted to refuse, I was always so stubborn with you and Jon, but Sansa in her child’s voice repeated ‘too’ over and over, so I did. I should have loved you from that moment. You were such a sweet child, and when I was done, you hugged me and went to play with the boys. I just got angry that you knotted your hair again." Catelyn stopped brushing and set down the brush, wiping tears from her eyes. She did not notice at first that Rosalyn was crying too.

"Why would I hope you or Jon could ever forgive me of the ways I hurt the two of you. I do not know how Ned could love me with how I treated you both."

"Because he saw how you loved his children and he thought that he could love Jon and I enough for
both a mother and a father.” Rosalyn whispered through the lump in her throat.

“I am sorry, truly, for all that I did against you.”

Rosalyn nodded quietly. “Maybe, in time, I can learn to forgive you. Maybe, in time, so can Jon. Thank you for brushing my hair. I believe I am ready to sleep now.”

With that, Rosalyn excused herself to the chamber that she had been shown earlier. She had thought that she would not sleep well with all the thoughts that were troubling her, but found herself soon fast asleep.

The days passed in turns between fast and slow. She spent days with Lady Stark, Ygritte, Gilly, Val, and Maester Aemon. Jon rarely spoke to her for he was busy with the concerns of the Night’s Watch. She heard whispers occasionally about herself. Some men called her whore and traitor, but if any men of the north thought so Lady Catelyn had silenced their suspicions.

The wildling women made her smile and laugh. Ygritte had been an enjoyable companion from the start, just as Meera had been. Though Meera had not liked Ygritte very much. Gilly was sweet and gentle. She and Ygritte were actually starting to get along well, and Gilly was giving Ygritte advice on pregnancy and babies. Val was fierce, angry, and intimidating. Rosalyn asked her and Ygritte to teach her how to use weapons. So they started training her readily, using sticks since they were not granted weapons.

Maester Aemon, the few times she had seen and helped him, was kind and wise. He let her read some of his books and told her a hundred tales of House Targaryen. When she told him of her herb studies, he gave her several useful books on the subject to study and would ask her questions when she returned to him the following day or so later. He let her take inventory of the medicines that were on hand so that they could see what was lacking. When she finished that task, he instructed some of the men to retrieve what medicinal plants they could from the forests nearby, and to take people with them who knew what to look for. When Rosalyn volunteered to help, the Maester and several others objected, saying that a woman would not be safe with the men, so she relented.

Rosalyn and Lady Stark began to grow more comfortable with one another. It was a long, and difficult process. As time passed though, it grew easier for the two of them to talk. They would reminisce about the past, speak of the present, and plan for the future. Catelyn told her about Lord Stannis, and when they had met in the south. She spoke of how Stannis was responsible for his brother Renly’s death. She talked about the plans Stannis had for retaking the North. She talked about Robb’s victories and the woman he married. Together they mourned their losses and hoped for the future. Rosalyn realized eventually that she did in many ways forgive Lady Catelyn.

Catelyn spent many days in discussions with Lord Stannis, or King Stannis, as he preferred to be called. Some of the time the red woman was in the room with her. Other times she was not. Rosalyn never spoke with either King Stannis or Lady Melisandre, but she often glimpsed the two of them in their part of the castle.

Rosalyn worried for Jon. He was somber, quiet, and serious. He looked like a more solemn version of Lord Eddard Stark. Sam told her when they were helping Maester Aemon that the men of the Watch were voting for Lord Commander and the choices were not good. One was former Commander of the City Watch in King’s Landing, responsible for Lord Stark’s imprisonment and eventual execution. He was one that spoke out most against Jon, calling him turncloak, traitor blooded, warg, and wildling lover. He would point out Rosalyn, his twin, as traitor and whore and Ygritte as Jon’s lover. He was never stupid enough to say those things where Jon, or one of Lady Stark’s men could hear, but word always got around. The other two most prominent candidates were older men of the watch, but it was Lord Slynt that kept gaining votes.
King Stannis was unhappy that there was no Lord Commander. He apparently was threatening to name a Lord Commander if they could not decide for themselves. Then one night there rang cheers and shouts from the men of the Watch, gathered in their vault for the evening meal. Rosalyn and Catelyn stood out on their balcony and looked down into the yard below. Nothing seemed unusual, other than the sounds of the men, but there were no sounds of battle. Much later there came a knock on their door, and Jon came to visit.

He took a seat in their main room, seeming rather dazed. “They chose me as Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch.” He said simply. The women looked at him with wide eyes. “I already told King Stannis, and he wants to have discussions with me first thing in the morning. I... “

“This is wonderful Jon.” Rosalyn said with a smile, and hugging him. “You can lead here at the Wall.”

“And take no part in the affairs of the realm not pertaining to the Wall and the Others.”

Catelyn sipped at a cup of mulled wine that she held. “There is no more important thing now than the evil that is rising beyond the Wall. I am the current leader of the North until Robb’s child or my son comes of age. As Lord Commander here you have the authority and power to act on behalf of the realm.”

He nodded solemnly. “It is late, and I must sleep. I just needed you to know.”

He gave a polite bow to Lady Catelyn and hugged his sister before leaving. Four days later, men from House Umber arrived, Lord Jon Umber and his men, along with men who were clearly not from the North. He greeted Jon, who had heard of his coming via raven, and wanted to meet with Lady Stark directly, but then Stannis wanted to meet with the new arrivals as well.

When all was said and done, Lord Umber, Lady Stark, Lord Commander Snow, and King Stannis, Lady Melisandre, Lady Dacey Mormont, and Rosalyn were all gathered to meet. They were gathered in a large room of the King’s Tower, seated at a circular table with their various guards standing along the perimeter.

“Why is she here?” Stannis asked coldly, indicating Rosalyn.

“Lady Rosalyn is here at my request.” Catelyn said firmly. “I had wished to speak with Lord Umber on matters regarding the North, but I see that I must wait.”

“We must all wait for kings.” Lady Melisandre purred. All the northerners stiffened at that.

“Until Lord Stannis sits upon the Iron Throne he is not a King.” Catelyn held. At that King Stannis stiffened. “In three years there have been seven men or boys declaring themselves King of Westeros. I supported my son and the decisions of his men. We would not bend the knee for any of the Lannister murderers, the bastard children of Cersei and Jamie Lannister. My son, King Robb, sought the support of Renly’s armies because they were powerful. I saw you there Lord Baratheon, and I saw you kill your brother. These things we have discussed at length and I will speak no more upon them. I have sworn to you that the North and Riverlands will follow you if you restore our lands, but I can not make the decisions for the Lords of my late husband and of my brother.”

“Would you take away the crown from Robb’s child?” Lord Umber exclaimed in horror.

“The Freys and Boltons did that when they took Robb’s head.” Lady Catelyn replied with so much cold venom in her voice that Rosalyn and Jon both looked visibly ill. “I will not have any more of my children or future grandchild die for a hopeless cause. I have lost too much in this war.” She
paused a moment to reign in her emotions. “How is my son’s wife?”

Greatjon Umber looked stricken. He was quiet and speechless for a time. “Lady Talisa is well, the babe inside was growing strong when we left. She made us settle in Pentos, and when we heard about the cursed wedding we left right away. Gained ships and an army from her family, her grandfather is Triarch of Volantis or something like that.”

The offense that Stannis was showing plainly on his face fled at the mention of Triarchs and ships. His red woman’s face remained impassive throughout. “Would this army support the true King of Westeros?”

The tension in the room was palpable. Rosalyn gripped the arms of her chair tightly to feel secure. “Can’t speak for them,” Lord Umber replied finally. “I think they would follow any command of Lady Talisa or her brother. She got us the ships and crew, all sworn to her family. And the ones that brought us here are only part of what is at Pentos, the whole family has more in Volantis.”

“We need those ships, those men.” Stannis muttered.

“Why would they follow you?” Lord Umber rebutted.

“Lord Stannis has saved the North from wildlings.” Catelyn supplied, her voice soothing but firm. “He has been the greatest support to house Stark outside of whatever houses remain loyal to the Starks in the north. I am sure that my good-daughter will offer as much support to her late husband’s family as we require.”

“I need your people’s support Lady Stark.” King Stannis said as he stood and paced the room.

“Talisà’s people are from Volantis, they hardly count as mine, my lord.”

“House Mormont will swear itself to the King whom House Stark swears itself to.” Dacey announced firmly.

Jon Umber clenched and unclenched his fists. “Prove yourself and House Umber will follow you if that’s what Lady Stark wants.”

“Prove myself? I am the King by right.”

“By whose right? We chose the Starks to be our Kings, in the Age of Heroes long ago. Again, we chose the Starks to be our Kings a year past. King Torrhen Stark bent the knee to the Dragons three hundred years ago. Lord Eddard Stark helped kick them out and put your brother on the Iron Throne nearly seventeen years ago. There was no rights, only power and loyalty. If the Starks had ever failed the North we would have left them and chosen a new Lord, but they never have. In ten thousand years the Starks have never failed us. They proved themselves to us over and over again, is it so much to prove yourself to the North? If it is then you have come to the wrong place.”

When the Greatjon finished there was absolute silence. The Lord of Last Hearth and Lord of House Baratheon stared levelly at one another, not speaking a word. Melisandre seemed almost impressed by Lord Umber. Jon Snow was watching with a neutral expression, so much like Lord Eddard’s that it was uncanny. Rosalyn and Catelyn just waited anxiously.

“They need to go to battle.” Stannis announced finally. “We must send letters throughout the North, to all of your Lords. We must have their support against Lord Bolton.”

“I have only once message to send to the Northern Lords,” Catelyn said with a slight smile. She produced a parchment from her gown and placed it upon the table. It was passed between everyone
at the table. Jon, Rosalyn, and Dacey smiled at the words. Lord Umber laughed loudly. Even Melisandre smiled. Finally King Stannis read the letter and the smallest hint of a pleased expression crossed his face.

"'Winter is coming' with a direwolf seal. Is that truly all your people need?"

Catelyn raised an eyebrow and looked at him without a sliver of doubt on her face. "The North belongs to the Starks. Those are our words. That is all they will need to see to know that I am alive and well and working for the North."

Stannis nodded solemnly. "As we deal with these wildlings we can develop our plans for the north. We should send these letters as soon as our positions are secure. I will take my leave of you all now." They all stood and bowed respectfully to King Stannis as he left the room. Lady Melisandre followed behind him a few moments later.

"Lord Umber, would you walk with myself and Lady Dacey. I want to know everything that happened since you left Riverrun. I will take my leave of you for now Lord Commander, Lady Rosalyn." There were more polite bows and Catelyn and her bannermen left the room.

Jon and Rosalyn were left alone in the large room. He ran his hands across his face and through his hair. "Lord and Lady... well I suppose it's better than being called bastards all the time."

She laughed. "I think Lady Catelyn enjoys calling me a Lady to spite King Stannis."

"She can certainly hold her own against him."

"This war has changed her. It has changed all of us." They both stood and walked to the door. "How did you get voted Lord Commander? I have not seen you since you came to tell us."

He sighed heavily. "I lay the blame on Sam. He pushed the votes in my direction."

"Better you than most of these other men. You can help the North."

"The Watch takes no part, you know that."

"Do you really thank that Janos Slynt would really have taken no part? Or would he have taken your head off and betrayed the Starks the first chance he got?" She gave him a hard, knowing look.

"No," he admitted after a long pause. "He would have destroyed the Night’s Watch and tried to take House Stark with him. This job is hard. Harder than I ever thought possible. I understand the pressure that Father and Robb had, at least a little."

She gave his hand a gentle squeeze. "You will be the best Lord Commander of the Watch."

He smiled and kissed her head. "What would I do without your blind faith in me?"

She gave a snorting laugh. "Even if I thought you were going to fail miserably I would lie about it. I have faith in you, but I don’t think anything the future holds will be easy. Winter is coming."

"Aye, winter is coming."

Nearly two weeks passed before Rosalyn spent any time with Jon. He was too busy with his duties as Lord Commander. Rosalyn also did not see Lady Catelyn much either, she was too busy with Lord Umber and King Stannis. She was summoned to the armory, where Jon had made his quarters and offices. She arrived as Sam was leaving, he seemed distracted but managed a smile for her. She
entered to find her twin brooding while staring at his fire.

“You summoned me?”

He nodded and turned to her. “In the morning I am sending Sam and Maester Aemon south. I am sending you, Gilly, and Ygritte as well.”

“Where?” She replied softly.

“Sam is going to Oldtown with Maester Aemon. We need maesters and ravens here at the Wall. I want to reopen as many of the forts as possible, and to do that we need maesters and ravens. Sam will train to be one. Aemon I want away from the Red Woman. I am sending Gilly and her babe, at Sam’s request, to his family at Horn Hill. They won’t think him a total craven if he could produce a bastard son.” He smiled weakly at that, but couldn’t meet her eyes.

She narrowed her eyes at him. “You’re lying. Jon Snow I have known you my whole life, and I know when you are lying.”

He stared at her, weariness showing in his eyes. “The babe will be Dalla’s, not Gilly’s.”

Rosalyn was horrified. “Why?!”

“So that he won’t be burned. When all of you are safely away I can tell the truth if she would burn the child.” He was pleading with her to understand, and saw the gradual acceptance in her eyes.

“What are your plans for Ygritte and I?”

“You will take one of Lady Talisa’s ships back to Pentos. Ygritte will remain with Lady Talisa. What if Gilly wants to go with Ygritte and I to Pentos?”

He shook his head. “They fight too much for me to inflict that upon Robb’s widow. Sam’s family will keep her safe. Do you know what you must do after Pentos?”

She stepped closer to him and nodded before responding in a whisper. “I need to bring the dragons home. I have known that since I saw them in my dreams.”

“When you return, everyone will realize the truth sooner or later...”

“And I will have a dragon to silence their doubts.” Tears began to form in her eyes. “I don’t want to leave you. You are all that I have left. It killed me inside to send Bran beyond the Wall. To not know if I sent Rickon to his death. To think that the last time we said goodbye to Father, Robb, Sansa, and Arya was the last time...”

He wrapped his arms around her, tears falling from his own eyes. “I will stay alive to see you, and Ygritte, and my child.”

“I will hold you to that.” She pulled away from him a little, tears glistening on her cheeks. “Forgive Lady Catelyn, she is truly sorry, and she is the mother of our brothers and sisters.”

His face hardened at her words. “I don’t know if I ever will be able to forgive her.”

“Then at least cooperate with her. For father’s sake, for Robb’s, for our brothers and sisters.”

“I will work with her to restore House Stark, for the stability of the North and the Night’s Watch. I will say goodbye to you when you leave. An hour before dawn in the courtyard. Now to tell
Ygritte.”

She gave him a sad smile. “Saved the hardest for last?”

“No. You are the hardest to tell goodbye. Ygritte I love, but you I have known my entire life.”

She hugged him closely for a few moments, and then headed out the door, letting the fire-headed girl enter as she left.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your support!

Next: Ygritte
Ygritte II

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Jon had barely said two words to Ygritte since she had been settled with Val, Gilly, and the infants. She was upset about it, but also knew that it was to keep both of them safe. *If they think you love him, and he loves you, they will kill him.* She reminded herself of that every day. She hated being stuck in the small rooms of the castle. She hated not having her weapons in hand. She did not like having two infants in the room with her. She hated that some of the men called Val a princess. They knew nothing. She wanted to tell them that she was a queen, but she was no fool. *A queen is only a queen if she has a throne. They will kill you both if you say a word.*

He smiled at her when she entered the room and bolted the door behind her. “Locking me in Jon Snow?”

He pressed a fervent kiss to her lips and she melted into him. She wanted him desperately and all of the anger toward him fled as they kissed. He left her lips and nuzzled into her neck, breathing heavily. “I have missed you.” He murmured into her hair.

“That’s not why you had me summoned here.” She whispered as she trailed kisses along his neck. He completely detached himself from her, to her frustration.

“You’re right.” He was suddenly cold and serious. “I... I am sending you away, with Rosalyn and some others. I need you to be safe, and here you and our child will not be safe.” He laid a gentle hand on her belly and the child kicked gently. She didn’t think he felt the motion through her furs however.

She glared at him. She did not want to run away. She was not a gentle girl that should be ordered away. Yet she knew that this child had to be protected. That was her job as a mother. That was her job as a wife. “Where?”

“You and Rosalyn will be going to Pentos. It is far south and across the sea. You will stay with my brother’s widow who is also expecting a child. It is my hope that they can be raised together as Robb and I were.”

She nodded quietly but could not find words. She just began to pull off layers of clothing until she was down to her shift. Jon watched her with a mix of surprise, confusion, and lust in his face. “I want you to see.” She said softly. In just her shift he could see all the curves of her body. From the swell of her breasts to the curves of her hips, and her belly which was once flat and smooth was now a gentle round curve. No one could see it through all of her furs, but in almost nothing, her growing child could easily be seen. He knelt in front of her and kissed her stomach where their child was growing. He rested his forehead against her and let out an anguished sob.

“I do not want to have you leave.” He said as he looked up into her eyes. “I wish we had stayed in those caves.”

She joined him on the ground, kissing his head as she knelt. “We will go back there some day. We can still join Gendel’s children.”

He kissed her neck. “No. We have the whole of Westeros to give this child, not just caverns in the darkness.”
He kissed her passionately, and she tore at his clothes, pulling at laces and layers. He pulled away and she whimpered. “We shouldn’t.”

“We must Jon Snow. For we may never have one another again.” There was no hesitation in his eyes, and she could see that she had won the battle.

“Just be quiet or they will kill me.”

“Would I be worth your death?” She said with a coy smile.

“I would die a thousand deaths to be with you.” He growled and then he kissed her roughly.

Their clothing disappeared swiftly. They had both gone so long without a lover’s touch that her skin felt like it was on fire. She wanted him, needed him, and his reactions showed her that he felt the same. He was barely out of his breeches when he pushed her back onto the pile of discarded clothing. She cried out softly when he entered her, and he silenced her with his lips. Otherwise, she was quiet throughout. Breathing in heavily when she wanted to shout. Biting him roughly when she could no longer handle the ecstasy. He kissed all of her hungrily, as though he would never touch her again. I may never touch him again. The doubt flickered through her mind like fire as they moved as one person on the floor.

It was over too soon, far too soon. They dressed slowly, not wanting to leave. “An hour before day break.” He murmured into her neck. “In the yard. Gilly is going too, so you can help one another get ready.”

“Won’t your people wonder why I was sent away?”

“It is none of their concern. They think Val is the valuable hostage.”

“They know nothing.” They both smiled at that, and parted with a kiss.

They were all gathered in the yard before the sun and the people of Castle Black awoke. Two wagons were loaded with food, clothes, and books. The third was readied to carry Maester Aemon, Gilly, and her son. Sam, Rosalyn, and Ygritte were to ride horses. A few men of the Night’s Watch were with Jon, and so was Lady Stark.

The Maester, Gilly, and the infant were settled into the wagon first. The girl was crying as she had been since she had left Jon not a day before. She had not wanted to speak with Val or Ygritte about why she was crying. They left her alone with the children for the rest of the day and night. When she picked up Dalla’s boy instead of her own to take on their journey east, they understood her tears. Ygritte had been furious about it, until Gilly told her that Jon wanted to protect the boys from the red woman. Jon was sending them all away to be kept safe, and Ygritte loved him for that.

Jon said his farewells to Maester Aemon first, then to Gilly. Snow began to fall all around them, and he said goodbye to Ygritte next. “Your weapons,” he said with a sad smile. She wanted to kiss him again, to stand by him forever.

“Never should have taken them away crow,” she growled at him when she took her knives and bow back from him. Their hands touched for a brief moment, and she knew that it would be the last touch. Don’t you die on me Jon Snow.

When her weapons were secured, she mounted her horse and waited beside the wagons. Her eyes never left him for a moment. He said goodbye to Sam next. Last of all he said goodbye to his twin. Ygritte had seen the girl part with her younger brother and it had been heartbreaking, yet she admired both the crippled boy and Rosalyn’s strength. This promised to be heartbreaking too.
Lady Stark handed Rosalyn a set of letters. “Have a safe journey.”

She accepted the letters and tucked them into her dress. “Thank you. May your time here be safe as well my lady.” The women clasped hands as they spoke, and then embraced briefly before Rosalyn turned to Jon.

The twins embraced immediately, as they had when she arrived at Castle Black. “Have a safe journey.” He told her, his voice nearly cracking with emotion.

“I will. Lead well.” She stopped speaking and let out a trembling sob. “I will see you again one day. I promise.”

“One day.” He choked back, a tear escaping his eye. He looked from his sister to Ygritte. “I love you.” He said, and she knew it was meant for her instead of his sister. Ygritte turned away so that no one could see the tears that had escaped her own eyes. A few minutes later they were on their way east. _I may never see him again_. She looked back to catch a glimpse of him, but he was already gone.

The overland journey was the easiest part of the trip. It snowed a little, on and off, but the road was rather easy to travel. By far it was the safest journey Ygritte had ever taken. There were no Others or wights, no rival tribes or other real threats. Her child sickness was lessening, and she started to have more energy again, which also made the journey easier.

They arrived at Eastwatch-by-the-Sea and prepared to board their ships. Maester Aemon, Sam, Gilly, the babe, and another crow were all to board the Blackbird for Braavos. Ygritte and Rosalyn were to board the Daughter of Dawn, the Volantene ship, also bound for Braavos to resupply and then for Pentos.

Rosalyn, Gilly, and Ygritte all gasped the first time they saw the ocean. None of them had ever seen it before, though all had heard tales of the seas. “Have you never seen the ocean before?” Ygritte asked Rosalyn.

“No... I never left Winterfell, neither did Jon. When father took trips the only one who went of us children was Robb. Until the King came and my sisters and Jon left. Then Robb left. Then my brothers and I. Now Winterfell is empty...”

Gilly was shaking silently beside them as they looked out at the water. “We have to cross that?” She squeaked. “It doesn’t end. What if the boat sinks?”

“Then we will be returned to the gods.” Ygritte whispered. She was terrified. She had spent her entire life being brave and strong, but that was always against something she could fight. There was no way to fight the ocean, just as there was no way to fight winter and the Others. Though if Rosalyn could get the dragons, then maybe the North stood a chance against the evil that was rising.

“It’s time to board the ships.” Sam said with a tremble in his voice as he approached them. Was there nothing the man wasn’t afraid of?

The three women walked with him to their ships. “Well. It has been nice to know both of you.” He said. “I hate the sea, and don’t want to become a maester, but that’s what the Lord Commander wants. Have a safe trip, both of you.”

Ygritte just nodded at him, looking at the ocean going up and down against the ships. Could those things really stay afloat? “It has been a pleasure knowing you Sam,” Rosalyn said with a smile. “I hope we may meet again, though our ships are both to make port in Braavos, so it may be there that
we part again. Have a safe journey to Oldtown. Gilly, I hope that your journey is safe as well. You are welcome to come with us and stay with my half-brother’s widow, though Jon thinks that you and Ygritte do not get along well enough for that.”

Ygritte huffed. “That man knows nothing, she and I have lived together fine all this time. Come with us if you want.”

The girl gave a shy smile. “Thanks for the offer, but Sam thinks his family will help raise the boy.”

“Ah so it’s Sam you want to be close to?” Ygritte grinned. Sam and Gilly both blushed red, causing Ygritte and Rosalyn to both laugh. “Have a safe journey, both of you.”

The four all exchanged polite bows of the head. Then Maester Aemon, who had been quietly standing beside them spoke. “Rosalyn, sweet girl, your path will not be easy. Do what must be done.”

She hugged him gently. “I will.” Sam looked between them, confused. He had been told nothing of the truth, but he did not ask questions.

“Come Sam, it is time for us to leave.” The old man said as he pulled away from Rosalyn, his unseeing eyes full of emotion. Obediently, Sam took the old man by the arm and led him up the docks to their ship. Gilly and a few others followed behind them. Rosalyn and Ygritte walked to their ship.

The Volantene ship was a beautiful caravel, brightly painted with a young girl as the figurehead of the vessel. The figure was naked, but her yellow hair covered her body, her hands reached out to the sky. The Blackbird of the Night’s Watch was drab in comparison, though it was quite possibly drab compared to any ship. Two hundred Volantenes had come on the ship, with Lord Umber and his men. One hundred of the Volantenes and all of the Umber men had stayed behind. Of all the men from Volantis only twenty bore no tattoos upon their faces. Five of the free men had stayed with their slave soldiers and the rest were the leaders of the ship.

The girls were given a cabin to share. It was a large room at the aft of the ship, next to the captain’s cabin. They had their own dining area, privy, and windows overlooking the sea. “If this is what their rooms are like, what is their city like?” Ygritte wondered aloud as they entered their cabin.

Rosalyn closed her eyes, trying to remember what she knew of the free cities. “Volantis is the biggest city in all the world. It’s ancient, the first daughter of Valyria it is called. They are ruled by three elected people called triarchs. There are people of Valyrian heritage in the city, and slaves beyond counting. All of the people on this ship who are tattooed are slaves.”

Ygritte wrinkled her nose at that. “Why are they willing to be slaves in chains? There are more of them aren’t there? Why not fight back?”

The other girl frowned. “I don’t know. Even in Westeros there are more poor than there are lords and hightborn. They do not fight against what they are told either. Maybe they feel there is nothing they can do to change their lives? Maybe they just accept it?”

“But why!? No man or woman is born higher or lower than another, none. We are all born free. None of us is less than another. You kneelers know nothing!”

“Maybe you are right.” Rosalyn said with a sad sigh. “Though I would not tell the slaves on this ship that or we may find ourselves in the middle of a mutiny.”

She nodded slowly. “That doesn’t mean I’m wrong.” She muttered.
Rosalyn laughed. “I never disagreed with you. I was raised as a bastard with no position. If I had not been Lord Stark’s bastard I would have most likely been treated as a whore. Now I am supposed to think of myself as a highborn princess? Yet I have not changed, just the perception of what I am. Yes I was privileged to be raised with a lady’s education. I can read and write, sing and speak some Valyrian. I was taught herblore and some healing arts. Those are all privileges. Yet none of that teaches me to be a princess or leader. Nothing, not blood or some title given to me makes me anyone other than who I have always been. Yet it is neither my place nor yours to change any of those things. We cannot free fish from water.”

“People aren’t fish.” Ygritte seethed, and went back out on deck. She did not want to think of slaves or kneelers or freefolk. Will we truly give you a crown my child? Will you have to decide what men are free or rich or poor? Will men of strength kneel before you? What of me? What of Jon? If she doubts that she can be a princess, can I be a queen? Southerners are nothing like us. Ygritte shivered, though not from the cold, as she watched the land slowly recede behind them.

She felt strangely saddened by parting with Sam and Gilly. The four of them had traveled and lived together for long enough that there was a comforting familiarity to them. Sure, Sam was a fat craven, but he had killed an Other. Gilly’s child may be accursed, but she was a very determined young mother.

The sea was the most terrifying thing that Ygritte had ever encountered. When they cleared land it appeared to go on forever. The storms that raged during their journey only increased her fear, and returned her sickness. Neither she nor Rosalyn cried out, but they worried together that they would drown in the sea. They worried that their friends would sink in the ocean as well.

Eventually they arrived at Braavos, safely in one piece, though they had no word of the Blackbird when they arrived. The Titan looming above her on the way to and from Braavos made Ygritte’s eyes go wide with wonder. She couldn’t help but cry out in fear at the sound it made the when they passed beneath its legs. The city was so strange to her, houses on the water, even the people looked wholly different in the city of canals. They only spent two days in port before continuing their journey south. Neither she nor Rosalyn left the ship during their short time at the docks. They spied the Blackbird entering Braavos when they left, to their great relief, and Ygritte hoped that their friends would reach their destinations safely.

Mercifully the seas were free of storms with a good strong wind as they travelled south. They spoke occasionally with the five men aboard who could actually speak the common tongue. One was the captain and the others were officers on the ship. Ygritte convinced them to allow herself and Rosalyn to train with swords and practice archery. The men laughed at the idea, but watched as they practiced.

“Stop leaving your center unguarded!” Ygritte yelled at her one day as they practiced.

“I don’t want to hit my niece or nephew!” Rosalyn gritted back. They both wore padding made of empty sackcloth, as they were using real swords in their fights.

“Should I convince them to allow one of the men to spar with you?”

She snorted at the suggestion. “The men are afraid enough of women being on their ship. I doubt they want to let me practice with them.”

“Aren’t slaves to do as they’re asked?”

“Aye, but that does not mean their masters will allow it. I wish we had practice swords.”
Ygritte laughed and slashed at her with her blade. “There are no practice swords beyond the Wall, just rusty blades and sharp ones. No one wants to be nicked by a rusty blade so we all fight with the slightly dull ones. Even as children, we learn to fight well or die.”

“Girls south of the Wall aren’t taught to fight. I would only watch my brothers spar, and they never sparred with real swords. Why don’t we just go down below and practice with the bow again.”

In the bowels of the ship Rosalyn and Ygritte would take turns shooting arrows into barrels and sacks of goods. Rosalyn was improving daily in her archery. She could hit the chalk targets that Ygritte drew for her almost dead on. Her arms were strengthening with all the practice Ygritte was making her go through, and she seemed genuinely grateful for the practice, even when she complained about being sore and bruised.

“No until you disarm me.” Ygritte parried her lunge easily. “Come on, I’m with child, should be easy for you!”

Finally, Rosalyn managed to hit the blade hard enough that she dropped in from her hand just from the shock of the concussion. The red-head laughed. “Good!” Ygritte sighed and sat on a nearby barrel. They were far enough south where it was warmer and their furs were all packed away inside their cabin. Their clothes were now lighter, looser, and Ygritte’s ever growing child was growing plainly visible. The child was kicking happily inside her and she stroked her belly after sliding out of her padding.

“This child still makes me tired and gets in the way of my sword arm.”

Rosalyn put down her sword and rested her hand on the moving skin above the babe. “This child will be a warrior. Wildling, direwolf, and dragon.” The women exchanged a smile. “I am glad that you are my family.”

“And I’m glad that you’re mine. Jon is lucky to have you for a sister.”

She smiled sadly. “I wish you could have met the rest of our family and could have seen Bran when he could walk.”

“If I had met your whole family, your dear father would’ve killed me for being from beyond the Wall.” Rosalyn frowned at that. “Oh don’t deny it. The Starks forgot why the Wall was built. The crows forgot that the freefolk are part of the realms that need to be protected. The true north hasn’t forgotten the Others, even though the rest of the world has.”

“That’s what we are setting out to change.”

“Aye, now let’s get you working with the bow.”

With a grunt of disapproval toward her harsh task-master, they headed below deck to practice archery. A few days later, they were able to find three men who were willing to spar with Rosalyn. Ygritte would watch and give instruction, as would one of the officers on the ship. Eventually, she was able to disarm two of the three men.

Finally, after many long weeks of travel, they could see land in the distance. As it grew nearer they could see the lighthouses and spires of the city. Near dawn, they docked in Pentos.
Notes: Thank you for all your support!

Next: Roose Bolton
Roose Bolton

Chapter Notes

Keep in mind that this is Roose Bolton's POV...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

‘She wolf and fiery stag at the Wall.’

That was all the message read. The raven had arrived for Roose Bolton at Barrowtown via King’s Landing, how long ago it was sent was anyone’s guess. Over a month late at least. Poor Janos Slynt, it must be freezing at the Wall. Two other letter had arrived separately. One was from Arnolf Karstark, also reporting that Lord Stannis and Lady Stark had been at the Wall. He also sent word, in the same letter, that both had left the Wall. The third letter was from Lord Stannis and Lady Stark, to all the northern lords. ‘Winter is coming.’ Was all that she had written.

So Lord Eddard’s little wife has not killed herself as Lord Mallister reported. Most likely the wolf pup lives as well. Where could she have hid the child? Surely if he had been there too it would have been mentioned. She certainly has a flair for the dramatic, but those simple words would be all she needed to rally support. Where have you gone now that you have left the Wall?

The Lannisters and Freys had both helped search for Lady Catelyn and Robb’s wife for some time. It seemed that the Young Wolf’s pregnant bride had fled for her homeland across the sea. She was unlikely to return. ‘Why would she ever return to a land that was never hers to begin with?’ When King Joffrey was killed, the Lannister forces went south again. The Frey’s stopped their search when Lord Mallister reappeared and told the tale that Catelyn had killed herself and the child out of grief. With the recent news it was clear that the man was lying. However, the Mallisters were the concern of the Frey’s, not the Boltons.

Catelyn Stark being alive and free in the north was troubling. Word had reached him that the Mormonts, Umbers, and mountain clans had sworn themselves to Lord Stannis. Roose also already harbored his doubts about the oaths of allegiance that had been sworn to him by the Cerwyns, Dustins, Hornwoods, Karstarks, Ryswells, Stouts, and Manderlys. Roose trusted Lord Manderly least of all. The man’s allegiance seemed to be established solely upon the return of his son from the Twins and self preservation. He would need to watch Lord Manderly closely. He believed the Karstarks to be loyal, they had told him of their pledge to Lord Stannis. Why would they follow Starks, when the Young Wolf had killed Lord Rickard? The others he would need to watch closely as well, there was no way of knowing when any of them could switch sides.

He had the support of the Freys, of course. His kin by marriage and in shared killings. Still though, there were too many Freys. They were all waiting impatiently for their father and grandfather to die. What would happen then? Would all of the sons just accept the eldest being their leader, or would they turn upon one another? Half-brothers are no friends, he had seen that in his own bastard son and trueborn son. They Freys were only usefull as long as Lord Walder lived.

Roose sipped at the wine in his cup as he looked out over the dark landscape. ‘The North is mine.’ He had the fake Arya Stark to marry to his son as soon as they reached Winterfell. As long as the people believed her to be Arya Stark they would be loyal. ‘Perhaps even her mother would come to rescue her?’
Mothers were known to be rash creatures. They wanted to protect their young at any cost, even at the expense of their own lives. It was not a dead Catelyn Stark that he wanted however. Alive Catelyn was worth far more than she would be dead. ‘She may yet be young enough to produce more children.’

She had produced six healthy children. The only one whom had died was Robb, and he had died with Roose’s blade in his chest. He could still remember the look of confusion on young King Robb’s face. The way he still tried to fight bravely as he was cut down and his men were slaughtered around him. The way his blood spilled out onto Roose’s hand as he uttered his last shaking breaths. ‘Jamie Lannister sends his regards.’ Roose remembered saying the words as though he had just spoken them a moment past. The younger boys may truly have escaped from Winterfell. The true Arya Stark may have died, but the fake one would serve her purpose. A captive Catelyn could give him control of Stark’s last heir to the North, and possibly give him a child of his own that could one day claim the Riverlands. The idea was delightfully perverse. If he could get her son, she would come for him, she would possibly already come just for the daughter. She would be willing to do anything to keep her last son safe, anything. He decided that in the morning he would send out men to search diligently for where the child could be hidden away. If they could not find the child, they would send letters throughout the north saying that they had the young Eddard Stark in their custody, and that Lady Arya Stark was to wed Ramsay Bolton.

He could possibly even rid himself of his troublesome bastard if he could get both his wife and Catelyn with child. Roose felt that he could get his Frey bride with child, but he felt that his son might kill any child she would produce. A new son would be a better leader, but he was old enough that he would die long before the child was of age. He pondered the idea though. Ridding himself of his bastard after a new son was born could have its benefits. Though to do so could also mean ending his family line if the child did not live to maturity.

Roose often wondered lately about the usefulness of his bastard son. He seemed as though he was becoming a larger problem than he was worth. Roose had always believed in having a quiet, peaceful rule. His bastard was disrupting that calm and seemed unwilling to listen. He had tortured and mutilated Theon Greyjoy, who would have been a priceless hostage. Instead of thinking, Ramsay used Theon as a toy, the same way he used every person who stood in his way. ‘Will you some day try to kill me, my son? The way you murdered Domeric?’

Roose also had his doubts that Ramsay would be able to father and raise a child to rule. ‘Would a child of yours be as wicked as you? The people of the north would rise against the two of you and House Bolton would become dust.’ Killing Ramsay would be simple enough. An arrow in the right man’s hand and it would be called a hunting accident or a casualty of war. It was something to think on at least.

In two days they would begin their ride to Winterfell. Then Ramsay and the so-called Arya Stark would be married. Then he would need to see where the tides of politics were taking them. The idea of possessing Catelyn Stark was so vivid in his mind now that planning her capture seemed of paramount importance. He could tell her of killing her first born as he pushed himself within her and gave her his child.

The north would follow him if he had Catelyn Stark in his control. They would not want to harm her children. The precious children of Lord Eddard Stark. Perhaps even the Riverlands would be concerned for her, she was the daughter of Riverrun. ‘Daughter of Riverrun and Bride of the North. Oh what a prize you would be for me to own.’
So I posted a Ned chapter, as a new chapter 7, bumping everything up a chapter.

I had a reviewer awhile ago ask if I would do Roose's or Ramsay's perspective and I wasn't sure, but here is Roose.

I have a confession... I have been reading the books as I went and I finally finished yesterday :) 

I will be doing a large edit/expansion (again) of early chapters soonish.

Next is either Brienne or Baelish, whichever cooperates more with me over the next week.

Thank you to all of your support!
Chapter Notes

New prologue added. New Rickon chapter added.

Prologue to Catelyn 2 have been expanded and edited and I am done with fooling around with them... I have to finish the exiting and expansion of the other chapters which I will be doing over the next month. As always the goal is to improve and make the story better. The more I work with the characters the more I understand them and know how to fix their POVs.

Thank you for your support, please let me know what you think.

The pain was horrific. She had vague recollections of various liquids being forced down her throat. The pain was so bad that she could scarcely taste whatever the fluids were. The nightmares were even worse than the pain. Death and fire surrounded her, and she was lost amid shadows. A hundred faces of men she had known and hated taunted her. Then there were the rare, beautiful faces that she had loved. Ser Jamie, who saved her from the bear pit and the men who would have raped her. Lady Catelyn who kept her safe as they ran from Renly's tent. Renly, her beautiful King Renly. Her father's sad face when she left him. Biter tearing at her face with his teeth. She shrieked and groaned. Some days he had no idea of who she was or where.

When Brienne awoke she found herself in a bed at the Inn where all the children were. Her face was throbbing, her ribs ached, but she was no longer feverish. Her tongue felt thick and dry. She tried to move but found that it was too painful. She did not know how long it was before a girl came in to see how she was.

"You finally woke up," the girl said tersely. She had the same brown hair and eyes of little Willow.

"Willow's sister," she asked with some difficulty.

"Aye, name's Jeyne. Here drink this."

Brienne accepted and downed the tankard of water in mere seconds. She was still thirsty, but her tongue felt less thick in her mouth. "What happened?"

"Gendry told us that you killed Rorge. Biter took some of your face off before Gendry killed him. The Septon left with his dog before I got here. Some of the Brotherhood wanted to take you, but Willow refused. She wanted you to stay and help us if you lived."

Brienne forced a weak smile. Smiling was painful; breathing was painful. "I thank both of you for nursing me to health. When I am recovered though, I must continue searching for a girl."

"Sansa Stark?" The girl knew more than Brienne realized.

"How did you..."

"You talked a lot during your fever. Podrick also talked with us. Gendry may be able to help. The
Brotherhood had one of the Stark girls with them for a while, Arya Stark. Gendry travelled with her from King’s Landing. Try to stand a bit today. Moving about will help you heal. I'll send Pod up to you soon."

Jeyne took a few dishes from the room and left her alone again. 'I left King's Landing to find Sansa Stark and all I hear are rumors of Arya Stark. I will keep the Oath. Lady Catelyn, wherever you are I will find your daughters and return them to you.' Brienne had heard the tales, of course. The stories that were true and false of the Red Wedding. The dozen different stories of where Lady Catelyn had been during and after that cursed day. Some said that her lady was dead, others that she killed her own son, but some whispered that she yet lived and would raise the armies of the North again to avenge the Starks.

Brienne did not believe for an instant that Catelyn Stark would kill her eldest son or her youngest. Neither did Jamie Lannister. He had told her as much when she left King's Landing to search for Lady Sansa. Lord Tywin Lannister had sent men throughout the Riverlands to find Catelyn Stark, so had the Freys, but she had vanished. ‘Where are you my lady? Did your daughter escape to you?’ If Sansa Stark had found her way to the North, then Brienne had been searching in vain. If she searched for Lady Arya however...

"Ser, my lady," Podrick Payne said, interrupting Brienne's contemplations.

"Hello Podrick."

"I'm glad you're awake my lady, ser. We thought you were going to die."

"How long was I asleep?"

"A few weeks."

Weeks, that was a troubling thought, so much lost time. "Where is Ser Hyle?"

He looked bothered. "Uh... they took him ser, my lady."

"Who?"

"The Brotherhood. Willow convinced them to let us stay, but they wanted to question him."

"Why?" She could not honestly say that she would miss Ser Hyle, but tales of this so-called Brotherhood were unsettling. The war had laid waste to the Riverlands, leaving most of the common people dead or homeless. Their towns and crops had been burned, their men killed, their women raped. The Brotherhood claimed to be protecting the common people, but their methods were that of criminals. Brienne was unsure if she agreed with their methods or not. She had seen the violence of war and the treachery of people. This brotherhood without banners, as she had heard them called, stole but gave back, killed but only when needed. Were they truly knights and brothers in arms or were they mere criminals?

"Too many lions and too many wolves, they said. They are trying to protect the people here, they said say."

"We need to leave here soon. I do not want us to have to deal with this Brotherhood. Jeyne said that Gendry travelled with Arya Stark, he may know something. " She travelled with the Hound. They were heading to Saltpans. Did she die there? Did she go north to try finding her mother? Where are you, and where is your sister?"

"They will come back here to talk to you; they said they would. Can you walk?"
She pulled the covers away from herself and moved her legs. Her legs were uninjured, but when she tried to move the rest of her body it felt as though a knife was tearing her apart. She clenched her jaw and fists and forced herself to stand. Pod caught her arm when she threatened to fall onto the bed again. "I can stand." She gritted out painfully. "Help me dress, I need to speak with Gendry."

So he did. She sat down again on a chair near the bed, and he helped her change into clean under garments and clothes. He blushed when he helped her change, but he was dutiful. When they finished, he pulled on her boots and laced them up. When they finished, he helped her up again. She let most of her weight rest on him, and he willingly supported her as she hobbled down the stairs. The going was slow and she gritted her teeth the entire way. She watched the children scatter about as she entered the common room. Pod asked her to pause a moment at the door so that he could grab cloaks. She shifted her weight from him to the wall beside the door. He returned a moment later with two large cloaks that were clearly made from old bed coverings. They were patched and stained, but looked to be warm. He helped her into her cloak, and he put his on before they headed outside.

There was a light covering of snow on the ground, and several of the children were building a wall of snow around the inn, leaving the yard a slushy, muddy mess. The chill in the air was painful to breathe, and Brienne wondered if winter had come already. If winter had already come, then the Riverlands would starve. She did not want to think of what would happen to the children at the inn during the winter.

They found Gendry near the forge, sharpening a blade. His likeness to Renly was breathtaking. Seeing him reminded her of the unhealed wounds in her heart. "Gendry?"

He looked up at her, his blue eyes cold. "You woke up finally."

"Yes. The girls took good care of me. I must thank you for saving me from Biter."

"I owed him a death." His words were bitter as he ran the blade along the grindstone.

"Owed him?"

"I told her to leave them in the cage. I told her to let them burn. She saved them. She saved them and they kept killing." He stood and looked as though he wanted to use the sword on someone.

"Who is she?"

He stared at her. He looked sad and angry at the same moment. "Arya."

_The young Stark girl... _"Jeyne said that you travelled with her. What can you tell me about Arya?"

He eyed her suspiciously. "Why would I tell you anything? You have a lion sword and the lions wanted to take her."

Brienne stiffened at his words, and felt a stab in her ribs at the movement. "I am sworn to Lady Catelyn Stark of Winterfell. I was tasked with exchanging the Kingslayer for her daughters. When we arrived in King's Landing we learned that both girls were missing. Ser Jaime gave me my sword to fulfill the oath he gave to Lady Catelyn. Anything you know would be of use."

He was still eyeing her suspiciously when he shrugged suddenly and returned to cleaning up the blade. "Why not? She's probably dead now anyway. We all left King's Landing together. She was the most stubborn little girl I ever met. I should have protected her, but she never wanted protecting. She never needed protecting. Not 'til the Hound took her."

"How did he get her?"
He gave a wan smile. "She ran away. He had been taken and released by the brotherhood but he kept following us. They wanted to ransom her back to her brother. She wanted me to go with her and smith for him. He was following us and stole her away to ransom her. They made it to the Twins... but you know what happened there."

Brienne nodded slowly. Arya and the Hound had escaped and had been heading to Saltpans when he died. If Arya had reached Saltpans and left before the town was torched... "If she is alive and managed to escape where do you think she would have gone?"

"North," he replied with no hesitation. "She wanted to go home. If she thought home was gone..." He shook his head and swung the sword away from them. He put it down and turned back to her. "I should have protected her. She was just a little girl who needed to be protected."

"Like the children here?"

He nodded in agreement. "Someone needs to protect the orphans. The Starks didn't. The Tullys didn't. The Lannisters haven't either."

"How will you protect them from winter," Brienne probed gently.

He tensed. He knew there was not enough food for the winter. He knew that they did not have a plan. He glared at her accusingly. "They would have had families and food if the wolves and lions never came here."

"I never served any of them. I served Lady Catelyn and before her I fought for King Renly. I only want to find Lady Catelyn's girls and return them to her." He was sizing her up again. Brienne had started leaning her weight more heavily against the wall. She needed to rest already, but needed to make headway with this stubborn boy who reminded her so much of Renly.

"If Catelyn Stark even lives. You have no way to know where she is or where either girl would be if they are alive."

"I will find them or die trying." She sighed heavily. She knew that the girls were most likely gone forever, but she could hope... "Can you think of some place Arya Stark might have gone if she thought she could never return home? No matter how insignificant or strange it might seem."

He ran his rough, dirty hands through his thick, black hair. "She spoke with this strange Lorathi man, one of the three who was supposed to die in the fire with Rorge and Biter. He helped her kill some people in Harrenhal when we were kept there as servants to the Tywin Lannister's men. Sometimes she would whisper a list of names, people she wanted to die like Queen Cersei and King Joffrey, after the list she would always whisper Valar Morghulis, like a prayer. That's all I know."

Valar Morghulis... Brienne knew the words were Valyrian, but it had been so long since she had studied that language that she could not remember what the words meant. She knew they were important somehow. She just could not remember why. "Thank you Gendry. For saving me and for telling me what you know." She reached for Podrick, and he helped her support herself as she stood upright again. "I can help with the orphans if all of you want me to." She could send them to Tarth. There was food, warmth, and safety in Tarth.

"If Jeyne lets you," he told her, returning to his swords.

Podrick returned Brienne to her room and helped her out of her boots and outer layers of clothing. She rested again, but uneasily. The children being stuck in the inn during the coming winter troubled her. So did the words that little Arya Stark had whispered. Brienne needed someone who could tell
her what the words meant. She also needed to leave the inn before the so-called brotherhood decided to talk with her. If only she could be fully recovered sooner rather than later. The Stark girls needed someone to keep them safe.

Chapter End Notes

Next: Littlefinger
Petyr Baelish breathed in the scent of the paper, as though he could catch of whiff of her scent from
the words she had written. *You live, my beautiful Cat.* He brushed his fingers lightly over the words
she had written. ‘Winter is Coming.’ Had the girl he had known truly become a Stark after all these
years? She had always been fond of the Starks. First Brandon, and then Ned. She was naturally
fond of her children as well, as any good mother would be. Petyr had always known that she would
be a good mother.

Yet Brandon never loved her as Petyr had. Brandon had bedded half the North and most of the
Riverlands if the stories were true. Yet he had not touched Catelyn Tully, his betrothed. Oh perhaps
they shared a few kisses here and there, but that was expected. Brandon wanted his bride to have
her virtue for her wedding. *I had her first. I had the maidenheads of both Tully girls.* That
knowledge gave him a sense of satisfaction. A certain sense of pride. Yet she never loved him,
ever wanted him.

*Would you want me now? I am Lord Paramount of the Trident and protector of the Vale. I have
kept your daughter alive and safe when no one else could. I have even promised her in marriage to
the heir of the Vale. Is that enough for you?*

Catelyn was his weakness. She had always been his weakness and his strength. He had always
tried so hard to please her. He had even tried to win her from Brandon but that only got him a
hideous scar from chest to groin. Now though, now everything was working according to his plans.
Thankfully his plans were made to change frequently. That was how Petyr Baelish had risen so far.

*I started with nothing,* he thought as he stood up from the writing desk and walked to the window of
his solar. He swirled the wine in the cup he held and sipped it as he looked out over the snowy
landscape of the Vale. Hills, valleys, mountains, and trees were all coated in snow, and it was still
autumn. They were housed at the Gates of the Moon, and he had the largest chambers for himself.

*Every step I take is a step forward. From the Fingers to Riverrun. From Riverrun to King’s
Landing. From King’s Landing to the Riverlands and Vale. One day my Cat you will see me again.
I am powerful enough to protect you now. I am giving your daughter the Vale. Is that enough for
you to love me?*

By the time spring arrived, the Lannisters would be in ruins thanks to the lovely Cersei, the Tyrell’s
would have control of King’s Landing, little Robin Arryn would be dead, and Sansa would be free
to become Lady of the Vale. If Lady Catelyn lived that long, she would be free to be his bride.
How could she possibly refuse the offer of a man who had worked so hard to gain her?

It had all started with Lysa. She was so easy to manipulate, even when they were children. Lysa
was always his creature, but never what he wanted. It was hard to say when his planning had begun.
Then one day he asked Lysa to poison Jon Arryn, and she did. He asked her to write the Starks a
lie and she did. Lord Stark came south and lost his head. Admittedly the plan had its complications.
Stark dying had not been in the plan, but it had been useful. Marrying Lysa had its advantages until
she lost her usefulness. The Tyrells were proving to be quite useful, as the Lannisters had been
before. People were the rungs on the ladder of success.

Truthfully, perhaps Catelyn was still just a boy’s fancy. Her daughter was more beautiful. Her
daughter was malleable, young, and under his control. She was going to marry Harrold Hardyng and become the Lady of the Vale. All she needed was a child with him to be the heir of the Vale, after that... Well, accidents happen. Then she would be free to become his bride. That would be years and a hundred plans away if everything went according to plan, which it often did not.

He drained his glass and returned to his desk. There were three other scrolls on the desk; one was from King's Landing and the other two were from the Vale. He set the first aside, and opened the letter from the capital.

_The Queens are both awaiting trial for crimes of fornication. The lion has confessed to some of her crimes and is now demanding a trial by combat for the rest of her crimes. The little rose is awaiting her trial by the Faith. Many roses in the capital, they outnumber the lions. Kevan Lannister is regent, giving the roses more power every day. All Kettleblack sons imprisoned for fornication with the queen._

-Yours

Littlefinger sighed, and put down the letter. Good help was hard to buy, but these Kettleblacks were serving their purpose. He would need to plan a trip to the capital when the trials were over to win his way into the hearts of whomever held power. The next letter contained news that his orders from Dorne and the free cities would be delayed due to poor weather. The final letter was from Harrold Hardyng.

_Lord Baelish,_

_I was pleased to hear that you daughter Alayne is happy with our betrothal. I am arranging for a trip to the Gates of the Moon so that I may meet your beloved daughter as soon as possible. We should arrive in about a month. That is providing that the weather is fair and we have no more snow storms. The weather is proving quite fierce for early autumn. Let us hope winter will be short. I praise your late wife's wisdom in remaining out of the war. Our people will have food for the winter._

_Yours most respectfully,_

_Ser Harrold Hardyng, Heir of the Vale_

The boy was eager. The boy was foolish. The boy would hopefully be as easy to manipulate as Sansa. Still, he should tell his lovely Alayne that her betrothed was eager to meet her. That would put a smile on her face. Then he would kiss her lovely smile. He knew that kissing her was quite possibly a poor decision, but she was a weakness. Just like her mother had been.

He stood again and put the letter from the capital in the hearth and watched it burn. A useful thing his whores were. They gathered more secrets in a few hours than most men could in a lifetime. They were loyal, and why not, he paid them well and pampered them. Whores were easy to please, but more cunning than lords. He would have to await their pleasure until he heard more news of the capital. For the time being, he had a daughter to teach and the Vale to rule.

He left the letters on his desk and went to find his sweet Alayne. She would need to be her most charming when her future husband arrived. Lord Baelish would make sure that she would shine for him.
Next: Sansa

I'm being lazy with expanding and editing but 1-10 are now done. Catelyn 3 is markedly improved, as are the first few chapters.

Catelyn being a single woman and mother to the heirs of Winterfell is definitely an important theme. It was a fun challenge to do POVs for Petyr and Roose... we have more diversity on the way! The story is catching up with many characters finally!

Thanks to everyone for your feedback, more is always welcome!
Sansa II

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

They were all together again. All of them except Robb. They were all older as well, yet Sansa knew each of their faces. Bran was seated beside the heart tree. It was their heart tree in Winterfell. They were all home. Bran was older, his hair longer, his dark blue eyes serious. He sat on his own without support. Rickon was there, but he looked so much like Robb. He had the same red hair, the same blue eyes. It was summertime again. The air smelled sweet, and the direwolves were seated all around them. Arya was there. She wore a dark blue dress, and it made her eyes look almost blue. She was smiling, laughing. She was pregnant. The next boy she had never met in life, but knew was Eddard, her baby brother. He had father’s hair and mother’s eyes. He was young still, and curious. He was asking so many questions that Sansa did not understand. Her half-brother and half-sister were there. They both seemed changed, though Sansa did not know how or why. It was not just from being older. Sansa then saw herself. Her red hair was nearly touching the ground behind where she was seated. I have a child too... Then she saw Lady. Lady died... are we all dead? Am I dead now? They were all so happy. Happy and laughing.

The dream tumbled into darkness and Sansa awoke. She looked around her, pulled her furs closer, and wiped the tears from her eyes. I am Alayne Stone and this is the Vale. I have never been to Winterfell. I have no brothers or sisters. I have no mother. My father is Petyr Baelish, Lord Protector of the Vale. She wanted to be Sansa Stark. The girl who had brothers and sisters. The second child of Eddard Stark and Catelyn Tully. She wanted home and family. The dream was worse than any nightmare. It was happy and hopeful. Yet all that she had was Lord Littlefinger holding her life in his hands.

He is kind to me. He took me from King’s Landing to keep me safe. He stopped my aunt from killing me. He is going to have me marry the heir of the Vale. Harry is coming here to meet me. I must smile for him and make him love me. The north will want their Starks back. I had a baby brother. Did he live? Where would he be? Where would mother be?

Her reverie was interrupted by a gentle rap on the door. Alayne cringed and hoped that it was not little Robin. She pushed away her covers and pulled on her robe and slippers. Even with the fires burning brightly, the castle was cold. She opened her door and to her surprise it was Mya Stone standing outside.

“Come in,” Alayne told her friend with a yawn.

“Did I wake you?”

She shook her head. “I had a dream that I awoke from.”

Mya nodded, and upon entering barred the door behind her. She then pulled a letter from her robe and gave it to Alayne. “Read this.” Sansa regarded her friend curiously but opened the letter and read its contents.

King Stannis Baratheon

First of that name

King of the Andals, Rhoynar, and First Men
To all the Northern Lords,

I have come to the North to defend and protect these lands from the foes who threaten to destroy these realms. Usurpers and traitors threaten to destroy Westeros from within. I call upon all true northmen to stand with me, your true King, against the foes which we face. I will restore the North to its rightful Lords. Any who stand with me stand with House Stark. We will fight the evils that threaten this land from within and from without. Here we will stand and here we will fight.

King Stannis Baratheon

~Winter is Coming~

Catelyn of House Tully

Widow of Eddard Stark the Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North

Mother of Robb Stark, King in the North and Riverlands

True protector and regent of the North

The letter bore a fire stag and a grey direwolf pressed beside the names of the signers. Sansa stared at the letter for a long time. It was such a short letter and yet... it was everything. The world had shifted beneath her in a moment. My mother is alive and fighting for Winterfell.

"Why bring this to me?" Her throat was dry and her voice shaky.

Mya shrugged casually. "Thought you would like to know what your mother is doing."

"My mo... how..."

"You look like her. I took her up to the Eyrie when she came to the Vale." Sansa's eyes went wide with fear. Mya laughed. "I knew who you were from the moment you arrived. Relax Lady Sansa, it's ok."

Sansa threw her arms around the older girl and squeezed. "Thank you, thank you." She whispered the words over and over again. "I am so alone here. I just want to go home, but I have no home."

"I have no home and no parents either. The Lord Protector wants to marry you off doesn't he? Seems like you have someone here to protect you."

Unwittingly Mya had hit upon the one point that Sansa was uncertain about. Was she protected or merely useful? What would happen after she was no longer useful? She said as much to Mya.

"So remain useful," her friend replied. "You are an heir to the North and the Riverlands. If you marry Ser Harrold your children will be heirs to three kingdoms. Meanwhile I will be here taking the mules up and down the mountain."

Sansa laughed. "Thank you... Where did you get the letter?"
“In Lord Baelish’s solar.”

Sansa gasped, her eyes wide. “You have to return it before he sees that it’s missing.”

Mya seemed amused, rolling her eyes casually. “No worries, I will do it right away.”

She let out a breath of relief. “Please come back to me when you are finished.”

Mya smiled at her, completely free of worries. “Of course.”

She took the letter back and left the room. In the agonizing quiet after she left Sansa slumped into a chair. She had given up hope of her family being alive. Tyrion had told her that her mother was alive. She had wanted to hope and believe that it was true. Yet she also heard rumors that her mother was dead, killed at the Red Wedding or shortly thereafter. Sansa just gave up believing that anything good would happen anymore. My mother lives. It troubled her that Lord Baelish had not told her about the letter. Maybe he did not want to upset me. Maybe he did not want to distract me. Maybe he did not want me to know. She shivered at the thought of him trying to keep her. His gazes and kisses were uncomfortable, but he was never too pushy.

Just as Sansa was starting to worry again, her door opened and Mya returned. “Mission accomplished my lady.”

Sansa let out an anxious laugh. “I can never thank you enough for bringing me that letter. Why were you in there in the first place?”

“I needed ink and the letters were just setting there, so I read them. It must be strange for you... to be someone you are not.”

Sansa considered her Mya’s words. When had she truly been herself last? “I have not been me for a long time. I was just a girl in Winterfell. I have not been a girl since my father was murdered. It has not been that long, a few years really, and yet it feels like a lifetime. I was ten and one when I left home. I will be ten and four in half a year or less. I have seen people I love murdered. I have had everything taken away from me, even my name. I do not know who I am anymore.”

“A Princess in the North.”

There was something about the simple way Mya said the words that shook her. Her instinct was to say that she was a traitor’s daughter and a traitor’s sister. Those were the lies though. Sansa was tired of the lies. Most days she could not separate the lies from the truth. She could forget that Petyr pushed her aunt Lysa from the moon door and see Marillion doing it. Suddenly she just started telling Mya everything. She told her the good and happy. She told her the bad and terrible. Mya listened to it all, and in the end held her when she sobbed and sobbed. Finally, Sansa’s tears dried and she felt truly free for the first time in ages.

“Thank you, thank you for being a friend.” A part of Sansa wanted to be suspicious of the dead king’s bastard girl, but she was not. Mya Stone was the most honest and forthright person she had met in ages. Sansa finally felt free to trust another person.

Later that day, Sansa visited her cousin Robert. The Lord of the Vale was becoming increasingly sick. He had not left his rooms in days. Sansa, despite not liking her cousin much, found herself feeling sorry for him.

“Can you sleep with me tonight Alayne,” he asked in his soft child voice. “Everyone else is mean to me.”
Sansa shook her head. “No my sweetrobin. You are the Lord of the Vale, you must be strong now and sleep alone. You would not want your stepfather being upset with us would you?” His lips pressed together tightly and shook his head. She favored him with her best smile. “That’s a wise decision Lord Arryn.”

His chest puffed up proudly at her compliment. “Thank you.”

“Do you think that you can come to dinner this evening? I know that the people want to see their Lord.” Robert Arryn was a battle that only Sansa seemed to be winning. He contemplated her request and nodded as solemnly as a child can.

“I... I shall try.”

She kissed his brow. “That is wonderful my sweetrobin. Now I must attend to other duties. I will look forward to seeing you when we dine.”

She left him with a gentle curtsey. As she was walking to her chambers, Lord Baelish found her.

“My sweet daughter, how fare you this day?”

“I am well father.” He slipped his arm through hers as they walked. “I am concerned for Lord Arryn however. He seems weaker than usual.”

He frowned and kissed her cheek. “Our dear Robin has always been sickly. It has always been just a matter of time. That is why I am working so hard towards the future of the Vale and its heirs.”

“In case Robert’s health should fail?”

“Of course my sweetling. I would be a poor Lord Protector if I did not ensure that Lord Arryn’s legacy would be well protected.” He gave her his best smile and a kiss on her cheek. The little hairs on the back of her neck stood on end and a shiver ran down her spine. That was the day suspicion about Robert Arryn’s health crept into her mind.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your support!

Catelyn is next, it was going to be Jon but I am annoyed with that chapter so it has to wait.
Catelyn VII

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains mentions of child sacrifice.

Also, I know this took me forever, sorry! I have been busy revising earlier chapters in an effort to improve structure, dialogue, and characterization. I have finished everything up to "Meera". I know that I want to more work on both Ygritte chapters and Catelyn's chapters at Greywater Watch. I also need to work on Jon's chapter a bit more. I think that this set of revisions, so far, has added around 5000 words to the story.

I have also been writing two other fics, because my brain apparently is happier when I have too many things to do?

Love you all!

Davos should be next.

Catelyn found herself talking less and less as she travelled. She had talked and bargained, argued and reasoned enough for a lifetime while at Castle Black. She had spent days on end arguing with Stannis about the war, the North, and rights. She told him that as regent for her son, or grandchild, and the only free member of House Tully, that the North and Riverlands would bend the knee to the King who restored them to their lands. Catelyn Stark, however, would never bend to Stannis Baratheon no matter how many lies she told him to his face. She could never call a man king who had murdered his own brother. She would see Jon Snow as King of Westeros before she would bend to Stannis Baratheon. At least, that was what she told herself. In truth, Catelyn would bend to whomever killed the Boltons, Freys, and Lannisters. She needed Stannis’s support and he needed hers, so they wrote their letters to the northern lords together.

She was glad to have parted ways with Stannis and his red woman. She could not really decide which of them she missed less. Stannis was misguided, stubborn, and difficult. Melisandre was something altogether different. It did not take long for Catelyn to realize who was in charge between the King and his priestess. Melisandre was in command, far more than even Stannis realized.

Melisandre paid Catelyn a visit a week after Rosalyn left the Wall. When she entered the room, the scent of the air changed. Melisandre reminded Catelyn of cinnamon and cloves, mixed with blood and fire. Catelyn greeted her with a tight smile.

"To what do I owe the pleasure of your visit?’’

"R’hllor has shown me your face in the fires and I wished to speak with you.’’

Catelyn sighed inwardly, she was quite tired of the red woman’s flames. She had witnessed the burning of Mance Rayder and wanted no part of the world they wanted to create. She would suffer these worshipers of the red god for as long as it took to regain the North and Riverlands, but prayed that they could be stopped after her family was avenged. “Please, have a seat. Would you like something to drink?’’
“No, thank you Lady Stark,” she purred as she took a seat, her red robes flowing gently around her.

Catelyn took the seat across from her and gave the woman her politest smile. “What is it that you would like to talk about?”

“I gaze into the fires daily and R’hllor shows me many things. It takes years of training to see visions at all, and years more to sift through what is seen. Before you arrived I saw you in the flames, a woman touched by the Lord of Light. His fire was breathed into you. When you arrived however... Your path changed somewhere, somehow.”

“Do you believe that to be a negative thing,” Catelyn’s brow arched, curious, annoyed, and somewhat amused.

“An uncertain thing. Then again, life is often uncertain. When I look at you I am reminded of myself.”

Catelyn found that statement to be laughable. “I am unsure how.”

She smoothed the sleeves of her dress and favored her with a kind smile. “I was seven when I was sold into the service of R’hllor. Many children break under the pressure and are eventually given as gifts to the fires. Those who grow are tempered through trials. Women give their bodies in worship. When children result, the woman must give her child to the fires. If a woman refuses, both are given to the flames. When a girl sees a friend given to the flames, she is less likely to refuse giving her child to our lord when her time comes. Five children of my body I gave to R’hllor. Until I changed, and gave birth to the first of my shadows. You have seen one of the shadows.”

Aghast, Catelyn remembered the shadow that killed Renly Baratheon. “Renly.”

“Yes, a gift of the Lord of Light. No longer do I birth weak children, but gifts of the god.”

“Gifts? Weak children?” Catelyn stood and walked across the room in disgust. Melisandre stood as well, but did not move away from her seat.

“You misunderstand me. I know that there are many things which the King and I have done of which you do not approve. Do you believe that I wanted those children to burn? I was only ten and five the first time. I was twenty and two the first time I gave birth to a shadow because I refused to burn another child and R’hllor granted me his favor. I grew in power and strength and was tempered as a blade for his work. As you have been through trials and will go through more, being tempered and formed into a blade of a different kind, for a different kind of work.”

“And what kind of work is that,” she spat, sickened by the tale Melisandre told.

“To restore balance. You are a mother. Mothers heal, defend, protect, and avenge.” Melisandre took a few steps toward her. “The Catelyn Stark I saw in the fire, the one who was kissed by R’hllor, had died, murdered. She killed for revenge instead of justice. You live, but that hate is still inside you.”

Catelyn contemplated her words carefully, not understanding what the red woman wanted from her. “You are not wrong.”

“I wanted to kill the people who sold me to the temple. I wanted to kill the priest who made me give my child to the flames. I hated R’hllor most of all. The day I gave my first child to the fire I spent hours staring at the flames, wanting to enter them as well. I was about to step inside a pyre when I saw my first vision. I saw the enemy we must face and the long path that I must travel. From that day to this, no matter how hard the road, I have followed R’hllor. I do not ask you to follow the true
god. What I ask is that you would find peace and help us win. Hate will not win this war. The North will need you very soon.”

They stood silently for a long time, observing one another. Melisandre poised and calm, a gentle flame of a candle. Catelyn, outwardly calm, but internally at war. She was disturbed by the red woman and her tale. She hated the men and women who had wronged her family. She missed her children and only felt their void. She missed Ned. She wanted Ned to hold her and kiss her and tell her that everything was fine and the past several years had just been a horrible nightmare.

“How do you think I will find my lost children?”

“I think that this wild north of yours belongs to House Stark. The blood of their ancestors is in the very foundation of this Wall. The wolves will survive, long after the rest of us are gone.”

“You seem very sure of that.”

Melisandre gave her a bemused smile. “I have seen wolves in the summer grass. Though we must defeat the great enemy before summer comes again.”

The red priestess did not speak to Catelyn very much after that day. Apparently Melisandre felt that their conversation had the appropriate impact. Cat often reflected upon the strange conversation and could not determine why Melisandre had told her so many personal details. Catelyn did think that, in some strange way, the woman had been trying to raise her spirits. In a way, the idea of wolves in the summer grass was the idea that kept Catelyn the strongest.

Her conversations with Jon were more difficult. While Catelyn and Rosalyn had managed to build a comfortable rapport, there was still a wall as thick as the one they lived beside between Catelyn and Jon. Cat was well aware that Rosalyn had not fully forgiven her, but their losses had united them. They had reminisced about Ned, Robb, Bran, Rickon, Sansa, and Arya. They had cried together about the family they had lost. Jon on the other hand, while he might not have been Ned’s son certainly had Ned’s quiet brooding nature.

She did not entirely blame his dark mood on her presence. He had been deluged with problems and information that he was most likely still processing. He had men calling him turncloak, wildling lover, and traitor. Then there were the reports of bad storms from Eastwatch. Catelyn could see his heart drop at the news. There would be no way to know if the ships carrying Rosalyn, Ygritte, Sam, and the others had been lost unless they received word that their ships safely made port. If those three were dead then much of their hopes were dead as well.

The only thing she and Jon seemed to both be positively anxious about were the oaths of fealty to King Stannis from the northern lords. Stannis was preparing to lead his armies to retake Deepwood Motte. Catelyn was preparing her people to depart from the Wall as well. Some of the men would go with Stannis in order to rally the support of the mountain tribes. The others would travel with her, ostensibly to Last Hearth, but in reality to look for Rickon Stark.

It was merely a day before she was to depart from the Wall that she mustered the courage to ask the impossible of Jon. She found him in the chambers he used for sleep and for his official business as Lord Commander.

“How do you think I will find my lost children?”

“Oh, Lord Commander,” he greeted her with cool politeness.

“How can I help you today?”
Her fingers laced and unlaced anxiously. “You said once that Ghost can sense his brothers and sister. Do you believe he could find one of them?”

He stared at her for several long minutes, his expression unreadable. “It may be possible. What were you thinking?”

She chewed her lip for a moment before letting out a long breath. “Do you think that Ghost would come with me to find Rickon?” Shock showed plainly upon his face. “I know that the direwolves bonded with each of you, but if it is even remotely possible that Ghost could find Rickon...”

“I don’t know if he will follow you,” Jon interrupted quietly. “He was able to return to me. He is able to feel Nymeria leading a pack and Shaggydog fighting a unicorn.”

“Unicorns?” She hoped that was not true. There was only one place where unicorns lived in Westeros and she did not want to travel there.

He nodded grimly. “Just yesterday. He might be able to find Rickon.”

“But we don’t know if he will come with me.” She gazed at him evenly. She knew what she was about to ask was not an easy request. “Would you be willing to try?” He gazed at her with a look that was somewhere between pained and angry. “I know that he is all that you have left, but if there is the slightest chance that he can find Rickon...”

“Then it is worth the pain,” he finished in a whisper. “I will tell Ghost to guide you to Rickon. That is the most I can do.”

“Thank you.” Her heart felt a bit lighter, even if it was for only a moment.

For a moment she saw in his eyes the child she had seen growing up. She saw the boy who just wanted to belong and be loved. She hated herself for the pain she had inflicted upon an innocent child. She added that to the sins she had committed that could never be forgiven. “Find my brother; that is all I want.”

To her surprise and Jon’s, Ghost followed her willingly. She left the same day as King Stannis. For many miles they travelled together. Eventually, Catelyn, the Umbers, and their Volantene allies split off to travel to Last Hearth. They resupplied at Last Hearth and then continued on their way to the only place in Westeros where unicorns lived, Skagos.

Catelyn gradually grew more and more isolated from her men. She found a strange sense of companionship with the snow white direwolf. The wolf lay beside her at night and led their march ever eastward. If her men had any problem with following a direwolf, they never voiced a protest or complaint. She supposed that she loved them for their willingness to follow her lead even in the paths that seemed like madness.

“If I am dead and he wants to be king, then raise the banners of the North around him and give the south all the fury of the Starks and of Jon’s father. Give them fire and blood.”

She could hear Robb’s request every time she closed her eyes at night and when she awoke in the mornings. Fire and blood. There were times when she wondered how the course of her life had taken her so far away from what she had anticipated as a girl. She had never envisioned being a leader and commander, but she was looked to for orders regularly. She had never envisioned her son becoming a king. She had never, even in her worst nightmares imagined having six children who would one day be scattered to every corner of Westeros.

She had also never imagined that she would be the one to conduct a deadly dance between so many
kings and queens. Her children and future grandchild were the Kings of the North. Her niece and
nephew were the trueborn heirs of all Westeros. She was swearing three houses to a king that she
meant to depose with every fiber of her being. She could scarcely recall the girl who had loved to
swim in the Trident and dreamt of marrying the Heir to Winterfell.

They reached the coast a few weeks after their departure from the Wall. The men of House Umber
had small fishing vessels along the coast. They were old and rickety, but were all they had to carry
them across the water. Ghost unhappily boarded a boat with Catelyn and five men. Two other boats
were travelling with them.

The ocean bothered the direwolf, but not Catelyn. Her Tully blood ran deep, and the sight and smell
of rivers and the sea always made her feel at home. Some of their men worried that they would die
upon Skagos or that the ships would sink in the seas.

“A storm is coming,” they all said.

“The Skagosi will kill us and eat us,” two of the older men said.

A storm did arrive. The snows began to fall shortly after they made landfall on Skagos. As they
were searching for shelter, they came upon a ship that was anchored in one of the bays, flying blue-
green merman banners of House Manderly.
Rickon II

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Brother...

He could sense his brother growing nearer each day. The human boy was frightened, angry, but not the wolf. The quiet brother was close, and so was their pack mother. The boy was confused, there was no pack mother. There had been one once, but she had left long ago. There had been brothers and sisters as well, but they were nearly forgotten. There was a pack mate in the south and another hidden in the north. Closest of the remaining pack was the quiet brother.

The scent of his brother breathed faintly in the air, even in their cave. The wolf needed to run and hunt, but the snows kept him inside. The wolf needed to find his brother, but also needed to keep the boy safe. When the snows ceased and the sunlight melted bits of the snow, the wolf finally escaped the cave.

"Rickon," Osha called gently, shaking the boy's shoulder.

He growled a little, as he always did when waking. "I was running with Shaggy," he murmured, wiping at his eyes.

"We need to gather supplies little wolf, the snows have stopped"

He grimaced. Gathering supplies wasn't fun. He remembered the term “playing” faintly in the back of his mind, playing was fun. The memory of fun was in the same place where he remembered mother, father, brothers and sisters, and a dream called home. Now, Osha was home. Shaggy was home. The cave was home. He knew that he once lived in a place called Winterfell with Bran and Rosa. He was told that there were other brothers and sisters, but he could not recall their faces.

Osha pulled away his furs and handed him a few strips of deer meat spread with acorn paste. He devoured the food but his stomach still grumbled. She passed him a skin of water and he drank deeply. When he finished, he stopped the skin and readied himself for the day.

He pulled on his outer furs and then his food packs. He next tied his daggers about his waist. He had found the weapons to be heavy at first, but in time he could bear the weight.

"Shaggy smells his quiet brother," he announced as they stepped out into the bright whiteness of the woods.

She gazed at him appraisingly. "Summer," she questioned.

He shook his head. "No, Summer is hidden in the north. The quiet brother is not Bran's."

She nodded slowly, measuring his words. "Is that where your wolf went?"

"Not right away, he needs to hunt. Then he wants to find the pack mother and quiet brother."

"Pack mother?"

"I dunno, Shaggy smells his mother."

She pressed her lips together tightly but said nothing. They trudged through the snow as quietly as
they could. There were dangerous people in the hills, so quiet was important. The people of Skagos were more likely to eat you than to eat with you.

They made their way to the coast, occasionally falling into deep snowbanks along the way. Wrapped in skins and furs, the biting winds were kept at bay. Rickon liked the snow. He liked the way it sparkled in the sun. The way it tasted on his tongue. The way he could hide in the snow and not be seen. Not being seen was important. He remembered that he had been hiding for a long time, though he did not always remember why. He remembered that Osha told him to pretend she was his mother while they travelled. She would remind him that she was not his mother when they went to sleep at night. She would remind him that his name was Rickon Stark of Winterfell.

The way to the coast was rocky, though all of Skagos was rocky. The terrain of the whole island was difficult to traverse, even without snow. Their cave was on the windward side of the island, allowing for a dense covering of pine trees to shelter and protect them. When they first arrived on the island, after discovering the cave, Osha spent several days gathering pine boughs to line their new home. She also, with Shaggydog’s help, killed several deer and sea cows for food, fur, and oil. They could occasionally hear the islanders, but had yet to be discovered.

Rickon knew that if they went to the coast it was his job to find clams or oysters in the shallows. He enjoyed his task, even though his fingers would get cold. Osha always warned him not to fall into the water as the cold would take the air from his lungs and it would be a long time before he warmed again.

He pulled off his mittens upon reaching the water and placed them in a pouch which hung from his side. Osha made her way further down the coastline, spear in hand. Rickon started plucking shellfish off of the rocks and out of the shoals. He caught a few crabs, cracking their claws with rocks to prevent them from pinching him. As far as supply gathering went, catching crabs and clams was fun. He placed his prizes in the empty shell of a horseshoe crab.

He hummed a song as he plunged his fingers into and out of the water. He did not remember the words. He had asked Osha to sing for him more than once, but she knew no songs. He remembered a woman whose hair was the same color as his, red like the setting sun. She was the one who sang to him. She was the one who knew the words to the song he hummed. ‘Mother,’ his mind whispered. Mother was the person whose hair was red and who sang. He did not remember anything else about mother.

He gathered clams until the shell was filled, humming all the while. He was about to look for Osha when she appeared along the coastline with several geese and swans tied by their necks to her waist. He held out his shell of shellfish when she was near. She favored him with a rare smile.

“Good job, let’s go home.”

They marched back to their cave carefully following the steps they took on the way to the coast. Osha stoked the fire and placed the crabs and some of the clams onto the coals. They buried the rest of the clams in the snow outside of the cave. While the clams cooked, Rickon helped Osha pluck the feathers from the birds.

Their work was nearly completed when Shaggydog appeared at the entrance to the cave. He sat at the entrance to the cave, staring at the people within. Rickon met the piercing gaze of his direwolf.

“Shaggy wants us to go with him,” the boy announced.

“Eat first, and then we will follow Shaggy.”
Rickon and Shaggy growled in protest, but Osha was not one to be easily swayed. She held his gaze without saying a word, and Rickon relented. He plucked his food from the coals and ate with impatience. Osha ate her fill as well, laying aside the birds. When they were finished, she placed the birds under the snow, donned her second layer of furs, and followed Rickon and his direwolf into the snow.

They walked in silence, often ducking beneath the low hanging boughs of the pine forest. Osha’s hands never left her spear, and Rickon’s hand was firmly on his knife. Their walk was difficult, and the direwolf often paused to watch them with impatience. He led them finally to the coastline where, in the distance, a ship could be seen.

“Brother,” Rickon whispered, knowing that the thought came from his wolf.

They could see a small encampment along the shore growing closer with every step. They were able to see people moving about when from the hills rang out a shout and horns. The people of Skagos crested the hill and ran toward the encampment, spears at the ready. A flash of white, larger and swifter than Shaggy raced from the small encampment.

Shaggy dashed away from Rickon and Osha toward the white direwolf. Shouts rang out from the camp as men readied weapons to fight the approaching horde. The wolves collided and tumbled together before racing back to Rickon and Osha. From the angle the Skaagosi were approaching, they would overtake Osha and Rickon on their way to the encampment by the seashore.

“Run,” she shouted, and Rickon ran as fast as his short legs could take him. At first he thought to run back toward their cave. He tripped and fell, smacking his face against the sandy snow and dropping his knife. Shaggy loomed above his boy. He pushed at Rickon with his snout, encouraging him to grip onto his fur. Rickon pulled himself up and onto Shaggy’s back, and the direwolf ran toward the encampment. The white wolf raced beside them.

“Osha,” Rickon called from atop his wolf. She had been running with them, but was losing ground swiftly. He turned his head and could see her following at a good pace, but she was slowing and the Skaagosi were gaining. She turned to them, spear in hand. From the camp, men with bows and swords approached. The direwolves continued to race toward the camp.

Osha was overtaken by the Skaagosi. She speared one through the chest the moment he reached her. She struck down a second moments after dislodging her spear from the first. Archers from the camp downed men all around her. Soon, others joined, swords cutting through the furs of their enemies. Osha struck a third man in his neck, his blood spilling everywhere. Yet as she removed her spear, a Skaagosi struck her from the side, lodging his blade deep into her chest. Rickon screamed her name, tumbling from his wolf and trying to race back to her. Behind him, the strong jaws of his wolf bit into his furs and dragged him away from the battle.

He deposed in the camp before a woman with hair the color of sunset. “Rickon,” she gasped. ‘Packmother,’ thought the direwolf.

“Osha,” Rickon sobbed, still trying to fight his way back to her.

“My lady, we have to get you back to the ship,” one of the men said as he looked between the woman and the Skaagosi.

She nodded numbly. “Rickon, come with me. We need to go to safety.”

“I want Osha!” He could see tears in her eyes, but did not understand why she was crying. Osha
was bleeding. He needed to help Osha.

She picked him up with trembling arms and carried him, kicking and screaming, toward the rowboats. The direwolves and several men entered the boat as well. Rickon did not see more of the battle. He fought against the woman, even as she began to sing to him.

They climbed the ladders to the deck of the ship, where Rickon collapsed upon the wet wood. The woman reached for him, but he shrugged her away, calling for Osha. Eventually, the boat was raised and the wolves were on the deck as well. Shaggy pushed Rickon with his nose until he stood. They followed the woman into a cabin of the ship.

He paced and growled for a long time before finally collapsing into the woman’s arms. She sang to him. She sang to him the song to which he had forgotten all of the words. ‘Mother,’ a memory said, but he did not know her. He only knew that he wanted Osha.

Chapter End Notes

I bumped Catelyn's flashback from Catelyn I to a new Catelyn I, no other revisions this time around.

Thank you for your patience, much love.
Brynden Tully was an old man. He realized that fact more and more since his escape from Riverrun. He hoped that his nephew was safe. There was nothing he could do to prevent Edmure’s captivity at Casterly Rock, but Brynden was not made to be a prisoner. His niece was still alive. Her son was alive, and so was the eldest daughter. He was the Blackfish of the family, but that did not mean he would stop fighting to protect his family. He swam down the river for hours, letting the current carry him and walking along the bank of the far side when the current was rough.

When the sky started to lighten, he left the river and began to head north. Edmure told him that Catelyn had left the column with Lords Mallister and Glover, and the Mormonts. Lord Mallister had returned to Seagard not that long after the Red Wedding, and he had come from somewhere in the Neck. If Mallister had been in the forsaken swamps of the bog devils, then that was where Brynden needed to go.

He knew enough about roots and plants that he was able to forage for food as he travelled up the river, but he knew that he would need to find supplies soon. He was skilled enough to catch fish in the shallows, and his blades worked well to clean the fish. He wished that he had a bow to hunt game that he saw wandering merrily through the forest. The nights were growing colder as well, and he only had the clothes on his back for warmth. He eventually found an abandoned raft on his journey up river, which helped him on his travels.

He found a few fishing huts along the river that he stole food and furs from. Eventually he rowed beneath the Twins and he cursed the Freys with every fiber of his being. In all his long years of life, he had seen many evils. He had fought wars and seen madmen, but slaughter at a wedding… He swore to himself that he would avenge his family’s blood.

Several days after he rowed beneath the Twins, he found himself in the bogs and swampland of the Neck. Swarms of flies bit at him, causing his skin to blister and chafe. He was forced to fight off an assortment of lizard-lions and snakes as he traveled through the murky waters. The swamplands proved to be difficult to navigate as well. He swore that he had circled the same groups of trees for days.

Then one morning, a week after he had arrived in the swamps, he awoke to find himself surrounded by spears.

“Bloody bog devils,” he muttered. Two of the spears moved closer, causing him to press harder against the wood of his raft. “Well if you want to kill an old man while he sleeps, you are devils,” he spat.

The apparent leader of the group motioned for his men to pull back their spears. “You are either very brave or very foolish to be traveling alone through our swamps. Who are you?”

He pushed himself up so that he was sitting. He stared hard at the six men who stood around him. “Anywhere else in the Seven Kingdoms wearing a black fish and Tully colors, I would be known. Here, it seems that you don’t even know the blood of your sworn lord. Unless of course you have
turned sides as well? I am Ser Brynden Tully, uncle to the Lady Catelyn, the mother of your King. Now kill me if you are my enemy or help me if you are my ally. I am too old for much else.”

The leader’s lips pressed into a bemused smirk. “We would be pleased to escort you to Greywater Watch, Ser Brynden.”

He gazed mistrustfully at them for some time before he agreed. He gathered the few supplies which were with him on the raft and stood. He followed the men to their shallow drafted canoes. They gave him some dried meat to eat, which he gladly accepted. He sat patiently in the canoe while the other men paddled for many long hours through the swamps. They eventually approached a large tree-fortress.

“What is that,” Brynden questioned his escorts.

“Our home,” the young man behind him replied. “Greywater Watch.”

Brynden looked up at the imposing structure of Greywater Watch as they drew closer. In his long years of life, he had never seen a building so strange and imposing. Roots, vines, and stone wove together to form a living, moving fortress. He was genuinely surprised when the men rowed the boat beneath an archway in the castle’s base to moor their rafts within a rather large cavern beneath the castle.

He stepped out of the boat, and followed the men up the algae covered walkways and into the wooden halls of the keep. He was brought to a small drawing room with large windows looking into a garden courtyard.

“If you will wait here ser, Lord Reed with be with you shortly,” one of the men told him.

He gave a brisk nod to the man and watched as the door closed. The room was small and simply furnished, but well made. Every side of the room, floor to ceiling, was intricately carved woodwork, a rival to any he had seen within the Seven Kingdoms. He paced the floor impatiently, grateful to at least be warm for a change.

He did not have to wait long before a short man with greying brown hair entered the room. He was followed by Daisy, Prince Eddard’s nurse.

“Where is my niece,” he questioned the man and nurse, eyeing each of them with suspicion.

“He’s Lady Catelyn’s uncle, as he says,” Daisy said to the man. She gave them both polite bows before she exited the room.

“My apologies for our secretive nature, Ser Brynden. I am Lord Howland Reed. Please, have a seat, refresh yourself.” Brynden remained standing, even when Lord Reed seated himself by the small fireplace in the room.

“I understand secrecy well enough, but you know who I am, now tell me where my niece is.”

Howland released a heavy sigh. “I do not know.”

“How do you not...”

“She went north in search of her sons.”

“Her sons?”
“Were reported as dead. A fact of which everyone is well aware, however Lady Catelyn had reason to believe that her middle two sons were still alive. She believed that fact so strongly that she left her infant here in order to find her boys.”

“Why would she think that her boys were still alive?” Brynden finally walked to the seats near Lord Howland and seated himself.

“A mother’s instinct,” he replied. “Three groups departed from here a week or so after the so-called Red Wedding. The Glover men went east to reach Last Hearth. The Mallister men went to Seagard to spread the word that Lady Catelyn and her son were dead. Lady Catelyn went north with the Mormonts. She left her son here for his safety. His presence is a secret to all save for those who accompanied my lady.”

“What is the plan? How will the blood of my family be avenged?”

Another sigh from the Lord of the Neck, more weary than the first. “More war, new allies, and winter.”

Brynden stared impatiently at his host, tapping at the armrests of the chair he was seated upon. “Meaning?”

“Lady Catelyn has sworn the North and Riverlands to Stannis Baratheon. My men have retrieved several letters which were addressed to all of the northern lords, calling for the north to stand with Stannis and reclaim Winterfell from the Boltons. However, it has been snowing in the North, and the progress that Lord Baratheon has made seems to have slowed.”

“Will we join the battle?”

“Yes,” Lord Reed replied firmly. “I am sending out a group of men shortly, to find the army of Lord Stannis and to fight beside him for Winterfell. You may join them, if that is your wish.”

“Aye, I will fight for Winterfell. When do we leave?”

“Two days’ time.”

Ser Brynden nodded slowly. “Good, I hope that I can kill Bolton myself. Now where is my niece’s son, I would like to hold the young prince again.”

Lord Reed smiled. “It will be my pleasure to bring you to him.”

They stood and walked from the room, Ser Brynden trailing behind Lord Howland. The walk was short, down a few corridors, until they reached a door. Lord Reed knocked on the door, and Daisy called for them to enter. Inside, the nursemaid was standing before the very small Prince Eddard who was toddling toward her on very unsteady feet.

“Da, da, la, ba,” he babbled.

“Have you come to see your grand-nephew,” she said with a laugh, not taking her eyes off of the dark haired boy.

He smiled at the boy, the only free and safe blood of House Tully other than himself. “Aye, old eyes like mine need to see the young.” He walked to Eddard, and the boy tumbled to the ground before he crawled over to Brynden.

“He is always a happy boy,” Daisy beamed. “Catelyn is blessed to have such a lovely son.”
Brynden picked up the boy and bounced him in his arms. Eddard giggled and babbled happily. “A wonderful boy he is, and safe and loved.”

The Blackfish’s thoughts turned to his nephew, imprisoned at Casterly Rock. Edmure’s wife of House Frey, carrying his ill begotten child. The children of his niece Catelyn were scattered to the wind or dead. His niece Lysa, now deceased, left only the small and sickly Robert behind in the Vale.

“He will never know his father or brothers or sisters, but he must be told of them,” Brynden commanded.

“He will know them,” Howland replied in quiet tones. “We will never allow him to forget who his is or where he came from. I have other matters to attend, but you are welcome to spend as much time as you wish with Prince Eddard. When you grow tired, one of the attendants will be able to escort you to your rooms.”

“You have my thanks, Lord Reed,” the older man replied, still smiling at Eddard.

He spent several hours with his niece’s son before the boy tired. He then found a one of the attendants and was escorted to the rooms which had been set aside for him. In the rooms, he found that fresh clothing, a basin of water, soap, and food was already laid out for him. He stripped out of his damp, smelly clothes, and washed the accumulated filth from his body before he changed into the attire which had been given to him. The trousers and tunic were both loose, but not uncomfortable. He ate all of the food which he had been given, and slept well for the first time in a very long time.

Two days later, he set out from Greywater Watch in the company of more than a hundred men. They boarded canoes, filled with provisions for the journey northward. Eventually they left the swamps and followed the coastline, close to Barrowton. They used the rivers and trees as their cover, staying far from the Kingsroad. The snows grew deeper and the air grew icy as they made their way slowly closer to Winterfell.

Chapter End Notes

My thanks to everyone who is following this story. I know that the chapters are short and the updates are not as frequent as they have been. Life has been busy and I had a couple issues that I did not realize until I reached this point. Thankfully I am at the point of the story where I have several chapters which are already partly or fully written and just need to be expanded. We are almost completely past canon!
Lady Stark leaving was almost a sigh of relief to Jon. She and King Stannis left the same day. They moved as two armies heading south. Jon knew that he still had much to deal with at Castle Black, but his load was lightened by their absence. He only wished that the red woman would have left as well, but she lingered.

He wished that he could say the tension between himself and Lady Stark had lessened, but it never had and probably never would. How could he learn to forgive a woman like her? His sister had asked them to cooperate, but they would never move beyond civil formality. For the family and the future, that was why he cooperated with Catelyn Stark. Yet what future was left to him if the storms had sunk the ships? The reports from Eastwatch were frightening. The storms had been fierce, so fierce that many a ship at sea could be lost. If the ships carrying Ygritte, Rosalyn, and Sam had not made it through... He did not want to think upon those losses, it was too painful.

His work kept his busy enough that Jon had almost no time to think upon his family. As Lord Commander he had to worry about the wildlings that he had let through the Wall and the ones that he was planning to let through soon. He had to worry about the Boltons. He had to worry that there was not enough food for winter. He had to worry about Melisandre.

The red woman had come to him shortly after the King and Lady Catelyn's departure. He avoided her most of the time, but sometimes it was unavoidable. Like the time when she let him know how much she knew.

"You fear for their safety," she asked as they stood in his chambers.

"Whose? There is no safety for anyone my lady."

"For the girl you love and the child she carries."

He had not been expecting such a statement and his jaw hung slack. "How?"

"How do I know? Observation can tell a person far more than most people realize. Yes you wanted her safe, but it was always more than that wasn't it? Your affection was obvious by the distance you kept and the looks you exchanged. Her belly grew during her time here but there is not enough food here for fatness. Do you need me to continue?"

"No."

"Do not worry Jon Snow, your secret is safe with me."

He stared at her, opening and closing his sword hand. "Why tell me that you know?"

"You are important. I know not why, but the Lord of Light keeps showing me you and the dangers you face. Would that you had not sent your wolf away."

"He is assisting Lady Stark in her efforts."

"May she find her lost son. Don't be so surprised at my knowledge, she told me of him. Your father's wife is quite a fascinating woman."
He could not suppress the scoffing noise that came from his throat. *Fascinating... does everyone love her but me?* "She is a strong woman and fights for her children as any mother would."

"You hate her," she stated placidly.

"I tolerate her," he replied mildly. "Ghost agreed to go with her to find my brother. Ghost sees her as a pack mother. The woman never showed me an ounce of love as a child, but my direwolf obeys her."

She placed a warm hand on his cheek. "I hope that you can find peace Jon Snow."

Thankfully, he had been able to avoid her for some time after that conversation. They received good news that Stannis had taken Deepwood Motte. The mountain clans and Umbers were leading armies southward to join with Stannis against Lord Bolton.

At Melisandre's request, he sent Mance Rayder, whom she had kept alive even though Jon had thought him dead, to Winterfell with six spearwives to recover Arya from the Boltons. Arya, his little sister, was said to be set to wed Ramsay Snow, now Bolton. Arya, little sister whom he had loved from the day she could pick up a stick and chase after her elder siblings. She was far too young to wed, and far better than a Bolton deserved.

Then Alys Karstark arrived from Karhold, half-frozen and half-starved. She warned that her uncle, who had sworn himself to Stannis, was truly allied with Lord Bolton. Her birthright of Karhold was being taken from her by her uncle and cousin. Jon arranged for her to marry the Magnar of Thenn, securing the loyalty of both Karhold and the Thenns.

Along with those events, Jon had sent Val beyond the Wall to find Tormund Giantsbane so that they could form a peace. Whist she was gone, Queen Selyse Baratheon arrived with her entire ensemble of southern lords and knights. After several days of dealing with Selyse, he found himself missing Lady Catelyn.

He wished that there was news of Lady Catelyn's journey to find Rickon, but there was no report from Lord Umber one way or the other about the progress of the expedition to find the second youngest Stark. The plan, so far as Jon was aware, was that Lady Catelyn and her escorts would travel to Skagos in search of Rickon, and then return to Last Hearth. Yet months had passed with no word of Lady Catelyn's expedition. Even the bits of information which he could decipher from Ghost told him very little. Ghost was alive, but the further away his direwolf travelled, the less of a connection he felt to the wolf. It felt as though some part of their connection was beginning to fade away.

He also hoped to hear some news from Samwell. If his friend had survived the storms, surely he would be in Oldtown already? He knew that news was not anticipated from Rosalyn and Ygritte, but he still wished that he could know how they were. He had said farewell to so many people whom he had loved, and every time he felt a part of himself die. It was a wonder that he was alive anymore with how much he had lost. When he left Winterfell, he told himself that it would not be so bad at the Wall. He had expected to spend time with his uncle Benjen and be part of an honorable brotherhood. He expected that he would be able to visit his family in Winterfell. How wrong he had been. Benjen was gone, if he ever returned it would likely be as an undead monster. The Night's Watch was just an assembly of misfits and cutthroats. Winterfell was held by the enemy. His sister, once thought dead, was now on a journey to the other side of the world. Everyone else he called family was gone. Even the few friends he had made at the Wall were gone.

He wondered about Ygritte and Rosalyn. Did they reach Pentos and Robb's widow? Did Rosalyn travel to meet Daenerys? Had his child been born? He knew that the birth had to be soon. *A father...*
If they live I'll be a father... And the true King of Westeros. He did not often dwell upon everything he had learned in the ancient weirwood grove, but some days he could not help but wonder how different his life would have been. The possibilities which arose in his mind were endless.

What if he had been raised as a Prince in King's Landing? With Rhaegar and Lyanna, his parents, Elia as a step-mother, and Rhaenys and Aegon his other brother and sister. Would he have been forced to marry Rhaenys? Rosalyn? Would he have met his cousins? Would he have been pledged to his cousins? To Sansa? To Arya? To his aunt Daenerys?

If Lady Catelyn had married Brandon Stark would the brothers and sisters he loved have even been born? If Rhaegar had won the battle on the Trident, would he have killed Eddard Stark? If Lord Stark told the truth of Jon and Rosalyn would they have been murdered as children? What if Robb had declared Jon and Rosalyn as Rhaegar's heirs? Would the people of the North have gathered around Lady Lyanna's children? Would the south have supported them as well?

It made his mind spin. There were days when he hated Lyanna for running away with Rhaegar. There were days when he hated Rhaegar for running away with Lyanna. He hated his father, Lord Stark, for never telling the truth. He loved his father for keeping them all safe. He hated himself for wanting a crown, for loving a woman, for wanting to betray the oaths he had sworn. He was trying to be a good Lord Commander, but he could not help wanting to fight against the men who had murdered his brother and father.

He was lonely too. The closest thing he had left as a friend at Castle Black was either Melisandre or Val, and neither of them was a friend. Val had returned with Tormund and the wildling host. In the morning, the wildlings would be let through the Wall. Jon knew that many of his men were opposed to the arrangement, but Jon knew what not letting them through would mean. If left on the other side of the Wall the wildlings would become thralls of the Others. Jon would rather have the thousands of men who were set to cross the Wall fight for the living then come back from the dead to fight for the Others.

Jon also heard rumors about himself. Traitor, they called him. Wildling-lover, turncloak, and traitor were the names he heard whispered about himself. He could not help but bitterly think how true it all was. Yet at the same time, every decision Jon made was for the survival of the realm. His men were all so blinded by their hatred of the wildlings to see the benefit of allowing the Wildlings to pass through the Wall.

It was a few weeks after he allowed the wildlings to pass beneath the Wall into Westeros that he received a letter. The letter was sealed with pink wax and addressed to 'Bastard'. He did not question who the bastard was, he knew the letter was meant for him.

He froze inside at the words. If what Ramsay Snow said was true, then Stannis Baratheon was dead. If what the Bastard of Bolton said was true, then Arya was missing and Mance Rayder was held captive. Ramsay also claimed that he was holding Eddard Stark, the youngest child of Lady Catelyn, in his custody. He demanded that Lady Catelyn return to Winterfell for her child.

He wondered, for a brief moment, if bad news was the only news left in all the wide world. The news from Hardhome had been grim. The news of the storms and not knowing if his bride or sister survived was maddening. There had been no news of Lady Stark. There had been no word from Lords Stannis, Umber, or anyone else for him to doubt the words which were written upon the parchment.

He told himself that day that the Night's Watch takes no part. Yet was that true? The vow had been that he would take no wife, hold now lands, father no children, wear no crowns, and take no glory... He had broken most of those vows. Their vow was to be the shield that guards the realms of men.
That did not mean that there was no taking part in politics. Ramsay said that he would attack the Night's Watch if Jon did not appear to face against him. If he did not meet Bolton's Bastard in battle, then surely the Bolton's would attack Castle Black.

He thought of his brothers and sisters, all cousins save one, but that mattered naught. He thought of Rickon and Bran, both so young and full of life, now lost somewhere in the wilds of the north. He thought of Sansa, always so proper and gentle. Eddard, the brother-cousin who was only a babe alone in the world. Of Robb... his brave brother who had been murdered because he had loved the wrong woman. Rosalyn, his twin, the one with whom his heart beat and from whom he had never withheld a secret. Arya, the wild girl whose clothing was always torn and dirty, whose face and hair were never clean. Bolton wanted Arya back... she was too young to be a bride!

He discussed his plans with Tormund and some of the other men. Hardhome would still need to be helped, if there was any hope left for survivors at Hardhome. He would ride south to find the truth of what happened at Winterfell.

The assembly was large in the Shieldhall. The men listened as he told them his plans. Men eventually agreed to follow him, shouting support. He also noticed the men who walked away. He did not worry about his dissenters. He had the support to go after Arya, to ensure that she was safe.

He was in the yard after the meeting, trying to deal with Wun Wun who was in the process of killing Ser Patrek. He had not expected such violence from the giant. He was not expecting the daggers from his men.

"For the Watch," Bowen Marsh said, as he plunged a dagger into Jon's belly.

*But I was doing everything for the Watch...* He couldn't move. He fell to the ground. The knives pierced through him like fire. The world went cold and dark.

Chapter End Notes

Will you hate me more if I tell you that it is going to be about six chapters before this is resolved? Credit to George RR Martin for most of this chapter's context and some of the words. At least I will have a resolution to this event sooner than Winds of Winter will arrive.
Rosalyn sat down upon the edge of one of the shaded pools atop the Maegyr Manse in Pentos. She sighed with relief as she slipped her legs in to the cool water. She cupped some of the water in her hands and splashed it on her face. She did it again, pouring the water on her legs and allowing the rivulets to caress her skin. The pools seemed to be the only way to escape the heat of the city.

She would miss the pools when she left Pentos in two days. She would miss Pentos as well, as strange as that seemed. She was unaccustomed to the hot weather and the unusual food. She was still uncomfortable in the airy clothes of Pentos, clothing which would not be worn outside of a sleeping room in the North. It was Robb’s widow and Jon’s wife whom she would miss.

Talisa and Ygritte were as different from one another as day was from night. Talisa was a highborn noblewoman. She had been educated by the best tutors money could buy. She spoke Volantene, High Valyrian, Westerosi, Pentoshi, Braavosi, and Dothraki. She was also a trained healer.

Ygritte on the other hand was a wildling in every possible sense of the word. She was uneducated, illiterate, and unrefined. She cared nothing for the opinions of other people and held strongly to her own opinions, no matter if she was right or wrong. She could fight with a sword and a bow. She had no use for power or position or respect based upon birth... and this was the girl who, in theory, was Queen of Westeros... By the old gods and the new it would be a miracle if anyone ever accepted Ygritte as a Queen.

Perhaps that miracle could be Talisa Maegyr. Although their thick accents made conversations between the two women difficult and somewhat entertaining to overhear, they spent much time together. They had begun to bond with one another, mostly over their pregnancies which were swiftly approaching their ends. Rosalyn hoped that Talisa would be able to teach the ever unruly wildling girl how to behave as a noble woman. It was a task which Rosalyn did not envy. Her greatest regret in leaving the two women was that she would not see the births of the children.

“I thought that I would find you here,” Talisa said quietly as she emerged from the breezeway to Rosalyn’s right.

She greeted Robb’s widow with a gentle smile. “I must enjoy the cool waters of your home whilst I still can. Where is Ygritte?”

“Resting in her rooms. Mella, my maid, laid wet cloths on her and is fanning her. The heat is not easy on her, especially with how far along she is.”

“You do not seem so affected.”

Talisa gave her a wan smile. “She has never lived in lands without snow. I am from farther south than where we are now.”

“From where I must soon visit.” She paused, watching as Talisa slipped off her sandals and sat upon the edge of the pool as well. “Do you think that we will succeed?”

She chewed her lip thoughtfully. “I do not know. I hope that my brother will succeed in convincing the Triarchs to side with you.”

Rosalyn breathed deeply, calming her anxieties. What was the use of worrying when arriving in Volantis was over a month away? They needed the armies of Volantis to ally with their cause, it was the only way to win Westeros. “If we gain your father’s armies, we can secure the North for your
child and the south for Ygritte’s child.”

Talis’s expression turned bitter. “For my child...” She stroked her large belly gently. “Only if I birth a son. You read Lady Catelyn’s letter. She does not think that the North will support Robb’s daughter, not when Lord Eddard’s son or sons are still safely in the North. ‘The Queen Who Lost the North,’ they call me. A foreign girl who does not belong to the North. Why would they accept my child?”

Rosalyn had read the letter shortly after Talisa. They had both been furious at the words Lady Catelyn had written. She said that the men of the North had followed Robb until their deaths. She was uncertain if the men who remained would follow Robb’s child, an infant of a foreign woman who was born on foreign soil. If Lord Eddard Stark’s children had survived, the North would likely support his children over a child whose birth some might question. Lady Catelyn had insisted that she did not doubt that Robb was the father of Talisa’s child, but some of his bannermen might not believe it so easily.

“I don’t know,” Rosalyn whispered. “All that we can do is hope for the best.”

“In this world in which we live, does the best even seem likely?”

Talis looked up at her, her gaze firm and fixed. Rosalyn shook her head in silence. The best seemed impossible. War still ravaged Westeros. The Others and un-dead things lived beyond the Wall, threatening the North. Then there were the dragons. The dragons were in chains. They were angry, clawing at the stones and chains which imprisoned them. They would kill to be free. Mother had forgotten them, betrayed them.

The silence was filled by the chirping of birds who flitted between the palm plants which lined the rooftop of the manse. There would be no joy in these dark endeavors. There would be little hope. Just dragons, if she could get to Volantis before they too decided to make war against Mereen. With the influence of Talisa’s brother, it was hoped that Volantis would side with Daenerys instead of against Daenerys. The cost was steep. Rosalyn could sense her father’s displeasure with the idea from beyond the grave.

The day she would leave from the docks of Pentos, she knew that she would miss everything about the place. She would miss the warm, dry air which smelt of spices, salt, fish, and sweat. She would miss the strange spices in their foods. She would miss Ygritte, with all her heart and soul she would miss the girl who had won her brother’s heart. She would miss Talisa just as fiercely, though that had only spent a few weeks with one another. Her heart would ache at the loss of safety and family. Of the northerners from House Umber who had travelled with Queen Talisa to Pentos, none would accompany Rosalyn on her journey to Volantis and then to Mereen, to Daenerys. For the first time in her life she would be truly on her own.

She would have Bevalio Maegyr with her as a companion, but he was little more than a stranger. A kind stranger, and brother to Robb’s widow, but a stranger none the less.

The day arrived for their departure. They would leave with the morning tide, and from there they would journey to Volantis to seek the favor of the Triarchs. Their trunks were filled with food and supplies, weapons, riches, and clothes. Rosalyn’s furs were left behind in Pentos, if ever she were to return to Westeros, it would be through Pentos. She would have no need of furs where she was travelling.

Ygritte, Talisa, Smalljon Umber, and all the northern contingent walked with them to the docks.

They had seen her as a traitor at first, these northmen who loved her brother-cousin so much that the
guarded his unborn child. She had been in Winterfell when Bran and Rickon were murdered. So she sold them her lies. She told them that Theon had hurt her, threatened her brothers if she did not comply with his wishes. She sold her lies with tears even as the bile burned her throat. If ever Theon Greyjoy met a northmen to whom she had told her tale, he would be dead. A part of her truly pitied Theon and wished for his forgiveness.

She told the truth as well, that her brothers lived when last she had seen them. By the grace of the gods they would stay alive. By the grace of the gods they would all survive these wars and return home and be together once again.

They parted with fierce embraces and family kisses.

“I wish you both good health, and for that of your children,” Rosalyn said in parting to the two women. They bade her a safe journey as she walked away.

Upon the deck of the ship, she watched as her family and supporters slowly shrank from view. When they were walking back into the manse, she could have sworn that she saw Jon Umber lay a comforting hand upon Talisa’s back as they walked into the manse.

After a week of smooth sailing, the seas turned rough. Rosalyn shut herself in her cabin and spent her days attempting not to vomit up the food she had eaten that day. When the seas were smooth, she had been able to continue learning her swordplay with Bevalio and some of his men. Only Bevalio could speak the tongue of Westeros, so she had little choice but to remain alone when the seas were rough and Bevalio was assisting with the crew.

Then one day, after the storms had died down, she retired to her rooms in pain. She felt as though a knife were ripping through her heart. She lay down in her bed, hoping that the pain would ebb. She drifted to sleep, still reeling from the pain which flooded her body.

She found herself in Winterfell as she had seen it last—burnt and broken, though the ground was covered in snow. A voice whispered her name, though she knew not where the voice came from. She called out into the snow, but no one answered. She ran to the crypts, to find Bran and Rickon. The way was dark, but there was warmth in the ancient stones of the crypts. They looked upon her in judgment, these long faced men of long ago. She found herself at the end of the newest carvings. Her grandfather, her uncle, her mother, and the uncle whom she called father.

“Mother,” she called out. “Father. I’m sorry father.”

Eddard Stark’s gaze was disapproving. Lyanna Stark looked upon her in tears. Rosalyn turned her face away from their penetrating gazes and cried out in terror. Near the tombs stood two direwolves, one young and one older and larger. Beside them stood Robb. He was dressed as befit a king, with a crown of bronze and iron upon his head.

“Avenge me,” he whispered. He laid his hand upon his direwolf and looked upon her with so much sadness that her heart broke.

“I will,” she cried. “I promise.”

Behind him a mist appeared. Robb’s shade turned to see what was coming. In the mists she saw her greatest fear.

“Jon! No, no, you can’t be here!” She screamed the words at the visage of her twin.

“Rosa?” He gazed at her with confusion, touching his stomach in disbelief. The brothers’ eyes met and Jon’s face became grim with understanding.
“No,” their mother whispered. “It isn’t time.”

“I tried,” Jon pled. Then he turned, as a different shadow emerged.

It was a man, regal to behold, tall and powerful. He wore a crown of iron, forged with runes. His eyes were dark grey, darker than any Rosalyn had ever seen. “It is time to make amends,” the stranger said. “Come with me.”

Jon nodded and followed after the man. He cast a final gaze at Rosalyn before they disappeared.

Rosalyn awoke screaming. The pain which had filled her left nothing but emptiness in its wake. “Jon,” she whispered. She knew he was gone, though she did not understand why or how.

“Rosalyn,” Bevalio shouted in the small corridor as he banged upon her door. “Rosalyn, is all well?”

Weak, she arose from the bed and opened the door. He was standing before her with a blade in one hand and a lantern in the other. “What happened? I heard you scream.”

“A horrible dream,” she choked out. “Such a horrible dream. I think that my twin...” She dared not say the word out loud, in case it were true.

He sheathed his blade and set the lantern upon a hook in the room. “It was only a dream,” he soothed, placing a gentle hand upon her shoulder.

She shook her head fiercely as tears streamed from her eyes. “He’s gone. I know he is... I... I can feel it. Like something is missing inside and it was there only moments ago.”

He made soft shushing sounds and led her to the bed. He sat down and she sat beside him, allowing him to wrap his arms around her as she wept.

“Tali refused to let me see her weep for Robb,” he told her quietly. “To know what you have lost, I cannot imagine how it must be for you to travel to the other side of the world, not knowing if our plans will succeed.”

“My father would hate me for what we plan to do,” she whispered against his chest.

“Do you believe that it is necessary?”

Yes, she knew that what they planned to do was necessary. “We need the armies, we need Daenerys and the dragons.”

“Then that is what we will get.”

She nodded weakly against him, not entirely convincing herself that he was correct. Their entire plan just felt wrong. The plan went against so many things which she had always believed in. They fell into silence as they sat upon the bed, his hands ran along her spine in soothing patterns. She relaxed willingly into his hands, feeling herself warm at the gentle touches he made.

She looked up at him and the naked expression with which he regarded her sent a warm shiver through her body. One of his hands left her back and caressed her cheek.

“You are beautiful,” he murmured.

She laughed, a nervous energy filling her body. “I was just sobbing hysterically. How can you call that beautiful?”
He smiled at her. “You are always beautiful.”

Every sensible, well-behaved part of her told her to send him from the room that instant. The lonelier side of her which hungered for more wanted him to stay. It was a foolish desire. Her eyes flickered between his lips and eyes while his did much the same. A voice in her head was certain that he was trying to use her. A very different voice did not care. A sensible voice reminded her that there was most certainly no moon tea aboard the ship. They were all drowned away when he bent down and pressed their lips together.

Their lips crashed together, a flurry of heated motion. She needed more, wanted more. She glanced to the door briefly and saw that it was closed. A sensible person would bolt the door, but to do so would remove his hands from her body. She did not want to part from him, for then the spell would end. She wrapped a hand around his neck and kissed him hard. He pulled her onto himself and rocked against her, a motion made stronger by the movement of the ship.

She willed herself to forget everything but the feeling of his hands upon her skin as he removed her sleeping garment. She forced herself to forget the ghostly visages of her mother, adopted father, and brothers. She needed to feel alive, if only for a few moments.

She ran her hands through his dark hair, grasping at him as though he were her only link to life. She pulled at his shirt as he laid kisses upon her neck and chest. A smarter girl would have asked why, but she did not want to understand. She wanted to feel. And for a time that seemed like an instant and forever, Rosalyn Targaryen was able to forget everything but pleasure.

It was afterward, when they lay side by side, that an overwhelming feeling of guilt seeped into her mind. “Why,” she whispered. His arms were wrapped around her as she stared at the cabin walls.

“Hmm,” his response was languid and wordless.

“Why did we... just now...”

He kissed her shoulder, as gently as a butterfly kiss. “I do not often consider why. I hope that I have not offended you.”

She laughed. “No, I am not offended. I... I just always dreamed that I would only be in bed with a man whom I love. I was coerced and did not like the first man at all. I scarcely know you.”

“I think that I know you,” he replied gently, running a lazy hand along her hip. “You are kind, caring, determined. You would sail across the world in order to find a way to restore your family, which tells me that your family means more to you than anything else in the world. It tells me that my sister’s family cares about her well-being and that of her child. Few women are so brave as you. Few women are as beautiful as you.”

They fell silent as she pondered his words. “Thank you,” she said finally. “Does this mean anything?”

“This,” he questioned. “The sharing of pleasure with one another? It can mean as much or as little as you wish. I may not wed without my father’s consent, not after Talisa did that very thing. Yet you are of the old blood, which is acceptable to my family. If you would not wish to marry me, then we are simply friends who have enjoyed the pleasures of one another.”

‘Of the Old Blood...’ He had been told of her heritage, it was the only way for him to agree with their plan. Robb had told Talisa that Rosalyn and Jon were trueborn Targaryens. Catelyn’s letter spoke of the truth as well. Talisa and Rosalyn had both told Bevalio the truth.
“Did you know,” he continued when she had not spoken. “There are several religions which see sex as an act of worship to the gods? The worshipers of the Lord of Light and the people of the Summer Islands use sex in their worship.”

“I do not follow either of those religions. What do you believe? In Volantis?”

“It varies from family to family. Some follow the Lord of Light, others follow a hundred different gods of the region. I am of the old blood, we still worship the gods of Valyria.”

There were gods of Valyria? This was an unexpectedly interesting, and not awkward, conversation.

“What are the gods of Valyria? I have not been taught about them.”

He released a light laugh. “Valyria was the mother of all, creator. Her three children were Balerion, Vhagar, and Meraxes.”

“The three dragons of Aegon the Conqueror and his two sisters.”

“Yes, the very same. They were named for the gods of old Valyria as many dragons were before the Doom destroyed most of the dragons. The children of Valyria were the three great gods, holding the world in balance. For this reason, in old Valyria it was not unusual for a married man to wed a second wife.”

She smiled, wondering if this was a tale which her mother had ever heard. Had this been the story to win her mother’s heart? “To hold the world in balance?”

He kissed the back of her head. “Yes, though for other reasons as well. It was Valyrian tradition for the eldest son and daughter of a family to wed in order to keep the bloodline pure. A tradition carried on by House Targaryen until they were nearly extinguished. A second wife was often married from outside the family for many different reasons.”

“How strange Valyrians seem.”

“Says a daughter of Valyria.”

“I am also of the oldest blood of Westeros, the First Men, from the very beginnings of time.”

“A most noble heritage. One which will be able to sway my father to your side.”

“And Volantis will be made as Valyria of old.” That was the plan. The plan which churned her stomach and made her think upon the judging gaze of her father. To make Volantis as powerful as Valyria of old. Daenerys would hate her for it as well.

“Will you stay with me tonight,” she asked after silence had fallen in the cabin again.

“Does it seem that I wish to leave?” They both laughed a little at that. “I will remain beside you for as long as you wish and as many nights as you wish.”

The idea sounded both wonderful and perfectly foolish. She said nothing and pulled his arms close around her. She did not want to think upon the horrors which lay before her or the ones which lay behind. She did not want to think about the empty ache which had appeared when she dreamt of Jon in the crypts beneath Winterfell. So she did not think when she lay in his arms, safe, if only for the moment.

The days and nights passed swiftly with clear skies and strong winds until the massive port of Volantis grew larger upon the horizon. Rosalyn’s days were passed practicing at swordplay and her
nights were spent foolishly wrapped in the arms of Bevalio Maegyr. When she slept and sometimes when she was awake, Rhaegal would make his unhappiness known. The dragon needed to be free. She promised that she was on her way.

The sheer size of Volantis was enough to take one’s breath away. The Wall was the only structure which Rosalyn had ever seen that was larger than Volantis, though anything must seem small when compared to the Wall. The closer they were to the city, the smaller the ocean and land seemed until they were all at once swallowed by city.

They docked close to the Black Wall, where only the Old Blood were permitted to live. No guests could enter without an invitation from those who lived within. The Maegyrs were amongst the oldest and noblest of Houses in Volantis, and Rosalyn was permitted to pass beneath the Black Wall with Bevalio.

If one were to describe the Maegyr manse in Pentos as extravagant, there were nearly no words to describe the ancient wealth which existed in the Maegyr manse of Volantis. The structure was three times the size of the manse in Pentos, and larger than the whole of Winterfell, including the Winter Town. There were rooms filled with statues, paintings, tapestries, books, jewels, and cloth. Not even in her wildest dreams could Rosalyn have imagined such enormity of wealth.

This was the life which Talisa was giving up. She had told Rosalyn more than once that she would return to Westeros and some day to Winterfell with Robb’s child. Winterfell was ancient, but it could not boast the sheer volume of beauty contained within the walls of the Maegyr home. Winterfell was in ruins, broken but able to be rebuilt. Volantis was beautiful and full of wonder.

She spent much of her time alone in the manse. Bevalio maintained a polite distance from her, for propriety, he had told her. He did not want his family to think poorly of her, not when her request was so great. So she filled her days until she was to meet with the Triarchs with exploring the many rooms of the manse and swimming in the thirty pools which could be found throughout the vast structure. There were also gardens and a small menagerie on the grounds of the estate. There was no one for her to speak with, for the slaves could not or would not speak to her and no one else ever met with her, not matter how long she wandered around in the estate.

Finally the day arrived when she was to speak before the Triarchs, though she would not say much as Bevalio would do all the speaking and translating. The entire speech had been decided beforehand. He had given his proposal the day they had landed in Volantis, the waiting period had been their time for deliberation. Now she would appear before the Triarchs so that she might know their decision.

There were two members of the tigers who sat as Triarch, Malaquo Maegyr, the grandfather of Talisa and Bevalio, and Alios Qhaedar, a newly elected Triarch. Nyessos Vhassar of the elephants had been reelected as Triarch for the year. All three men seemed old and toothless as Rosalyn stood before them, but she knew that they were anything but toothless. The three men held the power to sway Volantis in whatever direction they wished, and she needed them to be swayed towards her wishes.

She stood before them, garbed in the finest Volantene attire money could buy. She wore violet to bring out the color of her eyes and jewels of great beauty and pricelessness. Bevalio stood beside her as they faced the Triarchs, attired in dark blue silks. They were as stunning to behold as any King or Queen who had ever lived, hopefully it would have the desired response.

When asked to speak, she spoke, explaining the plan which they had devised in Pentos. Volantis wished to make war against Mereen, against Daenerys Targaryen. Volantis wanted to reestablish the slave trade and make an end to the chaos which the Targaryen girl had wrought upon Essos.
The answer which Rosalyn, Bevalio, and Talisa had devised would bring about a desired conclusion for all their wishes. Volantis could have Mereen, so long as Daenerys, the dragons, and any of Daenerys’s people who desired, were returned to Westeros. If Daenerys were in Westeros, she would no longer be a threat to Essos.

The Triarchs wanted to know why they should not just kill the Targaryen girl. She was just one girl, and a boy claiming to be Aegon, the son of Rhaegar Targaryen had just sailed to Westeros with the Golden Company.

The answer was simple, if they allied with House Targaryen, the True House Targaryen, agreeing to assist in the conquest of King’s Landing, Mereen would belong to Volantis. Why should the first daughter of Old Valyria share power with Yunkai, Astapor, or Mereen? If Volantis assisted with the Targaryen restoration, then a wealth of trading opportunities were promised.

Why would Daenerys leave Mereen after she had received so many offers to leave before that point?

She would not leave because she did not have a guarantee of victory in Westeros. With the backing of Volantis, she could easily over throw Westeros.

Why did some girl care? Who was she, the Triarchs wanted to know?

The niece of Daenerys Targaryen, with a stronger claim to the Iron Throne. There were witnesses to her birth alive in Westeros. She was also the cousin, raised as a sister, to Robb Stark, the King of the North and Riverlands. He had been married to the exalted Triarch Malaquo’s own granddaughter and she was due to give birth to his heir any day. Did not the Triarch feel his own blood should be restored to his or her rightful place in Westeros?

The debate raged for hours, though much of it was circular. The Triarchs wanted to know what they could get from an alliance with the dragons that they would not get if they joined with Yunkai. The debates ended at long last, and the three men deliberated once again before rendering their decision.

Daenerys Targaryen and her followers would be escorted from Essos. Volantis would assist in the conquest of King’s Landing, troops directly under the control of Triarch Maegyr would assist with the recapture of the North. In return, Volantis would control Mereen, Yunkai, and Astapor. Any subject of Daenerys Targaryen who did leave for Westeros would find themselves under the control of Volantis. Volantis would restore and strengthen the slave trade. Whenever hostilities were at an end in Westeros, a permanent delegation would be established to handle diplomatic ties between Volantis and Westeros.

The agreements were signed.

The deed was done.

Rosalyn’s first act as a Targaryen was to strip away power from her aunt and to restore the slave trade to the region known as Slaver’s Bay. She told herself that she was doing what needed to be done. She told herself that they needed the armies of Volantis on their side. She told herself that she was restoring balance to the region.

In the end she could still see her father, Lord Eddard Stark, sadly shaking his head in disapproval of the deeds which she was about to commit.
Roslin

Chapter Notes

Content Warning!

Contains descriptions of the aftermath of the Red Wedding at the Twins.

Other important notes at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Roslin Frey, by marriage a Tully, awoke to the sound of someone pounding on her door.

She pulled the furs closer to her, exhausted. Even when she recognized her brother Perwyn’s voice calling to her with urgency, she did not want to move. She had barely slept a full night since before she had been wed to Edmure Tully. She had not slept then out of guilt and fear. After the horrible murders at her wedding, she doubted that she would ever sleep a full night again.

“Roslin! Please! Roslin!”

Of course someone would try to wake her on one of the few nights in which she had actually managed to fall into a deep sleep. She ran her hands along her ever growing belly.

“It seems I will never sleep, between you and everyone else little one.”

The child was ever a reminder of her guilt and of the horrors which her family had committed. She paused a few moments, willing her brother to cease pounding on her door, knowing that her wish was futile. Slowly, sleepily, she untangled herself from her coverings. She pushed herself up from the bed and grabbed her housecoat, wrapping it around herself.

In the dim candlelight she slowly made her way to the door. She fumbled with the lock before she succeeded in sliding the bold aside. Upon opening the door, she beheld her brother standing with two maids and four men, two of whom were holding bare swords while the other two held lanterns.

Roslin clutched her robe close to her chest, suddenly more alert. “What’s wrong?”

“You are leaving,” Perwyn informed her as she stepped back and allowed him into her room.

“Leaving?” The maids entered, one set a lantern upon a table, then both proceeded to open her chests and wardrobes. The women found a travel bag and began to stuff articles of clothing into the bag.

“Father is dead.” He closed the door, leaving the men outside. “I am getting you to safety.”

“Dead?” She stumbled over the word. “Dead? Safety? What’s happening?” She ran her hands along her belly, attempting to soothe her child as much as she sought to soothe her own anxieties. Sleep fled from her and was replaced by a sickening sense of dread.

He met her eyes for a brief moment. “We are paying for our sins.” He walked to her windows and drew back the curtains. She felt a chill race down her spine at the glow which shown through her
windows. The other side of the Twins was aflame. “Our father has died. He was old enough that his heart may have failed, if truly he had a heart. When our brothers heard the news, some of them decided that they wished to seize possession of the Twins. This is the result.”

Her throat felt suddenly dry as she stepped to the window and watched the fires burning brightly across the river. “Who started it?”

“Does it matter? Lady Joyeuse is dead, her throat was slit. From what the servants who escaped to this side of the river have said, the factions are loosely defined by who our mothers were. Our family is killing itself for control of the Twins.”

“A judgment for our sins,” she whispered. She stepped away from the sight of her home burning, trying not to think upon how many half-brothers, nieces, nephews, and other family may have already died. “Where is Olyvar? Where is Jyanna and her children?”

“Olyvar escorted Jyanna and her children to the docks. He is also gathering supplies. We are trying to get as many of the women and children on the river as we can, especially you.”

“Me?”

“Your child is important, the true heir to the Riverlands.”

“Riverrun has been given to the Lannisters, have you forgotten that?” Her child was the true heir to the Riverlands, but that honor had been lost. They had betrayed their King and their overlords and in the end had gained little. Yes, their half-brother Emmon now held Riverrun, but by right the lands belonged to her estranged husband. Instead of her child holding the rights to Riverrun, it had been given to the only Lannister in the Frey family. Roslin had been the one to seal their bloody pact and yet she would receive nothing but sorrow from the part she had played.

He pulled her into his strong embrace. “I have not forgotten anything. I have not forgotten what you were forced to endure or the part I played in the death of our King.”

“You weren’t there, they forbid...”

“I should have warned him,” he snapped, startling the women who were still packing clothes for Roslin. “I should have told Robb what our father planned.” He looked out the window again, at the glowing blaze of their house. “This is the price we have paid for not telling our King what our father planned. Dress quickly. I will be waiting outside.”

He pulled away from her and walked out the door. The maids helped Roslin dress. They clothed her in thick wools and furs. She shook as they dressed her. She shook out of fear and anxiety. When she was readied, they left the room.

Perwyn led the way, down long corridors and flights of stairs. Thankfully their wing of the castle still remained rather quiet. The length of time until their side of the Twins erupted into fighting was anyone’s guess.

They emerged from the castle at a series of boats which were moored beneath the bridge. The chill of the air bit through the many layers of Roslin’s clothes. Or was it the screams which chilled her? Inside the castle there had been no noise from the outside world, but out in the open, the screams echoed across the water, shattering the calm of the night.

They walked swiftly to the boats and were greeted there by a strange assortment of people. Servants were loading the boats with supplies and children. Roslin noticed that the children of Lady Annara Farring, Roslin’s younger half-brothers and sisters, were already on a boat which was being
launched into the black waters of the river. In another boat was her good-sister Jyanna, the widow of her brother Benfrey, along with their young children.

Olyvar approached from the group and embraced Roslin. “I am glad that you are safe.”

She gave him a shaking nod of her head in reply, she was too stunned to speak. She wished that she were still asleep and that this night were just a terrible dream.

Perwyn embraced their brother quickly, and then embraced her, kissing her brow. “Keep her safe Olyvar.”

He gave a curt nod of his head, and took Roslin by the arm. “I will.”

“Keep me safe? Aren’t you coming with us?” Panic rose like a wave, slamming against her though she stood still on dry ground.

Perwyn shook his head. “I must try to help as many women and children out as I can. We have archers preventing the fighting from reaching this side of the Twins, but it will not last for long. Then we will have a long, bloody battle.”

He stepped away from her, holding her gaze and Olyvar’s for a few moments each. He then turned and walked back toward the door into the castle. Roslin felt her brother’s grip on her arm, preventing her from running after Perwyn.

Olyvar walked her to the boats and helped her into one. Her maids entered the boat with her, and Olyvar followed. They were joined by several others before they pushed off from the muddy shore, and slipped into the icy black of the Green Fork.

The glow of the fires faded away before the screams. Even after Roslin had drifted asleep in the boat and awoke in the early morning light she was convinced that she still heard the screams. She ate little of the provisions which were in their boat. She could not stomach the idea of eating when she knew that her family was warring with itself.

The first of the bodies made its way down the river by mid-morning, just a babe who was only starting to walk. Then more followed slowly with the currents. A nephew. A niece. A half-brother. A servant. All were thrown into the river and floated along with the current, often faster than the boats.

Was this how it had been for those who had died at the Red Wedding? Some bodies had been thrown into the river. Some had been laid in a large burial mound. Some had been burned. Of the boy who had been king a worse mockery had been made.

She shuddered still at what had happened to Robb Stark. The night he had been murdered, her family had taken Robb Stark’s head replaced it with that of his direwolf. They had paraded his corpse around for weeks. Then, when humiliating the corpse had lost its thrill, the boy’s body and that of his wolf had been laid in the center of the bridge to be eaten by the birds. They had been left to rot until nothing remained except for bleached bones. Then the remaining bones had been flung into the river.

“We are paying for our sins...”

Olyvar wanted Roslin to look away, from the bodies in the river, but she refused. She had played a part in her father’s schemes. She had wept endless tears before her wedding, but she had complied with her family’s demands. How could she have refused? They had threatened to rape her or worse if she refused to marry Lord Edmure. Yet could she have prevented the deaths of thousands?
They left the river near Fairmarket, beginning their long hike south. They were able to hire a horse and cart in the town, which allowed for herself and the children to not have to walk the entire way to Riverrun. Not that the cart travelled easily in the muddy slush of the roads. To make matters worse, the air was bitingly cold and damp. The children were quickly falling ill with coughs and fevers. She feared that she would fall ill as well. She feared that her child would die.

She feared their destination. She feared Riverrun.

Riverrun was held by her half-brother Emmon and his wife Genna Lannister. She doubted that they would truly welcome her to Riverrun. How could she have faith in them when her kin at the Twins had proven to be so treacherous? How could she trust them when she carried a Tully within her?

She also feared for the safety of her brother Perwyn. Her brother who had chosen to remain behind at the Twins so that he might atone for his sins.

Chapter End Notes

I know that I haven't posted in this story in months, and that has been partly intentional. I have been extraordinarily busy since January. I also came to a point where I realized that I needed to focus on one story and finish that story first. I chose Desert Wolves over any of my other stories for various reasons. I have not abandoned this story. I love this story! I am sooo happy that there are people who like it and read it! So this is what is going on with the story.

I will return to this story, don't worry about that part. I am not for a second going to forget or abandon this story... I have put way too much time into outlining and writing it to give up! (Plus I wrote the draft of the epilogue last year and want you to read that some day!) I am, however, going to do a complete revision/rewrite of the posted material. I have done revisions as I have gone and the story has improved each time, but I feel that at this point I can do an even better job than I have done before. I want this story to be my best possible effort and right now I know that it isn't. I have learned a lot about writing during my time writing in this fandom and want to apply what I have learned to all of my stories.

I didn't want to just post a note saying that this story will be revised because I hate to post something and then it's just a note and the reader was hoping for a chapter! So this is a real update, though the chapter is not a full chapter. There are about three chapters that should come before this one, so I couldn't do the whole chapter or you would be really confused.

Much love, and I hope you stick around!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!