All Choked Up

by theworldunseen

Summary

Brienne of Tarth marries Jaime Lannister, and neither are happy about it. Until, one day, they are. Just an AU arranged marriage.
Wedding Bell Blues

Brienne of Tarth didn’t want to do this. If she had any say in the matter, she’d make sure that was
the engraving on her tomb in the crypt — the Lannister crypt, apparently.

For the old maiden of Tarth had finally been given a match — Ser Jaime Lannister.

When her father told her the news of her arranged marriage, she knew something was wrong. Not
the arranged marriage part: her father had been trying that for years. But Lord Tywin Lannister
married off his golden prince to the ogre of Tarth — for that’s what the boys had called her at the
her debut ball. Something must have happened to make him lose his shine.

Her father didn’t seem to care. He wasn’t unfeeling: He just knew this was probably his last chance
to secure a place for his daughter. It wouldn’t be proper for a lady to be alone.

And the Lannisters has money, but a lackadaisical army. The Tarths had an incredible army that
needed funds. A match made in heaven.

Brienne eventually found out — via her gossiping maid — what had happened. Jaime Lannister has
lost a hand in some undisclosed incident. His sword hand. Nothing had been the same for him
since. Now he was broody and cold, so the rumors said. Brienne had nothing to compare him to.
She wondered if he’d always been miserable, and people only just admitted it once he was less
physically pleasing.

But she knew he must have gotten bad if his father was willing to marry him to her. She was too
tall. She was too big. She lacked womanly curves. Her nose jutted out at an unpleasant angle. She
never looked quite right in a dress. She couldn’t sew or knit. She never remembered her prayers.

All the things that might recommend her to a person — She was strong and loyal and brave. She
was decent with a sword. She had a biting wit. — were usually kept hidden from potential suitors,
deemed unwomanly. Do you have to learn to sew when you become someone’s wife?

Her wedding day came so quickly, she wondered if her father was worried Lord Tywin was going
to change his mind. Too soon she was saying goodbye to the only home she’d known, sailing
toward Casterly Rock.

The men had decided the soon-to-be weds wouldn’t see each other until the ceremony began.
“Maybe my father did lie about my looks,” she thought, as her old septa laced her into her wedding
dress. Someone had decided that Brienne looked bad in white and chose ivory instead, but, looking
in the mirror, she saw that had been an even worse choice. Her skin looked yellow. Her blue eyes
looked dull. The gown had a little gold embroidery — stars and crescents like the Tarth digit —
but they didn’t shine. It all seemed a bad omen.

The shape of the gown was mostly shapeless. If there was a way to make Brienne look womanly,
the seamstresses of Tarth hadn’t found it yet. “And now they never will,” Brienne thought with a
sigh.

She’d been trying to grow her hair out ever since her father told her about the match, but it still
wasn’t enough for any complicated hairstyle. Her septa had wanted to braid in other hair, giving
her a full crown of braids, but Lord Selwyn forbade it. He didn’t want “deception.” Brienne
thought the very act of putting her in a dress was a deception, but she said nothing. What was done
was done.
Her father came to get her. He wouldn’t quite meet her eye. “Good,” she thought. “Let him be embarrassed by this.”

They entered the chapel. Everyone turned to look at her, and almost instantly started to look away. She could feel if not snickers then the beginning of snickers. Even the flowers that lined the aisle seemed a little disappointed.

But she wouldn’t stand it. If she was to be lady of Casterly Rock (though the thought did make her shudder), she wasn’t going to cow-towed by comments about her looks, which had been happening her whole life. She looked straight ahead. Her face was blank. She’d give them no satisfaction.

The only person looking her dead in the face, she realized, was her betrothed. His wedding costume was beautiful, all glistening golds and bright reds. “We have the money,” his tunic seemed to be shouting.

But the aura of wealth and power wasn’t making it all the way to his face. He looked tired. His eyes were a little sunken. He was freshly shaven, but she felt like he clearly longed to have a beard. His hair was somehow both too long and too short. Still, he was the handsomest man she’d ever seen, though she vowed to never tell him that. He probably already knew.

She stared at him as she walked up the aisle, trying to betray nothing with her face. He was clearly trying to do the same. But he raised an eyebrow as he looked her over. It could’ve meant anything. Well, almost anything.

Finally, her father gave her away. She took Jaime’s hands in her own — but one was too heavy. And metal. She looked down her fingers. She had forgotten he had lost a hand, and she didn’t know he’d replaced it with one made of gold. It was hideous. And it weighed far too much. She hoped he didn’t wear it all the time.

He looked down at their hands and back up at her, as if daring her to say something. But he didn’t know her. She said nothing. His eyes were so green.

And in what felt like a second they were married. All those weeks of quiet agony, and it was over in a moment.

In no time at all they were at their wedding banquet. They still hadn’t spoken to each other, besides their wedding vows. Different courtiers and lords and what not came over to their table, bearing gifts, which they kindly accepted. Everyone was putting in their best effort to seem happy — except Jaime. But it didn’t feel personal to Brienne. She didn’t think a more beautiful bride would have brought a smile to his face.

During the meal, she noticed he ate nothing that needed to be cut. He seemed to often forget himself and reach for something with his right hand. He knocked over his wine glass a few times with the gold appendage, but no one said a thing about it. Brienne wished he had a sense of humor about this, at least.

Eventually, some drunken bannerman noticed that they hadn’t kissed yet. He got all the other drunk men to cheer, teasing Jaime to kiss his bride. Brienne wanted to evaporate, but she fought the blush spreading to her cheeks with everything she had.

She turned to her new husband. “What do you say, my bride?” he said. The first time he’d spoken to her. “My bride” dripped with something she didn’t like. It felt like a slap in the face. She wouldn’t show it.
She kissed him. She could tell he was surprised from the way he almost pulled his head back. She could tell the drunk men were surprised by the way they hollered. It was perfunctory. Unremarkable except that it was the first.

She pulled away and took a sip of her wine, trying to appear nonplussed.

Just like that it was over. And they were locked in their bed chamber.

Brienne didn’t care that they were married — she was not going to fulfill her “widely duty” with someone who’d spoken six words to her. No matter what it took. She wished she had her sword.

So she was relieved when, instead of walking over to her, he sat at the table. He tried to pour himself wine, but spilled some on the table. Brienne didn’t know if she should help.

“How recent was it?” she asked, as he placed the pitcher on the table.

“Ah,” he said, dripping with irony. “She speaks.”

She sat down on the bed and kicked off her shoes. She tried to reach around her back to get the tie on her corset, but it was just out of reach.

“It was recent, I assume,” she said, ignoring him.

“Why’s that?” he asked, his vowels long. She knew he wasn’t drunk, though.

“You’re unpracticed with your left hand,” she said matter of factly. “You keep reaching with your right. And no one can figure out how to react when you drop something.”

He pursed his lips, displeased. “Clever girl,” he said.

Brienne had had enough. “Listen Ser Jaime,” she said, her voice rising. “I was perfectly happy in Tarth with no husband. Whatever angst you have about your lot in life, you are not going to use me as your punching bag when I did nothing but my duty as a daughter. I’m not going to have a miserable rest of my life because of your...whatever this is.”

It wasn’t her most elegant speech. She distracted herself by taking off her jewelry.

He looked her over, considering her again.

“We were betrothed, what, one month?” he asked. She nodded, wondering what he was getting at. “So it’s been one month and two weeks.”

Her instincts were right then — that’s what had lowered his value enough to make him a match for her.

She didn’t ask what happened. She knew he wouldn’t tell her.

She picked up the layers of her dress and walked over to him. She turned around so her back faced him.

“What do you want me to do, my bride?” he asked, once again dripping with condescension on the last two syllables. She let it slide for now.

“I need you to undo my corset so I can go to sleep.”

“Can’t you call the maids to do that?” he asked, annoyed, or maybe even panicked.
“Since this is our wedding night,” she said, letting her irritation show, “I thought you’d rather the maids didn’t know that you weren’t removing my clothes this evening.”

A laugh started in his throat and died. She stood there a moment, wondering what he would choose.

A moment later, she felt his fingers on her back, working out the tie on the ribbon. It took him a long time — her septa had tied a tight knot. It would have been annoying without the extra difficulties of his left hand. But Brienne said nothing. She stood statue still.

After what felt like ages the knot was undone. He pulled the ribbon through the holes. If she closed her eyes and forgot where she was and who she was and who he was, it almost felt like a caress.

When he was done, she nodded her thanks and walked off to undress.

They slept that night in their enormous bed, putting as much space between themselves as possible. Jaime snored, and Brienne let herself cry silently into her pillow for the first time in a month.
Knocking on the door woke Brienne up. For a moment, she forgot where she was — all alone in a giant bed. But the gold and red drapes quickly reminded her.

The knocking continued. They were waiting for her, she realized.

“Come in,” she croaked. She wondered what time it was. She wondered where her husband was, though she didn’t regret that he was missing.

In came her lady’s maid. They’d been introduced the day before, but her name had slipped from Brienne’s mind.

“I’m sorry if I woke you, my lady,” the girl began. She was short and plump, with a round face, kind eyes. She didn’t look like she belonged on Casterly Rock either, Brienne thought.

“It’s just almost midday...” she said, her voice trailing off. Brienne groaned before remembering that she didn’t exactly have anything to do today anyway.

“It’s alright,” she said, sitting up in bed. She desperately tried to remember the girl’s name, but it wasn’t there. She was too emotionally hungover.

“I’m sorry,” Brienne said, “but I can’t remember your name.”

The servant girl blushed and looked at her feet. Brienne felt bad.

“Johanna, my lady,” she said.

“Johanna,” she repeated, and tried to telepath warmth and understanding with her smile. “Johanna, if you could have them bring me something to eat after I get dressed, that would be perfect.”

“Yes my lady,” she said with a nod. “I’ll give word to one of the boys, then I can help you dress.”

Brienne ran a hand through her hair. She just wanted to be alone, but that didn’t seem to be an option. She nodded her ascent to Johanna, who scuttled off to give her orders out.

She looked around the bed chamber, which looked different in the light of day. It was too spacious. It needed more pillows. The Lannister colors were everywhere — the curtains, the blankets, the chair. But something about the room was cold. Stoic. Unmovable. Like her husband.

She slid out of bed and walked over to her wardrobe. In Tarth she wore trousers almost every day. It was a habit she’d fallen into as a child and everyone was used to it. But she knew only dresses were acceptable for the lady of Casterly Rock.

Johanna slipped back in while Brienne contemplated her choices. They all seemed so heavy and difficult, though she realized she couldn’t expect to get much physical activity anymore.

“My lady,” Johanna said, hesitantly. “Might I recommend the blue dress? It would bring out your eyes.”

Brienne turned to look at her maid. Johanna turned away, afraid she’d overstepped.

“I think that would be splendid. Thank you.” Johanna allowed herself a small smile as she stepped forward to retrieve the clothes.
“How long have you been a lady’s maid, Johanna?” Brienne asked as the young girl aired out the sky blue skirt.

“I served Ser Jaime’s sister Cersei for years,” Johanna said, “until she went to King’s Landing. She didn’t take me with her.” Johanna didn’t sound upset about that, Brienne noted.

“So they moved me to the kitchens,” she continued as she helped Brienne step into the skirt. “And now I’m back up here with you, my lady.”

“Did you like the kitchens better than being a lady’s maid?” Brienne asked. Johanna considered as she laced up Brienne’s top.

“Yes and no. Being a maid depends on how nice the person you’re serving is,” she said. “Not that Lady Cersei wasn’t kind,” she added quickly, realizing what she’d given away.

Brienne shook her head, trying to signal that it was OK. Really, she wanted to hear all about her husband’s whole family. She could tell Johanna would eventually let her know everything, if she could keep her talking.

“Did you know my husband when he was younger?” she asked. She sat down in front of the vanity so Johanna could attempt to tame her unruly hair. “I just wish I could’ve seen him then,” she added, trying to sound breezy and girlish, not like she was desperately digging for information on the man her fate had been tied to. She didn’t think she succeeded, but Johanna didn’t need much prodding.

“Oh yes, all the maids always thought Ser Jaime was so handsome. Of course he’s still handsome,” she added quickly. “But I remember once he smiled at Tilly — she’s one of the girls in the kitchens and she talked about it for weeks.”

Brienne looked at herself in the mirror. This dress fit no better than her terrible wedding gown, but Johanna had been spot on — blue was her color.

“He was very close with his sister,” she said as she pulled Brienne’s hair back.

“Oh?” Brienne said. Cersei hadn’t come to the wedding. Neither had his brother, Tyrion.

“Yes my lady, I heard he was angry when his father married her off to the king. It took half a dozen maids to clean up the mess he made.”

A temper. Brienne didn’t like the sound of that.

“That’s when he started to slide into...” Johanna added, her voice trailing off. “His accident only made it worse.”

Brienne nodded. She wanted to ask more, but didn’t want to push her luck. A servant entered with her lunch. He bowed and placed it on the table.

“Thank you,” she said to both of them.

Her lunch was leftovers from the wedding feast. The meal had been fine last night, but it tasted mushy and too salty today. She mostly ate bread and drank her wine quickly. She braced herself for what was coming: leaving the room.

Eventually she ran out of excuses to say inside. She opened the door and looked out into the hallway. No one was there.
She walked out and the door slammed behind her. Were the stairs to the right or the left? The night before was a blur. Shouldn’t Jaime be here to show her the way?

Not that she really wanted her husband to be here. She felt foolish now, and she knew she’d only feel more foolish if he were here to watch her.

She picked left and silently walked down the long hallway, trying her best not to make a sound. Still, her shoes echoed on the stones. She imagined scores of servants hearing her feet and ducking out of the way, leaving her to wander alone.

She reached stairs she thought she recognized and headed down. She just wanted to get outside, though she wasn’t sure that was a simple task in this castle that was more like a fortress.

Eventually she noticed an entrance to a balcony. She opened the door and stepped out into the cool spring air.

They had a nice view of the ocean, she had to admit. Not as nice as Tarth, but nothing to complain about. It was windy this high up, though. She wouldn’t be able to stay out here long.

But the rest of the day stretched ahead of her, endless time with nothing to do. At home, she would spar with the squires, teaching them a few tricks. She would read in the library. She would talk to her father about that season’s harvest and plans for the winter.

And now. Nothing.

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After hours of wandering, it was finally time for dinner. A servant came and found her somewhere on an upper floor, otherwise she’d have never known, and never found her way there.

When she entered the dining room, Jaime was already sitting and drinking. She noticed his eyes look her up and down, like he was trying to remember just what she looked like. She sat across from him.

“My bride,” he said, raising his glass to her. She ignored his implications.

“Is your father joining us?” she asked.

“On his way back to Kings Landing,” he said. She wondered if that’s where Jaime wanted to be, too.

They ate in silence. Brienne had one million questions, but she didn’t want to give him the satisfaction of knowing she was uncomfortable. She snuck glances at him between bites. He hadn’t shaved this morning — his jaw was streaked with stubble. Did he usually have a beard? He was less clumsy with his left hand today. She must have touched a nerve when she mentioned it. That hadn’t been her intention.

She noticed he kept stealing glances at her too. She tried not to imagine what he thought when he looked at her. She knew, in the pit of her stomach, that it wouldn’t be kind.

When dinner was over, he offered her his arm.

“Come,” he said, when she hesitated to take it. She looped her arm through his and they made their way up the stairs. Sure, everyone important was gone, but the servants were still here, always watching. It was bad enough they hadn’t spoken all through dinner — they couldn’t be seen not returning to bed together.
Brienne tried to build a mental map of the place in her head as they walked, connecting things she’d seen that day with what she was seeing now. Jaime looked straight ahead, stone silent. She was so tired of feeling invisible.

Brienne lost track of their location but they eventually reached their bed chamber. Jaime held their door open for her, a gesture she hadn’t realized could be dripping with sarcasm.

She sat down at her vanity and brushed her hair, just to have something for her hands to do. She was not improving her appearance. In the mirror, she watched him sit down at the table and put his head in his hands. Just as she questioned if he would ever speak to her again, he did.

“So do you need help with your dress again?” he asked very quietly. She wanted to say no, but she did.

“Yes, thank you,” she mumbled.

He took off his gold hand and place it on the table. She had a sudden urge to grab his arm and examine his wrist, just to know him in some way. She kept brushing her hair.

He rose and walked over to her. With his left hand, he started to work at the knot Johanna had tied. Brienne watched him in the mirror. He furrowed his brow. He bit his lip. Silently, she rooted him on.

He got it more quickly than he had the day before and speeded through the rest.

“Thanks,” she whispered when he was done. He nodded and walked over to the bed.

“Jaime,” she began, very quietly. He looked up at her. “What am I meant to do all day?”

But his blank face twisted in a rude smile. She shouldn’t have said anything.

“Fulfilling your wifely duties,” he spat at her. “Are you struggling with those? Didn’t you have a mother to teach you?”

“My mother died giving birth to me,” she said, letting her words hang in the air. She didn’t even look at him to see how he reacted.

She quickly and decisively rose to her feet. She took off her top and stepped out of their skirt. In a quick movement, she pulled her slip over her head. Brienne stood in front of him, completely naked and furious — but she said nothing.

She walked over to her wardrobe and searched for a night gown. He was quiet, but she knew he was watching her. She tried not to think about him looking at her body — but why she should care what he thought? Still, she felt her ears getting warm.

She threw on her night clothes and stomped around to her side of the bed. She climbed in and pulled her blankets over her head. She thought she could feel him looking at her still, an uncomfortable warmth in the base of spine. She squeezed her eyes shut and promised that tonight she wouldn’t cry. If she had to, she could weep on a balcony — far from his eyes — in the morning.

She listened to him rise and undress. He blew out the candles and climbed into bed beside her. Eventually she fell into a fitful sleep.
That’s how the next few weeks passed. Jaime was never in the bed in the morning, no matter how early Brienne woke. Johanna would come and help her dress and a servant would bring her breakfast. Word quickly spread among the household staff that while the new Lady Lannister was hideous, she was also very kind. The younger boys argued over who would bring her meals.

She found a small library — at least she hoped it wasn’t the main one, since it was dreadfully small. Their library in Tarth had been much better stocked. She found a balcony with a couch she liked. In her head it was “my balcony,” even though she twice got lost looking for it. After the third day, she stopped crying. She never saw her husband before dinner.

Johanna proved an endless resource of information, as Brienne had assumed she would. Her mother had been handmaid to Jaime’s mother, Joanna, for whom Brienne’s Johanna was named.

The maid tried her best to only tell positive stories about the Lannisters, but it was impossible to hide the truth completely. Lord Tywin had turned cruel with his wife’s death. Cersei — and Jaime, Brienne assumed — had been terrible to Tyrion. Jaime had struggled with reading and writing and math, but thrived in battle. But there weren’t any battles to fight anymore — especially not for a warrior who lost his sword hand.

The maid also told Brienne about Casterly Rock. She told her about the servants who’d worked in the castle all their lives, the farmers who relied on the market and good weather, the merchants who risked their lives at sea. She helped the place come alive for Brienne.

Brienne knew that Johanna was probably pestered by other members of the staff with questions about her, so she tried to give snippets of info about herself too. She made herself homesick describing all the things that made Tarth beautiful, that made life there so sweet. No one would describe Casterly Rock as sweet.

And then there was Jaime. He seemed to have switched tact, after her exhibit in the bedroom. Instead of not speaking to her, whenever they were together he spoke all the time. He narrated his dinner, the chewing of potatoes. He threw in sly comments about her looks. He had figured out that she didn’t like being called “My bride,” so he used it all the time.

“Could this dinner be any less appealing?” he said one night, poking at a slice of pie in his plate. He had a point — it was deeply unappetizing. “The only thing uglier is my dining companion,” he said, shooting her a look. It was also bolder than his usual jabs.

She looked him dead in the eyes, cut a huge chunk of her pie off, shoved it in her mouth, chewed, and swallowed.

“Think about how much your stock must have fallen,” she said, “that the only girl in the Seven Kingdoms who’d marry you is someone as ugly as me.”

So that stopped the comments about her looks.

Another day, she was sitting in her library, flipping through a book of old maps, when Jaime burst in. Both of them were shocked to see the other one.

“What are you doing in here?” he said, not mad, just confused.

“Reading,” she said, holding up the old book. “Is there something you rather I’d be doing, dear
husband?”

He flinched at that, she noticed. But he decided to ignore her and searched through the shelves. She thought it was taking him a long time, but she didn’t offer any help.

Finally, he selected a thick book. He cradled it in his bad arm. He turned to her, gave her a nod, and left.

Another day, Johanna was brushing Brienne’s hair, trying to get it to do something even slightly appealing.

“My lady,” she began, as sweetly as possible. “Is this how long your hair usually is?”

Brienne let out a small laugh. “No, it’s usually much shorter.”

“Shorter?!” Johanna exclaimed. “Then why not cut it, my lady?”

Brienne fingered her hair, showing Johanna how short it usually was.

“I didn’t think short hair was appropriate for Lady Lannister.”

“But you are Lady Lannister,” Johanna said matter of factly. “Anything you do is appropriate, just because you did it.”

Brienne smiled. She didn’t think it was that simple. And yet...

Lady Lannister made sure she arrived at dinner that night nice and early. When her husband walked in, he didn’t even glance toward her. But when he sat, he tossed a single look her way — then immediately looked back again.

Brienne tried not to smile as he slid his gaze over her newly shorn hair. It wasn’t quiet as short as she’d usually worn it on Tarth, but Johanna had found a length and style that was both becoming and easy. Brienne thought she ought to give her a raise, though she didn’t know how much she was paid.

Jaime eventually looked away and carried on as he always did, with a stream of nonsense meant to provoke her. She threw in a sharp barb of her own here and there. But she noticed he kept looking at her head — at her hair. Every time he did, she felt the tops of her ears must have been glowing bright red. If they were, he didn’t comment on that either.

And so another night passed like it always did. They ate dinner, they went to their room, he unlaced her corset, and they fitfully slept.

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Jaime Lannister had started waking up earlier than his wife to prove a point. What the point was exactly, he wasn’t sure. That he didn’t need her? Of course he didn’t. That he didn’t want her? Of course he didn’t. That he had better things to do than spend time with her?

But quickly his routine had morphed, though he wasn’t sure when. Every day he would wake up bright and early and lie in bed and watch his wife sleep.

Brienne of Tarth had been nothing like he expected. When his father had ordered him to marry the ugly maiden daughter of Lord Selwyn Tarth, who people called an ogre, he had pictured a dumb, ugly, dull woman who would be so grateful to have been married at all that she’d let him do
whatever he wanted until she gave up and went back to Tarth.

But Brienne was none of those things. She was clearly smarter than him, which deeply annoyed him. And nothing about her was dull. He wanted to ignore her, but ignoring her felt like trying to ignore the sun.

So he got his fill in the morning while she slept. He wondered what life had been like on Tarth. He wondered what she thought of him (nothing good, probably, which he deserved). He wondered what it was she wanted. She obviously hadn’t wanted to marry him, not that he could blame her. But she had.

Of course, he would find none of the answers by staring at her head. But talking to her felt...he wasn’t going to try that.

He should have said something about her haircut, he realized now. It could’ve been an olive branch, a bridge across the divide. Now it was too late.

Eventually he pulled himself away, and strapped on his gold hand, and went out for another day of ignoring her. His wife.

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At dinner that night, she surprised him. He was just about to dig into his potatoes when she spoke, unprompted. He dropped his fork on the floor, that’s how surprised he was.

“Ser Jaime,” she said. She waited for him to retrieve his fork. He hated that she had the upper hand now.

“I was wondering if there might be someone on the Rock who would be a suitable sparring partner for me?”

He knocked his glass of wine over — with his good hand. She seemed amused by this reaction.


“Surely my father told you that I’m accomplished with the sword. I used to train all the squires on Tarth.” Brienne knew her father had told him no such thing, but he couldn’t admit it.

“You want to spar the squires?” he asked, smirking.

“No, dear husband, I used to train the squires. I want to spar the knights.”

He rubbed his forehead with his hand.

“You’re not sparring with my knights,” he said, reflexively. “They’ll hurt you.”

“Or I’ll hurt them,” she said, taking a big sip of wine. Why had Jaime gotten the most troublesome wife in the Seven Kingdoms?

And then he had an ingenious thought, perhaps the first of his life.

“Spar me,” he said. She raised an eyebrow. “If you win — which you won’t — you can spar my knights. And if you can’t, you’re done.”

“You can’t tell me what to do,” she said, stabbing a piece of steak.

“Yes but I can tell my knights what to do.” She frowned, then looked down at his hands.
“Yes, with my left hand,” he said, reading her mind. He held a knife up as proof that he was fine. So what that he’d barely practiced with his left hand? He was Jaime Lannister. Surely he could beat a woman.

Though he’d never seen a woman looking quite so fierce...
Brienne didn’t sleep well, but her husband was still already gone when she woke up bright and early. She just wanted to catch him one day, rolling out of bed, or even still asleep. But it wasn’t to be today.

Johanna helped her dress in trousers instead of a gown. Brienne didn’t need help with that, but she didn’t feel like hurting the girl’s feelings. She felt like she was on the precipice of something, and this wasn’t the time to alienate people.

She followed her husband’s directions out of the castle and into the old gold mine. He didn’t want anyone to see him sparring his wife, which she understood. Of course, he could’ve shown her the way, but she imagined that didn’t appeal to his sense of drama. Honestly she wasn’t mad he wasn’t there. She was nervous.

It was obvious to Brienne she was going to win. The question was, how would she win. She wanted him to know she was good, that she was better than him, especially with his left hand. She wanted him to know she wasn’t to be trifled with. That she was serious. That she was worthy.

But she also realized she shouldn’t embarrass him. She didn’t know, really, if he was a man of his word. If his pride were wounded, he might decide she couldn’t spar with anyone anyway. And everyone knew lions are proud.

She was sure she followed his directions perfectly, but she still got lost. She assumed that was part of his plan to unsettle her. It didn’t work.

Eventually she found him, waiting with two swords for sparring. He did a double take when he noticed she was wearing trousers, but said nothing. Did he think she’d wear a dress? Did he not think she was taking this seriously?

The location he had chosen was deserted and mostly dark. The few torches threw shadows on his face, making him look, she regretted to notice, even more handsome.

Wordlessly, he threw her sword to her. It was a terrible throw, but she caught it.

She closed her eyes and took a centering breath.

“I have your word,” she said as she opened them, “that if you lose, I get to spar with whoever I want.”

“Yes,” he said, annoyed and — was that a note of fear?

“Even if your pride is wounded when you lose?” she added in, a little snicker in her voice.

“My pride doesn’t wound,” he growled. She nodded, confident that she’d covered her bases.

She raised her sword, ready to begin. He raised his. She thought his hand might be shaking, but he ignored it so she did too.

And then they were off.

Jaime’s confidence had shook the minute he picked up his sword, but he was feeling a little better now. He was matching her move for move, party for parry. He protected himself here, he almost
got ahead of her there. The sword felt so heavy in his left hand, but he was really doing it.

He had to admit she was much more talented than he expected. More graceful with a sword in her hand than she was anywhere else, she moved with smoothness and strength. She was bold on the attack and kept coming for him, but he was able to keep her off. Her eyes were shining in a way he’d never seen before.

They worked in silence for a couple minutes. He realized he was getting sweaty, and he wasn’t sure how much longer he would last. But maybe he could tire her out first...

“Imagine if I had my right hand,” he said, in a tone he thought was cutting and biting and clever. She said nothing back.

He looked up at her face for a moment. She wasn’t sweaty. She had the strangest look in her eyes. And it hit him like a ton of bricks: She wasn’t trying. She was humoring him. Pitying him, maybe.

His face got hot. His heart was pounding. His ears burned. His left hand hurt so much — his sword was too heavy. And she could see it all.

His rage surged up in him and he charged. She blocked him and blocked him and blocked him.

Brienne nodded, as if deciding to end it, and in three swift movements she did. It wasn’t a contest. She has been humoring him. His sword was on the ground, his wrist was killing him, and he was gasping for air. She didn’t have a single hair out of place.

Finally, red started to spread across her face, but it was embarrassment, not fatigue. She didn’t know what to say to him. He didn’t know what to say to her. He wanted to disappear.

So he turned away and did just that.

—-

She ate dinner alone. She was still wearing her trousers — she hadn’t gone back to their bed chamber for fear that he’d be there. She kept hoping he was just running late for dinner, that he’d been held up by work or something, but she knew it wasn’t true. She held off starting her meal for as long as possible until she had no other choice. The cook apologized that her fish was mostly cold. She hadn’t noticed.

Brienne made the long climb to their bedchamber alone. It felt spooky. Now her heart really was pounding. She thought she could hear it in her ears.

She stood outside the door a moment, trying to divine if he was inside. She took a breath and opened the door.

He wasn’t. She swore under her breath.

She sat at her vanity and started to brush her hair. She just wished she knew where he was. That he was OK. She hadn’t meant ... for any of this.

She jumped when he opened the door a moment later. He looked tired, but no worse for wear. They made eye contact, then both quickly looked away. She went back to brushing her hair, which was so short now there really wasn’t any point.

He poured himself a cup of wine, which he swallowed in a quick gulp.
“Did you eat?” she asked matter of factly, but softly. He shook his head.

“It’s fine,” he said, waving her off. He sounded hoarse. He walked over to her, she wasn’t sure what he was going to do. She held her breath. He came up behind her and started to untie her corset. She breathed out.

“You’re getting better with your left hand,” she said softly. He grunted; he didn’t agree. “You are. Think about how long it took you to untie my wedding dress.”

They both grimaced at the memory. But he knew she was right. He mumbled something.

“What was that?” she asked, trying to sound kind.

“You don’t get it,” he said, walking over to their bed and sitting down. She turned to face him fully.

“So tell me,” she offered. He bit his upper lip, considering. He lifted his gold hand up.

“This was the only good part of me,” he said, so quietly. “I could fight. And now I can’t. I can’t fight and I can’t write and I can barely pour wine without spilling it everywhere.”

She still wanted to ask what had happened, but she didn’t.

“But you’re getting better,” she said again. “You don’t spill wine all the time. You can practice writing. You can practice fighting!”

He shook his head. “You don’t know how long it took me to learn to write the first time.”

She rolled her eyes. “Yes, it’s too bad you still have the intelligence of a seven-year-old boy.” He grunted.

“And I can’t practice fighting,” he said. “I can’t let anyone know I can’t fight now, so there’s no one to spar with.” She let out a short, rude laugh.

“Maybe you do have the intelligence of a child.” He didn’t know what she meant. “If only there were someone who already knew you couldn’t fight, who was just aching to practice sword fighting herself, who has literally nothing else to do all day.”

He rose and started to undress for bed.

“You?” he spat. “You want me to train with you?”

“Yes. It’s a very nice thing for me to offer, to spend my time helping you,” she said.

“You just said you have nothing better to do,” he quipped as he pulled his shirt off.

“Maybe I was lying. Maybe I was planning to get really into embroidering handkerchiefs for my husband.”

They stared each other down. She didn’t know why she was offering to help him when he’d been such a .... such a monster from the moment she’d arrived. And yet.

He nodded. That was it. She finally rose and dressed for bed. They didn’t speak again until they had both been under the blanket a long while.

“Brienne,” he whispered, so softly she almost thought she was imagining it.
“Mhm?”

“Thank you.”
For the rest of her life, Brienne would think of that night as the beginning of everything.

But it took a few years before she had enough perspective.

The next morning when she woke up, her husband was sitting at the table, eating breakfast. He’d summoned enough for both of them.

“Hurry up and get dressed,” he growled once he realized she was awake. “I have meetings at midday.”

She didn’t hurry, on principle. She liked watching him sulk as he picked at his oatmeal. Once she was in her trousers, she slowly ate some fruit, just to make him squirm. When she reached for more tea, he bellowed, “That’s enough!” and stormed out. Suppressing a laugh, she followed.

That first day, they practiced mostly in silence. He clearly didn’t enjoy taking direction from her, but he really had no choice as they ran drills. Halfway through, she noticed he kept wincing. She figured his left hand, unused to so much activity, was bothering him.

“Let’s take a break,” she suggested. He narrowed his eyes but said nothing, so she knew she was right about the pain.

They leaned against the wall in silence for a few moments, drinking water.

“What meetings do you have today, Ser Jaime?” she asked, excessively polite. He grunted

“Something about ... the harvest. There’s worry we don’t have enough stored for winter. The Westerlands aren’t know for their farming prowess,” he said. “And we can’t buy more to make up for it, for some reason.”

“Probably no one else is selling,” Brienne said. “Everyone to worried about winter, so they don’t care about gold — they want wheat.” He grunted again.

“That sounds vaguely familiar,” he said. “I don’t...” He picked up his sword again, and they continued their drills, dropping the thought.

“Were you not preparing to become lord of the Rock your whole life?” she asked, before she realized it was a little rude. He grimaced but shook his head.

“I wasn’t,” he said, matter of factly. “I planned on being a heroic knight who died valiantly in battle and had lots of songs written about him. I guess I got halfway there.”

She couldn’t tell if he was joking.

“My father thought I was too dumb,” he added. “Not that he wanted Tyrion in charge either.”

She didn’t respond. They kept practicing.

“And what, my wife, were you preparing to become on Tarth?” he asked, raising his eyebrow.
“I planned on becoming a heroic knight who had lots of songs written about her,” she said, not missing a beat. “But I was going to die in old age, on Tarth, surrounded by my eleven great grandchildren.”

That caught him off guard. She disarmed him, his sword falling to the ground. He was still looking at her like she was ... a puzzle. She looked away, a blush starting to spread across her cheeks. She’d revealed more than she meant to.

The next day during training, she got to hear about his meeting from the day before, which hadn’t gone well. His advisors seemed a bit clueless, and he was out of his depth.

“Maybe you need to visit the farmers yourself,” she offered.

His instinct was to tell her that was ridiculous, that the Lord of the Rock was beneath such things. But winter was coming. She had a point.

Eventually, they both found it easy to talk to each other with swords in their hands, much easier than it was to talk at any other time of day.

He told her about playing hide and seek in the abandoned mines with Tyrion and Cersei. Once they both forgot about him for hours, and he just sat in the dark, waiting. It felt so long, he imagined when they found the whole world would be changed. His septa found him, and he got in trouble for missing dinner.

She told him about learning to sail on Tarth. She told him about learning to swim in the sapphire blue ocean. He thought it funny that the girl with the bluest eyes in all of Westeros was from the sapphire island, but he kept that to himself. It was easy now to picture her at nine, ten, eleven, an only child getting into all sorts of shenanigans on her own.

He told her about squiring for Lord Sumner Crakehall. She told him about how she worshipped the knights on Tarth, who only let her follow them around because she was the lord’s daughter.

She told him about her septa punishing her for her terrible stitches, her atrocious weaving, her bad table manners. He told her about how long it took for him to learn to read and write, his father sitting over him in the library until he got it right. She wanted to help him, but she didn't know what to do.

Though they did slowly figure out other things for her to do. Lord Selwyn Tarth had done a much better job of training his heir to be charge than Lord Tywin Lannister had done with his. Brienne was good at math. She was good at politics, charming when she needed to be (Jaime didn't know how to feel that she never turned her charm on for him). She understand farming 100 times better than he did, and she was a much quicker reading. In a few months, he realized he depended on her. He was stubborn, but he didn't completely mind the feeling.

She noticed that he never called her ugly anymore. She tried not to think about it.

One day they were sparring, and Brienne thought she'd gotten the best of him again. She slashed her sword down — and he caught it in his gold hand. It rang out when the metal slammed into the metal. They stood there, staring at each other, both shocked. Then he laughed. She smiled.

"I never thought to do that before," he said. "You've taught me well, wife." She didn't hate when he called her wife anymore — or rather, she only sometimes hated it. It depended on his tone.

"I hate that hand," she said, absentmindedly. He looked taken aback. "No, not — I just hate that it's gold. It's so ... garish."
"I'm Lord of Casterly Rock," he said, defensively. "It was decided that it befit my position." She raised an eyebrow. "My father..." he mumbled by way of explanation.

"And isn't it heavy? When we got married, I thought it was so heavy," she added. "Isn't it uncomfortable?"

It was too heavy. He hated it. It hadn't occurred to him to get rid of it before.

Brienne tried not to be visibly surprised when he stopped strapping it on every day. But she was still a little smug.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading this AU while so much good canon stuff is going on. i solemnly swear to give j and b a happy ending here at least. (and thanks for all the comments!)
Months slid by this way. Brienne wasn’t sure they were quite friends — nothing was ever easy between them — but they were friendly, sometimes. They worked together well as a team, when they wanted to. Sometimes their sparring — both physical and verbal — got more intense than it should have, but it was like rolling down a hill. She felt like she was falling with no ground beneath her feet, and it was scary but it was also exhilarating.

Jaime still woke up before her every morning. He still laid in bed and watched her sleep. He had lots of thoughts about her that he did his best to never analyze. Sometimes he thought up questions to ask her while they were sparring, when everything seemed less serious and a little looser. They rarely spoke in their bedchamber and they never spoke after their heads hit the pillow. To do so would cross a line, though what the line was and why he didn’t want to cross it, he wasn’t quite as sure anymore.

“We can’t spar today,” he said to her one morning, after she’d woken up. They had rarely missed a day, except when his wrist was bothering him too much. “I have to go to Kayce, speak to Lord Kenning.”

Brienne was surprised by her acute disappointment. Training was the highlight of her day, but she shouldn’t be this letdown to skip one day. And yet…

“Why isn’t he coming to The Rock?” she asked as she watched him dress. Jaime had gotten better about visiting parts of the Westerlands, but it was unlike him to make a sudden trip like this.

“Since it’s a bit of a delicate situation, I’m surprising them,” he said as he pulled on his red and gold tunic. He usually avoided his house colors, but today he was trying to make a statement about who was Lord Lannister, it seemed.

Lord Kenning hadn’t paid the amount of tax he was meant to, Brienne remembered. Jaime’s council was unsure what move to take next with the old lord, afraid to appear either too weak or too strong. It could’ve been an honest mistake, but it could’ve been a sign of his discontent, or a test to see how Jaime would respond, a precursor to something bolder.

Jaime looked in the mirror, stroking his beard, contemplative.

“Don’t shave,” Brienne blurted out. He turned to look at her and raised an eyebrow.

“You like my beard, wife?” he asked with a smirk. She did, but she didn’t want to admit it.

“It makes you look friendlier,” she said. “You have a very stern chin.” He looked in the mirror again. Was his chin stern? She rolled her eyes at him, but smiled.

“Take me with you,” she said, rising from bed. He let out a little laugh.

“You won’t miss me long, wife,” he said. “It’s just a quick ride on horseback. I’ll be home for supper.”

“Oh I won’t miss you husband,” she said as she walked over and handed him a hairbrush. He looked in the mirror again. Did his hair look bad? “I just think your sudden arrival will be taken more amicably with your new wife by your side.”

She had a point, which still annoyed him a little.
“I wasn’t planning on taking the carriage,” he mumbled as he strapped on his gold hand. He didn’t know why he was being so difficult.

“I can ride a horse,” she said, offense slipping into her voice.

“Fine,” he said. “Hurry up, I want to leave soon.” Her maid Joanna had appeared seemingly out of nowhere to help her dress.

“Joanna,” he said, startling the girl. He shot her his best golden lion smile, which he still had a trace of, after all the time.

“Yes my lord?” she said, a blush rising to her cheeks. Brienne was ready to chide him for being rude to her maid, who always dressed her quickly.

“Dress my wife in her light blue dress. It makes her eyes...you know.” Now Brienne was the one blushing. She hoped he didn’t notice. He did. He felt a little something in his chest, but he decided not to think about it.

Brienne had, of course, been right, and going to Kayce together was the correct choice. The elderly Lord and Lady Kenning thought it wonderful that he had brought his wife to visit them. They made sure to show her the beach and listened attentively as she talked about what was different on the coast in Tarth.

“The Sapphire Isle,” Lady Kenning said, wistfully. “I’ve always wanted to visit. Is the water really bluer there?” It was, Brienne assured her.

During tea, Jaime slipped in the issue with Lord Kenning’s taxes, very casually and easily. The old man assured him that it was just a clerical issue. Maybe Jaime was just in good spirits, but he believed him. He knew nothing of that visit would’ve gone quite as well without his wife.

Soon they were off, astride their horses and headed back for the Rock.

“I didn’t know Lord Tywin let his son have a love marriage,” Lady Kenning said to her husband as they watched the pair depart.

“I don’t think he did,” her husband said, slipping his hand in hers.

“Even luckier, then,” she said, as they went back inside their castle together.

Brienne felt that their horses were taking them back home faster than they’d gotten there. Maybe they wanted dinner, too. But she regretted it. She’d seen so little of the Westerlands, she was trying to cherish every branch of every tree. She would suggest more excursions like this one in the future.

Halfway home, they stopped by a stream to let their horses drink.

“We’ll be home before sundown,” he said, looking at the height of the sun in the sky.

“If we hurry, we might have time to spar before we eat,” she added, with a grin. Her horse started walking down stream, so she followed it.

“You’re so violent, wife,” he said with lightness in his voice. He searched in his bags for a snack he had brought. “I think you just might be trying to stab me.”

“Ser Jaime,” she said, something ice cold suddenly in her voice. His heart jumped into his throat as
he turned around. There was his beautiful wife, with a robber’s sword against her throat.

“He turned around. There was his beautiful wife, with a robber’s sword against her throat.”

“Let her go,” he yelled as he unsheathed his sword. His hand was shaking and he felt like he couldn’t breathe. Oh no oh no oh no.

“Give me that pretty golden hand,” the robber said, “And I might let your ugly wife go.” Brienne was trying to tell him something with her eyes, but he couldn’t figure out what it was. His heart was galloping in his chest and his hand wouldn’t stop shaking. He was afraid he was going to drop his sword, and then they’d really be screwed.

“Jaime,” she said, so calmly. Did she want him to fight? Did she want him to give over his hand? He was stuck, he was frozen, he was going to let her die.

Miraculously, he noticed her right hand twitch. Oh. That’s what she wanted. She was right.

In one awkward motion, he chucked his sword at her. The robber stepped back in his confusion, dropping his hand from her neck, giving Brienne just enough room to catch it. Jaime stumbled backward, falling to the ground.

But Brienne? She didn’t miss a single step. She was on her attacker in an instant. He was relentlessly on the attack, and she parried every single blow like it was nothing. Her blue skirt swirled around her, mesmerizing. Jaime had trained with her every single day, and still he was in awe of her prowess and strength.

In an instant her sword was at the robber’s throat.

“Drop your sword,” she said, “And we’ll let you live. We’ll bring you back to the Rock and you’ll face trial.”

“Surrender to some bitch? Never,” he spat at her. She nodded and pierced him, taking no pleasure in it.

She took a moment to breath, then turned to her husband. They were both pale.

“I’ve never...” she said, breathlessly. He nodded, still speechless. She helped him off the ground and handed him back his sword. His hand shook again as he put it back in its sheath.

Her horse had run away in the chaos. Wordlessly, they negotiated their way on to the one horse, her in the front, him behind her. He drove the horse as fast as he could, but it was slower with both of them on it.

When they arrived at the castle, just after sundown, the staff were abuzz. What took them so long? Was that blood on her dress? Where was the second horse? Jaime couldn’t find any words.

“We were apprehended by a robber when we stopped for water,” Brienne told the maester, solemnly. “Ser Jaime killed him. But my horse ran off.”

He didn’t know what to say. He couldn’t contradict her, but he felt dirtied by the lie. He appreciated the lie, which made him feel even dirtier.

Brienne excused herself from everyone and went down to the baths. Joanna offered to help her in the steamy room, but she just wanted to be alone.

She sank her body into the scalding water. She’d always imagined what it would be like to be in a real battle, but she’d never imagined what it would be like to take a life. She didn’t like it.
wanted to disappear.

She didn’t know how long she sat there before the door opened. She turned to tell Joanna she wasn’t ready to get out, but it was her husband.

“Ser Jaime,” she whispered as he walked over and sat at the edge of the bath opposite of her.

“Wife,” he said as he disrobed and slid in. Neither could look the other in the eye.

After a long while, he opened his mouth.

“Why did you lie?” he mumbled.

“I don’t know,” she said, quietly.

“I don’t think that’s true,” he said as he ran water through his hair.

She tried again. “I didn’t want you...to be…”

“Embarrassed?” he finished. She neither confirmed nor denied. “I’ve been embarrassed every day since this happened,” he said, waving his stump.

“What happened?” she finally asked, so softly. He almost couldn’t believe it took her this long. He floated a little closer to her.

“There was a small uprising in Silverhill,” he said. He closed his eyes — he couldn’t say this while looking at her. “I led a few men to quash it.”

He pictured himself in his golden armor, astride his horse, laughing in the wind. He was shining. He wasn’t sure he’d ever really been that bright or that happy, but it’s how he pictured himself now. Superior. Stupid.

“It should have been quick and easy,” he said, rubbing soap over his shoulders, just to have something to do. “But I was … arrogant. They took me hostage.”

He opened his eyes. Brienne had floated over to him: She was almost in arms’ reach and looking him right in the eyes. He almost started to cry.

“They asked my father for a ransom. He said no — he doesn’t negotiate with rebels. So they took my hand.”

She wanted to reach out to him, but she didn’t. He had to finish.

“That was a mistake, actually,” he said. “Because now my father really wasn’t going to pay anything for a one-handed idiot knight, even if it was his son. But the men in my command ambushed the place and freed me, and no one found out the truth.”

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of —” she began.

“It is,” he said, breaking eye contact with her. “Everybody lies for poor Jaime. Keep the myth alive that he’s some war hero when he’s a dumb, useless cripple.”

“Not dumb,” she said. “Not useless.” He let out one bitter laugh.

“My father was most concerned with what this said about him. That people thought he could be trifled with, that he was touchable. So he decided to marry me off, secure your father’s forces, let
“Don’t worry about me,” she said, and she meant it.

“I couldn’t even defend my wife,” he said, more to himself than her.

“Your wife doesn’t need defending.”

He looked up at her again, something hard in his face. “Why did you marry me, Brienne?”

She slid a few inches away from him. “My father set it up,” she said. “He told me to.”

“You see, I would’ve believed that before we met. But now I know you’re not the type of girl who does things just because someone else tells her to,” he said. He was right and she hated the feeling of it. “So why *did* you say yes?”

She considered her words for a moment. He watched the rise and fall of her chest.

“Tarth is a beautiful place,” she said. “But it’s not rich. The land isn’t good for farming. The merchants’ ships have been wrecked by too many storms. People have starved. My father said if I married you, we’d have money to help all of our people.”

He nodded. That sounded like his noble Brienne.

She continued, “I knew there must be something wrong with you if your father was trying to marry you off to ugly me —”

“Don’t call yourself ugly,” he mumbled.

“You used to do it every day,” she reminded him.

“Yeah, well…”

She went back to her story.

“But it’s not like I had any prospects. And now Tarth is thriving. The fleet has been upgraded. The farmers built a new irrigation system. And I could’ve done worse for a husband.”

He allowed himself a small smile. They sat in silence again as the water cooled.

After a long while, Jaime said, “That was the first man you killed.”

“That was the first man I *fought*,” she added. He nodded.

“I’d tell you it gets easier,” he said, “But it shouldn’t. If it does, something’s gone terribly wrong.”

She nodded. He put his hand under her chin, lifting it up, drawing her eyes to his.

“Thank you,” he said.

“Of course,” she whispered. He let go.

He rose from the bath, put his robe on, and fetched hers. As she rose from the water, he wrapped the robe around her shoulders.

“Do you want Joanna?” he asked softly. She shook her head. He took her hand. They walked out
together.
Jaime slept terribly that night. His dreams were full of knives and darkness and women screaming. No, not women: Brienne. In his dreams he stood there frozen and watched her struggle against the robber’s blade. She didn’t live and she didn’t die — they were stuck in this one unmovable moment because he was too afraid to do anything at all.

After an eternity, the robber moved his blade across her neck and Jaime woke with a shout. He blinked his eyes open but he couldn’t see. It was still night. He gasped for air.

“Jaime?” a quiet voice asked. “What’s the matter?”

He couldn’t say anything, his heart was pounding so badly. Something was reaching for his hand: her fingers, he realized. She held his hand in hers.

“It’s ok,” she said, giving him a light squeeze. “It’s safe. Just focus on breathing.”

He listened. He breathed in and out. His heart slowed down.

“Did I wake you?” he asked after a while.

“No,” she said, squeezing his hand again. He squeezed back. They sat in the silence.

“I dreamed of you,” he whispered after a while. He stared up at the ceiling, too afraid to look her way even in the dark. “You died because I couldn’t save you.”

“But I didn’t die,” she whispered. “You threw me the sword. We lived.” He released a puff of air from his mouth; he didn’t believe her.

“Go to sleep, Jaime Lannister,” she said, letting go of his hand.

“Go to sleep, Brienne of Tarth,” he said, taking hers back. She squeezed. They slept.

In the morning when she woke up, he wasn’t in their bed. He wasn’t in their room. She didn’t like it.

“Jaime?” she called out, as she rolled out from under the blankets.

She noticed a note on the table, next to a bowl of fruit. Shaking just a little, she opened it. The penmanship was sloppy, but not illegible.

Sapphire girl -

Had to run to a meeting. Thought we could both use a break from playing with swords anyway. I’ll see you at dinner.

Yours,

J

She smiled to herself as she read it over again. She pictured him setting ink to paper — his least
favorite activity — for her.

She walked over to her dresser and opened up a small wooden box her father had given to her. It had been her mother’s, he said, but there was nothing inside. She folded the note and placed it inside. Closing the lid, she felt a little silly, but she didn’t want to get rid of it.

She decided to go to Lannisport. She was too antsy to stay inside all day.

She had Johanna dress her in a gown, since people were liable to recognize her as the lady of the Rock, but she slipped a knife into her belt loop. That robber had probably been a chance encounter, but in case it wasn’t...

“Johanna,” she said, once she was dressed. “Would you like to come to Lannisport with me?”

The maid was taken aback and gave a small bow.

“Milady, you want me to accompany you in the city?” she asked, so quietly.

“Yes,” Brienne said with a smile. “My husband is busy, and I’d rather not walk around alone.”

Johanna nodded. “It would be my honor.”

Bringing Johanna was a brilliant move, Brienne quickly realized, because she knew just about every one. She introduced her to the fishermen’s wives, selling their husband’s catches. On the waterfront, she met the dockworkers, who couldn’t have been kinder.

“Have you ever seen a mermaid, milady?” one of them, an older man, asked her.

“No,” she said, with a little laugh. “I don’t think we have those on Tarth.”

“A pity,” he said. He wore an eyepatch over one eye. “This port is famous for its mermaids.”

“Oh is it?” she asked, with a little smirk. Johanna was stifling a laugh.

“Certainly, milady!” he said, only emboldened by their disbelief. “Sundown and sunset are the best times for spotting them, but you could maybe see one now. Watch the water Lady Lannister, and you’ll see a sparkling in the waves.”

She looked. The water was sparkling.

“Look closer and you’ll spot their silver hair as they swim out to sea. Close your eyes and you can hear their siren song.”

She closed her eyes. She heard the waves hitting the dock beneath them. She felt the salty wind hitting her face. She listened closer. Maybe she did hear it…

Later, she and Johanna walked through the market together. There were wares from all over the seven kingdoms: rainbow mirrors, intricate fabrics, and sharp knives of every size and shape. She bought Johanna a bangle she caught her maid staring at. The young girl practically fell over herself thanking Brienne for the gift until she told her to stop. She thought absentmindedly of buying her husband something, but she couldn’t think of anything he wanted or needed.

They continued to zig zag through the stalls. Brienne figured they ought to go back home soon — the shopkeepers were packing up for the night, and she didn’t want to be late for dinner.

The next seller had vials and vials of fabulous inks and hundreds of ostentatious quills. Brienne
scanned them with her eyes, until her eyes caught one that was deep forest green. She twirled it in
her hand, considering. She pictured Jaime using it to write her another note, a little wrinkle in his
eyebrow has he searched for the right word. She bought it.

When she arrived at dinner, her husband was already seated. He stood up when she entered the
room.

“Lady Brienne,” he said a little awkwardly.

“Husband,” she said with a small smile and a nod. They sat.

“I was sorry to cancel our meeting this morning,” he said, and it was true. But they couldn’t talk
openly with the servants around. The truth was, he'd missed her desperately all day. He couldn't say
that, though. She nodded.

“Are you feeling better this evening?” she asked as she cut into her fish. She wondered if the
dockman she’d met today had brought it to shore.

“I am,” he said, quietly.

“I went to Lannisport today,” she said. “Johanna accompanied me. Met all sorts of interesting
people.”

“Did you?” he asked with a little smirk as he drank his wine. She was so excited and open, it was a
little infectious.

“Did you know there are mermaids off shore?” she said, grinning. “The men of the docks told me.”

“Tyrion convinced me to go mermaid chasing with him once,” he said. “One of the servants lent us
a rowboat. We capsized, we almost drowned.” He smiled at the memory.

“Did the mermaids save you?” she asked with a laugh. He shook his head.

“Some nights I think I hear their song, though,” he said quickly. “If you go to one of the high
balconies…”

She stood up. “We have to go check,” she said.

They practically ran up the stairs. Brienne wasn’t sure why she felt so giddy today. Maybe it was
the fresh air, or the smell of the ocean. Maybe it was some sort of reaction to almost dying the day
before. Maybe she was just happy to be with her husband…

He brought her to a small balcony she hadn’t found on her own. It had the perfect view of the
ocean.

“This was my favorite balcony growing up,” he said as he leaned out against the railing. “It was
hard to find, everyone forgot about it.”

She joined him at the edge, looking out at the ocean. They stayed like that a few moments,
listening.

“I … don’t hear anything,” Brienne admitted.

“Me neither!” he said with a laugh. He turned to face her. “Maybe Lannisport isn’t so magical after
all.”
“Oh, that reminds me,” she said, reaching into the purse at her waist. “I got you … something.” She felt self conscious, suddenly. What if he didn’t like it? What if it made him insecure about writing? What if he laughed at it?

She pulled it out anyway — a perfect green quill. She held it in the air between them. He stared at it, then back at her.

“I…it’s a quill,” she said, stupidly, she felt. “I just thought…it reminded me of you.”

He took it from her and held it in his hand, twirling it around, admiring it.

“Thank you,” he said, and put it in his pocket. “We should finish dinner,” he added, as he turned toward the door. She felt cold all of a sudden.

But then he turned back and smiled at her and they went inside.

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They continued on. The first time they sparred again, Brienne felt that Jaime was nervous, jumpy. His hand was even shaking a little. But she said nothing and he got over it. He was getting stronger. Neither said it aloud, but they both saw it.

His handwriting was also getting better. Brienne had a perfect view of that, too, since he’d taken to leaving her little notes all the time. They were always just slight little things: “Do you think the cook has been serving too much fish,” “I might join you for lunch, Sapphire,” “Will it ever stop raining? Did it rain like this on Tarth?” She saved them all in her box anyway. She knew he wrote them with the green quill.

One night after dinner, he was untying her corset and she was watching him in the mirror. He had the strangest smile on his face.

“What’s going on, husband?” she asked, suspiciously. He met her eyes in the mirror and tried to look innocent. He failed.

“Nothing,” he said, trying to keep a grin from his lips. He focused on the knot again, finally breaking it free. In a moment he was done.

He mumbled something she couldn’t hear.

“What was that, husband?” she asked.

“I got you something, Sapphire girl,” he repeated, barely above a whisper. Whenever he called her that, she felt...something.

He walked over to his dresser, then walked back, a box in his hand. He gave it to her and looked away immediately.

She opened it slowly. Inside was a gold necklace, with a perfect sapphire. She looked up at him.

“It used to be a ring,” he said in a rush, “But I didn’t think you wanted a ring, so I had them turn it into a necklace. But if you want a ring, we can turn it back, I didn’t —”

“It’s beautiful,” she said, unable to look him right in the face. He smiled.

He wanted to put it on her, but he couldn’t with one hand. She put it on herself. She smiled at herself in the mirror. He wanted to kiss her — but where had that feeling come from?
“Thank you Ser Jaime,” she said. She rose to dress for bed. He wanted to say something else, but he didn’t know what.

The next morning the unthinkable happened: She woke up before him. She was so afraid to move, lest she disrupted his sleep.

Instead she watched him. She let her eyes drink in the planes of his face in ways she never did when she was awake. She wasn’t afraid of him anymore, she trusted him completely, but still she could rarely bring herself to look him in the face full on. Not when he could look back.

She scanned his beard, which was sprinkled with more gray than the hair on his head. She followed its line to his chin, his perfect chin. If she ever kissed him, that’s where she would do it first — but she knocked that thought away. That’s not the sort of thing they had. Yet what did they have?

Her hand reached to the necklace still around her neck.

Sometimes, Brienne thought of Jaime in ways that were … not ideal and she’d gotten good at making those thoughts go away. Of course, if there were any man in the seven kingdoms about whom those types of thoughts would be appropriate, it would be her own husband, and yet...

They had drawn a line between the two of them, and they never crossed it. They had gone right to the edge of the line a few times, but there it was, a no man’s land neither of them ever passed into. It was the third person in the room, unspeakable but always acknowledged, somehow.

What would happen if she did pass over it? If she reached out now and put her thumb at the top of his forehead, and dragged it down, the way she wanted to. Down the slope of his perfect nose, over his pouting lips, down his stubborn chin, straight to his heart. Would he wake up? Would he shout? Would they…

Her thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door. It was early for someone to come here. They knocked again, loudly. She watched her husband wake up.

“What is it?” he shouted, his voice hoarse with sleep.

“Urgent message from your father, my lord,” the servant said. Jaime turned to Brienne and seemed surprised she was awake. She nodded at him.

He rose from bed and opened the door. Snatching the message from the boy, he immediately sent him away. His hand might have been shaking as he opened the note.

She watched his forehead crinkle as he read. At the end of the message, he balled it up and threw it across the room.

“What’s the matter?” she asked. He snapped his head toward her, as if he’d forgotten she was there.

“My brother is getting married,” he said bitterly. He saw the puzzled look on her face. “Here. My father has decided the wedding should be here. So they’re all coming: my father, brother” — did she imagine a creek in his voice here? — “and sister. We’re planning the wedding.”

She laid back against the pillows and closed her eyes.

“Exactly,” he said and crawled back into bed. The day could wait.
thanks as always for the kudos and comments. praying for us as we go into episode 3.
Tyrion arrived at Casterly Rock two weeks before he was to wed Margaery Tyrell. He didn’t like being there, but it hadn’t been his decision. None of this had been his decision. Tywin ordered and he said yes because...well, it was complicated.

But Margaery was a beautiful girl and Tyrion — or Tywin — was lucky her grandmother died when she did because there’s not way the old woman would have agreed to the match, but her father had happily. And now their houses were to be joined. Wins all around.

Tyrion was met by his brother at the gate. He climbed out of his carriage and they embraced.

“I’ve missed you,” Tyrion said, and he meant it. He left King’s Landing was superior to Casterly Rock in every single way, except that there was no one there he trusted like his brother.

He looked his brother up and down. He seemed healthier than the last time they’d been together, shortly after he lost his hand. He had a beard, but it was nicely kept, and he was carrying himself with some measure of self-respect. Still, he was clearly anxious about something — but maybe it was just the imminent descent of their family, which was stressful enough for everyone involved.

“You look good, brother,” Jaime told the younger man. Tyrion had also grown a beard and he looked like a proper Lannister in his red and gold. They headed toward the castle.

“And where’s your bride?” Tyrion said, with a little smirk. “I’ve heard she’s famously hideous.”

His brother turned on him immediately, his face turning red. Tyrion took a step back, surprised.

“That’s my wife,” Jaime said in a fierce, angry whisper, more terrifying than a shout. “And you will respect her as such.” Tyrion has never seen his brother so mad. He stalked off. Tyrion struggled to follow.

“I didn’t mean —” he stumbled over his words. “I’d just heard she was — you know, rumors and such...”

“Lady Brienne…” Jaime didn’t know what to say. Lady Brienne was the sun. She was the reason he was alive. She was... He didn’t think his brother would understand — hells, he didn’t really understand himself. He let his voice trail off and just stared down at his brother instead. Tyrion nodded, though he was still confused.

Clarity came a few moments later when they met the lady herself in the hall.

“Lady Brienne,” Jaime said, standing up straighter, as if he’d been shocked by her appearance. “This is my brother Tyrion.”

Tyrion looked her over. She was indubitably the tallest woman he had ever seen. Her blonde hair was cut short and she was wearing trousers. Her smile was crooked and it looked like her nose had been broken at least once before.

Yet, he couldn’t deny that she had some sort of irresistible quality about her, an immediate kindness and strength. He wasn’t sure it was exactly beauty, but it was close.
“Lord Tyrion,” she said, her voice strong. “It’s lovely to meet you after all this time. Your brother speaks of you highly, and frequently.”

He looked over to Jaime, prepared to make a joke about his older brother being a liar, but much more interesting was the look he saw there.

The way his brother was looking at his wife reminded Tyrion of the fairytales they read as children. It was so open and pure he couldn’t even bring himself to laugh at it.

Until later. Later the brothers were alone, discussing preparations for the wedding. Jaime had calmed down a little bit, now that he knew his brother would treat Brienne with respect.

As their conversation about sleeping arrangements dragged on, Tyrion decided to spice things up.

“So how long have you been in love with your wife?” he asked, casually, as if asking what was for dinner.

“I — what?!” Jaime said. “I’m not — we’re not — what ever gave you that idea?” His face felt hot all of a sudden. He reached for more wine just to have something to do with his hands.

Tyrion raised his eyebrows in silence, which Jaime found even more infuriating.

“Lady Brienne is...my wife isn’t...” he couldn’t finish a sentence. Still, Tyrion was silent.

But Jaime couldn’t find the words. When he thought of his wife, he thought of warmth and bright blue and the taste of his favorite wine and the way her laugh was too loud. What did that all add up to?

Tyrion saw his brother frown as he worked on puzzling it out. He decided to rescue him.

“May you have a whole brood of Jaime Lannisters in no time,” he said, raising a glass. “Just don’t let them play hide and seek in the mines, Cersei always forgot I was there.”

Jaime made another face at that comment.

“Don’t count your nieces and nephews before they hatch...” he mumbled.

“What does that mean? Of course you’ll...” He saw his brother’s stricken face.

“It’s not like I could ever force her...” Jaime mumbled, looking away.

“You never consummated your marriage?!” Tyrion asked, genuinely shocked.

“Yes, please run around my home shouting that, thank you!” Jaime sniped.

This had been a new fear hanging over Jaime’s head — she could always have their marriage annulled. She could always leave him. She seemed fine with the status quo for now, but if he made a move to tip the scale and it wasn’t received kindly...

“She’s not in love with you?” Tyrion asked, simply stunned. He could believe his brother wasn’t sure of his own feelings, but how anyone could resist Jaime he didn’t know. Every girl they’d ever met in their entire lives has been in love with the Golden Lion of Casterly Rock, and now the one woman his brother wanted...

“Look at me,” Jaime said, sadly. “I’m not exactly a prize. I’m not nice, I’m not brave. I’m not smart. I’m not even handsome anymore. I have one hand I can barely scratch out a sentence with. I
spent months calling her ugly, to her face, every chance I got. Would you be in love with me?"

“You’re still a little handsome,” Tyrion offered, but Jaime didn’t bite.

Tyrion had to laugh. Jaime sneered at him.

“Well brother,” Tyrion said as he rose from the table. “I feel much better about my wedding now.”

Jaime rested his head on the table.

“And to think,” Tyrion added as he stood in the doorway. “Cersei’s not even here yet.”

It was going to be a long wedding.

—-

Brienne has been worried about her husband ever since he’d gotten the raven from his father about the wedding. It had made him anxious and hurried. He was rarely either of those things.

Brienne had met Margaery Tyrell once, at a banquet held by House Baratheon. She was stunning. Every man in the room had tried to dance with her, and she’s tried to give them all a moment in the sunlight of her face.

But she was also kind. That night, Brienne had been wearing a gown she hated. It was a hideous purple, for some reason she couldn’t remember, and enormous. She kept tripping over it. The high neck made her look dowdy and old. Brienne never thought she looked good in a dress, but she looked particularly terrible in this one.

As she stood against the wall and was ignored by scores of men, Margaery Tyrell appeared.

“Lady Brienne,” she said with a smile. Brienne didn’t know who she knew her name. She liked the way she said “lady” — most people said it to Brienne like it was a joke, like she was a joke, but Margaery said it like she meant every syllable.

“Lady Margaery,” Brienne said, returning the greeting.

“It’s lovely the make your acquaintance,” she said like she really meant it. “I’ve heard you’re quite the accomplished swordsman.”

Brienne’s jaw dropped. Margaery guessed what she was going to ask.

“Men are terrible secret keepers,” she said with a smile. “And they’re not much better at dancing.”

Brienne smiled at her. She didn’t feel quite as terrible anymore. She did refuse to wear the gown ever again, though.

So Brienne was happy that Jaime’s brother was marrying someone so lovely, but it also made her feel...inferior. She couldn’t help but imagine what everyone would be thinking — that handsome Jaime ought to be married to beautiful Margaery instead.

She pictured herself standing next to her two sister-in-laws. She’d never met Cersei, but even the servants who despised her couldn’t help but mention her beauty. So it would be two gorgeous
goddesses — and Brienne the ogre.

She was sure her husband would feel the same way when he saw Margaery. “If only I’d held out a little longer,” he’d think, “I could have someone beautiful and charming and agreeable. Instead of...”

She successfully avoided this line of inquiry during the daylight, but everything always felt worse at night.

So, like her husband, she tried to distract herself with wedding preparations. She picked flowers. She talked to the musicians. Johanna helped her pick out food. It was terrible and boring.

The only time she felt like herself — and the only time her husband seemed like himself — was when they were sparring. They could be vicious and brutal, both of them gasping for air, but a smile never really left his lips when he had a sword in his hand. She wished to keep it there.

She’s hoped that Tyrion’s arrival would calm Jaime, but he stayed just as anxious as ever. Actually, it might have been worse. He got quiet. She knew that couldn’t be good.

Then his father and sister arrived. The three of them waited for them outside. Jaime was deadly silent and Tyrion wouldn’t shut up. They both wore rich Lannister red, and she felt like she couldn’t have stuck out more in her dark blue.

The carriage arrived. First came out Lord Tywin. The old man almost seemed surprised by Brienne’s presence, as if he didn’t remember that he’d married off his son to her. He gave Tyrion and Jaime two haughty looks.

Then came Cersei, with Joffrey at her side. She was even more beautiful than Brienne had imagined. Her blonde hair was done up in an intricate top knot with more braids than Brienne could count. She wore her good looks like armor.

Joffrey, who Brienne knew was about 8, looked nothing like this mother. His black hair fell into his dark eyes. But when he smirked she saw the Lannister resemblance.

Cersei dropped her son’s arm to embrace her brother. She hadn’t seen him since he lost his hand. She looked him over like she wanted to make sure it was still him. She looked him over like she didn’t think it was.

She grabbed his gold hand and turned it over. Brienne saw Jaime grimace — she knew the scar there bothered him sometimes, especially if the prosthetic rubbed against it.

“It’s so heavy,” Cersei said.

“Yes,” Jaime said, not really looking at her. “Brienne doesn’t like it.”

Brienne blushed at the mention of her name. Cersei finally turned to look at her.

“Lady Brienne,” Cersei said. She said it in the viper way, the way that meant “I can’t believe the words coming out of my mouth.” “So nice to finally meet my brother’s wife.” That sounded like an insult too.

Brienne tried to smile, but the muscles in her face weren’t working in quite the right way.

“I’ve heard so much about you,” she croaked out, which wasn’t a lie. Cersei’s eyes narrowed.
“I’m almost taller than you, Uncle Tyrion,” Joffrey was saying, snidely.

“Of course you’ll be taller than your uncle,” a man said. It was Cersei’s husband, Robert Baratheon, carrying their daughter Marcella. Here’s where Joffrey and the little girl got their dark hair and pitch black eyes.

Brienne felt both of Cersei’s brothers stiffen as Robert approached. But her father was a Baratheon bannerman.

“Lady Brienne,” he said, with a genuine smile. “It’s good to see someone from our neck of the woods in the westerlands.”

She gave him a stiff smile.

“I’ve come to love to westerlands,” she said. “The people are good and just and kind.” She worried that she’d given too much away.

Robert didn’t agree. He stiffly greeted Jaime and Tyrion and walked inside with his daughter. Joffrey ran after him. Tywin had already disappeared. Cersei claimed Jaime’s arm and steered him inside. Tyrion walked off to speak to the stable master.

And so Brienne was alone. She took a deep breath. It was a wedding! It would be over soon! She’d killed a man! She could handle a little rudeness.

—

Tywin got Jaime alone after dinner. He called him into his study — which was really Jaime’s study now, but he didn’t bother to correct the older man. At first they sat in silence, Tywin’s judgement weighing on his son.

“The council has been telling me you’re doing a good job,” he said finally. Jaime didn’t know how to respond to praise.

“Thank you,” he mumbled. He shifted awkwardly in his chair, wishing to be gone.

“You’ve been a dutiful son,” Tywin added. Jaime’s guards went up. Two compliments in a row? He stayed silent.

“And now I have a new task for you,” he continued. Jaime sat up straighter. He knew whatever was coming, he wouldn’t like it.

“You’re going to annul your marriage,” Tywin said, as if he was asking his son to pass him the wine. Jaime stood up.

“No,” he said, slowly, “I don’t think I will.”

“We don’t need the Tarths now that we have the Tyrells,” Tywin continued as if his son hadn’t spoken. “And I think I can marry you off the eldest Stark girl.”

“I have a wife,” Jaime said again. “You picked her for me.”

“I couldn’t do any better with you then,” Tywin said. “Now I think I can. Word spread of that robber you killed. Everyone knows the Golden Lion is back.”

Jaime sat back down. His head was spinning.
“You can’t make me,” he said, realizing he sounded like a child.

“I know you haven’t consummated your marriage,” Tywin said, so casually.

“Tyrion,” Jaime mumbled.

“It wasn’t your brother,” Tywin said with a small laugh. “You might think you run the Rock, but I still do.”

Jaime had had enough. He stood again.

“I have done everything you asked. I married Brienne. I took over as Lord. We’re doing a good job. You can’t blow up my life because it suits you.”

“Blow up your life?” Tywin said. “Don’t be so dramatic. Don’t pretend you care about that ogre.”

“That’s my wife!” Jaime yelled, his golden hand smacking the desk. “And she is the lady of this Rock and you will respect her.”

With that, he was gone.

—-

Brienne fell asleep alone that night. She hated it. She wondered where he was, but, knowing the house was swarmed with Lannisters, she didn’t go look.

She dreamed she was in the mines, looking for Jaime, but she could never find him.

When she woke up, she was alone in their bed. But she knew he’d slept here. His side of the bed was mussed up and his pillow was still warm. He’d ordered her breakfast delivered.

She walked over to the table to grab some fruit. There was a note for her.

See you soon.

She dropped it her box and ate her breakfast. She couldn’t shake a feeling of dread in the pit of her stomach.

Soon, too soon, it was time to get ready. Johanna was upon her, brushing her short hair and adding the tiniest bit of paint to her face.

“I won’t use pink,” Johanna said, “Because you blush so easily on your own.” Brienne blushed at that.

When it was time to dress, Johanna produced a sky blue gown Brienne had never seen.

“Johanna,” Brienne said, “I thought I was wearing the red dress.” Her maid smiled.

“Lord Jaime had this custom made for you as a surprise. Picked out the color himself.” Brienne’s blush deepened, but Johanna didn’t point it out this time.

Brienne didn’t look in the mirror as the maid dressed her. The skirt was full, but not too heavy. The corset pulled her in tight, but she could still breathe.

When Johanna was done, she turned her mistress toward the mirror.
Brienne gasped at the sight of herself. She looked ... well, almost beautiful. The neckline of the dress accentuated her perfectly. The waist of the skirt hit her at just the right point. The blue fabric made both her eyes and her sapphire necklace shine.

“You look wonderful, milady,” Johanna said. Brienne gave a shy smile.

The one sadness she felt was knowing that all the other Lannisters would be in red and gold. Even today — when she looked the nicest she ever had — she’d stand out in the wrong way.

Someone knocked.

“Are you decent, sapphire girl?” It was Jaime.

“Come in,” she croaked. Jaime entered. She was too anxious to look at him.

“Brienne,” he said, almost whispering. “You’re ... beautiful.” She turned to him.

His tunic was the same blue as her dress. She lit up with a smile. The rock at the pit of her stomach dissolved.

“Are you ready?” he asked. He held out his hand, his left hand. She took it.

“Thank you Johanna,” she threw behind her shoulder as they left the room in a hurry.

As the maid straightened up the room, she wondered if any man would ever look at her the way Lord Jaime looked at her mistress. She hoped so.

Chapter End Notes

thanks as always for the comments!! lighting a prayer circle for Jaime and Brienne for episode 4!
Jaime didn’t let go of her hand as they walked down the hallway. He practically thundered down the stairs with her, he was so full of — she wasn’t sure what. Anxious excitement? She got caught up in it too, running behind him.

At the bottom step, she kept walking but he’d stopped.

“Come on,” she said, giving him a tug. “We shouldn’t keep them waiting.” He tugged back.

“They can wait a minute,” he mumbled. He squeezed her hand, and she took a step closer, but she looked at the floor, not at his eyes. With his gold hand, he raised her chin up.

“You look beautiful,” he said again. She felt her ears get warm.

“You said that already,” she said, bashful. He wasn’t acting like himself.

“So what?” he said, “You’re my wife, I can say it as many times as I want.” She rolled her eyes at him, which he didn’t like. “It’s true,” he said, frustrated.

“I remember this man who used to always tell me how ugly I was,” she said, half joking and half not. “Do you know him, his name was Jaime—”

“Ok, Ok,” he said. “I get it.”

She felt bad for ruining his good mood.

“I’m sorry,” she mumbled.

“No, I’m sorry,” he interrupted, squeezing her hand again. “I never should have…” Now he couldn’t meet her eyes.

“Jaime,” she whispered. “Don’t. It’s over. We…” She didn’t have the words. “Thank you for the dress,” she said instead.

He looked at her then and raised her hand to his lips. Slowly, he kissed her palm, then let go. Brienne felt her heart beat faster. It felt like a promise, but she didn’t know of what. She took his hand again.

“Let’s go,” she said, giving him a small smile. He nodded and they walked off.

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When Margaery Tyrell entered the chapel, every eye in the room was on her. She was even more beautiful than Brienne remembered. Her white dress was covered in roses of every color, and even more flowers cascaded down her long brown hair, which formed a huge braid. As she slowly marched down the aisle, somehow smiling at every person at once, Brienne thought she looked like a princess out of an old song.

Every eye in the room was on Margaery Tyrell except Jaime Lannister’s. He only had eyes for his wife. She didn’t turn to look at him, even though he still hadn’t let go of her hand. But she could feel his eyes on her. She didn’t want to think about what it all meant.
The wedding was more beautiful than theirs had been, by a mile. Jaime felt bad remembering it. Brienne had deserved something wonderful, too, but he had been too self-absorbed to care about his future wife for a second. If he could turn back time…

Soon the ceremony was over. Tyrion and Margaery both seemed happy enough. He was sure his brother would have no problem with his bedding. But first, the feast.

Brienne sat next to Jaime, who sat next to Cersei, who sat next to Robert. It was not cozy. Cersei kept whispering into her brother’s ear, but he mostly responded with grunts and mumbled asides, which was annoying her. Robert was mostly drinking.

At some point, Margaery and Tyrion rose to lead the dance. Brienne was hopeful that Cersei and Robert would join the revelers, but they didn’t move.

Jaime turned to her, taking her hand again. “Do you want to dance, my lady?”

“I’m a terrible dancer,” she said, which was extremely true. He smirked at her.

“Somehow I don’t believe that,” he said, getting up, still holding her hand.

“It is!” she yelled as he dragged her out of her chair. “I’m not being humble! My septa used to mock me! None of the boys would dance with me!” But she followed him to the dance floor despite her pleas.

He put his real hand on her waist and offered her his gold hand. She took it with a big sigh.

“You’re very graceful,” he said as the upbeat music began. “I’m sure you’re a good dancer.”

She wasn’t, but neither was he. She tripped over her skirt, then he tripped over her skirt, and they somehow bumped into almost every other couple. It was a blast.

Eventually, the dancing ceased for the next course of dinner. Jaime led her back to the dais. At this point, her hand felt so right in his, she almost didn’t trust it.

Back at their table, things had progressed less smoothly. Robert was drunk. Robert was extremely drunk. Brienne worried he was going to fall out of his chair on to the floor, and he was so large she wasn’t sure who’d be able to get him back up.

Jaime clearly had the same thought.

“Robert,” he said, as they approached the table. “How are you feeling?” The bigger man rolled his eyes at him.

“Oh I’m fine brother,” he slurred. “In fact, let me make a toast to the newlyweds.”

He stood and raised his cup, and nearly fell over. Jaime was under his arm in a minute.

“Why don’t I go help you lie down?” Jaime offered, trying hard to conceal his rage. Both his wife and his sister looked horrified — Brienne openly, Cersei with her quiet, seething anger.

“I don’t need to lie down,” Robert bellowed. Now, it seemed everyone in the room was either looking at them or pointedly not looking at them. Tyrion hurried over.

“Brothers,” he said, in his most charming voice. “I had a special barrel of cider brought here for the wedding. Might you accompany me to go taste it before it’s served?”
“Yes,” Jaime said, mimicking his brother’s appeasing tone. “Let’s do that. Robert?” The promise of more alcohol was enough to get the larger man to exit the room. Brienne audibly sighed in relief.

“And how are you enjoying married life, Lady Brienne?” Cersei said. Brienne hadn’t expected her sister-in-law to address her.

“Casterly Rock is beautiful,” Brienne admitted, not wanting to say anything about anything. Cersei’s eyebrows rose anyway.

“I hated growing up here,” Cersei said. “But now I hate King’s Landing more.” Brienne had nothing to say to that.

“Tell me Lady Brienne,” Cersei said, barreling through the silence. “Do you love my brother?” Brienne practically choked on her wine.

“Because my brother is very fickle. Today he might be obsessed with something and next week he’ll have forgotten all about it. I wouldn’t want you to get hurt by his indecision.” Brienne gaped at her. “He loves beautiful things. He flits like a bird. Jaime isn’t constant, he’s not—”

“Lady Brienne, Lady Cersei,” Margaery interrupted. “Just wanted to greet you both.” Brienne had never been so happy to see anyone in her whole entire life.

“Lady Margaery,” Brienne said. “It’s good to see you again. You’ve made a beautiful bride. I’m glad to welcome you into our family.” Her heart was pumping like mad, but her voice was strong and true.

“Brienne, you look even more beautiful than the last time we met,” Margaery said with one of her beaming smiles. Cersei coughed.

“Yes, welcome to the family,” Cersei said, maybe rolling her eyes a little.

“I can only hope I’ll be blessed with children as quickly as you were, sister,” Margaery said with another smile, though Brienne could see the venom in it. “And Brienne, I hope I’ll be blessed with the love you and Jaime clearly have for each other.” Cersei coughed even louder. Brienne raised her glass.

“To the newlyweds,” she said, looking Cersei right in the eye. She took a big drink. She couldn’t wait for this deranged wedding to be over.

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Jaime and Tyrion returned soon after, Robert having fallen asleep on some faraway couch. The rest of the wedding passed in a blur. Brienne and Jaime danced again, but she felt less joyful than she had the first time, her mind spinning through a million different ideas. She did her best to avoid his eyes, because she didn’t want him to see. He was so wrapped up in his own thoughts he didn’t notice.

Finally, Tyrion and Margaery were chased from the room for the bedding and everything began to die down. Cersei had left their table to consult with her father. It worried Jaime to see them conspiring, but he couldn’t focus on it now. He had more important things.

He leaned into Brienne’s ear. “Do you want to go?” he whispered. His breath tickled her ear, warming the back of her neck.
“Desperately,” she whispered back. He laughed and took her hand.

“Let’s go, sapphire girl,” he said as he pulled her up. They left hand in hand.

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Everything felt too serious by the time they entered their bed chamber. Jaime took off his gold hand and set it on the table with a thud. He’d worn it much longer than he was used it.

“How’s your wrist?” she asked.

“Fine, fine,” he said. It looked a little red from Brienne’s vantage point.

She turned around, and Jaime reached to untie her corset. She realized his hand was shaking, and she didn’t think it was from fatigue. She held her breath, weighing the options in her mind.

He unlaced it. He helped her step out of the complicated skirt. She laid the dress on the couch for Johanna to take care of in the morning while he, too, undressed for bed.

“Jaime,” she said, turned away from him, looking down at her hands (She only had so much bravery). “Do you love me?”

She heard him stop moving. She might have stopped breathing.

“Brienne…” he said eventually. She nodded.

“OK,” she said. “OK. OK.”

“Brienne,” he said again.

“No, it’s OK,” she was saying, still not looking at him, blinking back tears. What an idiot she was! “It’s OK,” she said again, her voice climbing up an octave. She was going to have to ask him to leave so she could weep in peace.

“Brienne!” he said, grabbing her hand and spinning her around. She bit her lip and looked away. “Of course I love you,” he said, finally. A weight he didn’t know had been there was lifted from his chest.

“Really?” she asked, so softly.

“Yes,” he said again. “Desperately.”

She slapped him in the face. He yelped.

“What was that for?” he asked, though he was mostly smiling.

“You...you made me think...you’re such an idiot!” she said, sputtering. He smiled wider.

“I agree,” he said. He had such a moony look in his eyes, she felt like she’d slipped into another life. Jaime Lannister was really looking at Brienne of Tarth like that?

“You know,” he said, “Usually when you tell someone you love them, you want them to say it back.”

“Oh, you tell women you love them frequently?” she said. She walked away from him, over to their bed, and sat down. “When did you start loving me?” she asked, truly enjoying having the
upper hand for once.

“When did I...gods,” he said, rolling his eyes but sitting next to her. “Do you love *me*?” he asked.

“Answer my question first,” she said, folding her legs under her.

“How did I get the most impossible wife in Westeros?” She pouted her lips in response.

“Fine,” he said, pushing himself back so he was sitting against the headboard. “Let me think...that day with the robber...no, I loved you already then, I think.” She was taken aback. That was so long ago now. She could feel her heart thumping in her chest. He closed his eyes to think and she saw her chance. Slowly she climbed up the bed and slid into his lap, one leg on either side of his hips.

“Hello,” he whispered up at her as he opened his eyes. He slid his arms around her waist. She put hers around his neck, grazing his beard with her fingers.

“Jaime,” she whispered back. She could feel his pulse beating out of control under her hands. It made her feel powerful. She took her thumb and grazed the top of his forehead, where it met his hairline. She pulled it down, over his nose. She felt the little bump from when he broke it in his teens, an overzealous squire. She ran it past his lips — he tried to kiss it but she kept moving. She landed at his chin and felt the stubble under her fingertip. It felt like fireworks under her hand.

“The day we got married,” she said instead, running her hand over his jaw, “I thought, ‘Now that’s the most handsome man I’ve ever seen.’” He gave a little smile. She wasn’t afraid to look him in the eyes anymore.

“And then I thought, ‘I will never, ever tell him that.”’ He laughed. She ran her hands over his ears, through his hair.

“Remember when you kissed me at the end of the night?” he asked, his voice a deep baritone. She nodded. “You should do that again.” Now she laughed.

“I only did that because I knew you didn’t think I would,” she said, running her thumb over his eyebrow, smoothing it down. Gods, his face really was so perfect. She could look at it forever. “I wanted to surprise you.”

“All you ever do is surprise me,” he said. “It’s one of the things I love about you.” She didn’t have a quippy response for that.

He opened his mouth again. “I wanted to —”

She’d had enough talking. She cut him off mid-word, her lips finally meeting his. He gasped in surprise as she raised her hands to his face, pulling him closer, sliding down his lap. In her brain she wanted to go slow, but her lips had a mind of their own, apparently. She kissed him like her life depended on it. She wasn’t sure it didn’t.

She pulled on his bottom lip with hers, teasing it a little with her tongue. She felt him smiling against her mouth. Then he grabbed her bottom lip with his. He smelled like fire. He tasted like life.

She pulled away and nuzzled him with her face, letting his beard burn her skin just a little. She kissed him under his chin, where it met his jaw.
“I’ve always wanted to do that,” she said, a little blissed out.

“You’ve always wanted to do that?” he asked, a little annoyed. “We sleep in the same bed. You could’ve just done that.”

She pulled back completely and glowered down at him, which he very much liked.

“You could’ve reached over to my side of the bed too, lion boy.”

“I thought you might stab me! You’re very intimidating.” She laughed and kissed the tip of his nose. He took his chance to kiss her neck, which sent goosebumps down her spine.

“I’m so glad you didn’t shave,” she said. He bit her ear and she groaned. She wanted him all over, forever and ever. But he pulled away. She let out a sigh of frustration and went to kiss him again, but he ducked.

“Lady Brienne,” he said, just out of reach. “Do you love me?” She almost laughed at him, but she could tell he was serious. She took a deep breath. She was in their bed, she was in his lap, but still she couldn’t help but hold herself back.

“I spent the whole day wondering if you loved me,” she said instead, running her hands up to his arms. “Does my husband love me? He bought me this dress so he must. He wasn’t in bed this morning so he mustn’t. He danced with me so he does. He let go of my hand just now so he doesn’t.”

He waited for her to continue. His thumb drew circles at the base of her spine.

“Your sister said you only love beautiful things,” she said instead. He sat up straighter, the proud lion. He drew his hand to her face, cupping her cheek. She felt the calluses from his sword training. She’d never expected everything about him to be so rough, so beautiful.

“You are beautiful,” he said. She started to interrupt, but he stopped her. “You are. If I could take back one thing in my whole life, it would be saying those things to you.” She started to tear up again, which she hated. She blinked it away.

“Gods, Brienne,” he said. “Sometimes looking at you...it’s like looking at the sun. You know what I used to do, when first we were married?” She shook her head. “I’d wake up early and just watch you sleep, like some sort of lovesick lunatic.” But he was smiling — he liked being a lovesick lunatic. “I still do it...” he admitted.

She kissed the palm of his hand.


“Not hopelessly, sapphire girl,” he mumbled, rubbing his thumb across her lips.

She took his head into her hands again, and she kissed his mouth once more. They were languorous and slow. She felt drunk, in the best way. They had the rest of their lives.

She dropped her hands and reached for them hem of his shirt.

“Can I?” she muttered into his lips. He nodded and she pulled it off. She’d seen him shirtless countless times, but it was different to have him right here, right where she wanted him, under her hands. She planted kisses along his collarbones, his shoulders.
“This is the part of my dreams where I always wake up,” he said. She ground into his lap and he moaned. She was never leaving this room. She was never leaving this bed.

“Touch me,” she whispered into his ear. His hand found her breast, which fit perfectly in his palm. He ran his thumb over her nipple, the fabric of her slip rubbing against it. She shivered. She kissed him on the mouth again, diving deeper and deeper.

Jaime had had enough of this. He slid his arms under her legs and picked her up, out of his lap. In one swift movement, he had her on her back. He held himself over her.

“You want this?” he asked.

“What part of ‘desperately’ was unclear?” she said. He laughed and she grinned back. The light he felt in his chest, the warm glow — he didn't deserve it. And yet.

He dropped his head and kissed her, holding himself up with his right forearm. With his hand, he slowly pulled the bottom of her dress up her thigh. He could feel the goosebumps on her thighs as his fingers trailed across her flesh.

As he reached her hip, there was a knock on the door. He hissed. He put a finger to her lips — don’t make a noise. There was another knock. And another.

“Go away!” he yelled. Brienne silently laughed against his finger.

“It’s urgent,” a servant said.

“It can wait until morning!” he shouted back, praying that whoever it was would go away. Could he fire them?

“It’s an urgent message,” they repeated.

“I said —”

“For Lady Brienne!”

His finger dropped from her lips. There was only one person who she would get an urgent message about. He rolled off her and raced to the door. In one swift motion, he opened it, got the message, and closed it again. Brienne was sitting up on the bed, pale as a sheet. He held the note out to her, but she shook her head.

“Read it to me,” she said. He nodded.

“My dearest daughter,” he began. Good, he was alive. “The maester urged me to write to you — I told him I didn’t want to bother you, but you know how he gets. I’ve been sick for some weeks now. It’s not clear when or if I’ll recover.” Brienne gasped.

“He said you might regret not knowing, if it’s possible for you to come. It would be a relief to me to see my only daughter at home once more and would surely help me recover. Yours always, your father.”

Jaime scooped Brienne up in his arms. She weeped into his shoulder, huge wracking sobs. Every so often, she’d say a word or phrase: “My father,” “sick,” “Jaime.” He held her and held her until she started to come down, her sobs turning into tears.

“We’ll go tomorrow,” he said, rubbing her back.
“Go where?” she asked. “To Tarth?!”

“Of course,” he said.

“We can’t,” she said. “Your whole family is here until at least the end of the week. We can’t just leave.”

“I’m Lord of the Rock,” he said, puffing up his chest, “And I can do anything I want.”

She nestled into his chest.

“Jaime,” she said. “You can’t. It’s too sudden. There’s too much for you to do here.” She was right, which he hated.

“Then you go,” he said. She shook her head.

“And leave you alone?” He pushed her hair back off her forehead.

“I’ll be OK. Your father needs you. I’ll be right here when you get back.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry that I don't understand what pacing is and that I am apparently obsessed with Jaime's beard?? Your comments and kudos have all been so kind so I hope you like the way I land this plane! Sending us all good vibes before episode 4!
Jaime hated letting Brienne go, but he knew he’d hate himself more if he didn’t. But the idea of staying at Casterly Rock with every Lannister under the sun spooked him so much, he almost jumped on the boat with her.

But, for his wife, he kept it together. He quickly got Johanna to pack everything she needed. He ordered a servant to arrange travel for her by sea to Tarth.

And he held her through the sleepless night. How glad he was that she’d spoken up before the terrible news had come. He could feel another world, another life, where her father’s note came and she didn’t know that he loved her and she silently wept while he searched for something to do with his hands.

But that wasn’t this world. In this world, he let his embrace say all the words his tongue would never think of. It wasn’t enough, but it was something. She stopped crying eventually, but she never let go.

At dawn, Johanna brought water for a quick bath. He shooed her from the room, kindly, he hoped. With the warm water and the rag, he slowly washed his wife’s face, wiping the little makeup she hadn’t cried off, moistening her skin, which looked so dry from crying. He thought of the night before, when she’d run her hands so carefully, delicately, over his face. He’d known, really known, that she loved him then. He tried to say the same thing with this fingertips now.

“...the last time I saw him,” she said finally, quietly, while he was brushing her hair. He didn’t say anything, giving her space.

“I was so angry with him ... because he made me marry you,” she said, with a choking noise. He couldn’t tell if she was laughing or crying. It seemed like both. He kneeled on the floor to face her.

“Well now you can go apologize,” he said with a little smirk. “Since he picked the perfect husband for you.” She rolled her eyes.

“Who knew your ego could grow larger?” she said, and he kissed her nose. How had he spent months not touching her? How had he survived it? How was he going to let her go now?

But he would.

“Oh so,” he said, standing up. “Johanna has your things packed. I told her mostly trousers, but she might have thrown a dress or two in.”

“Jaime —“

“And your boat is leaving in —“ he looked out the window “— an hour. So we better hurry to Lannisport.”
“Jaime —“

“And of course I trust Tarth is safe, but I’d still feel better if you brought your sword with you.”

“Jaime — my what?” Now he’d stopped her in her tracks. “I don’t have a sword.”

“Yes you do,” he said.

“Jaime,” she said again. He wished he could just get her to say his name over and over. Jaime Jaime Jaime. Some night he would.

Instead he walked over to his wardrobe, and started digging.

“On my 16th name day,” he said as he searched, “My father gave me a sword with a lion on the pommel. He let me name it. The Roar is what I picked. Stupid name.”

He found it and pulled it out of the closet. He walked back over to Brienne and unsheathed it.

“I stopped using it after I lost my hand.”

“Jaime, I can’t take your sword.”

He ignored her.

“A few months ago, I had some work done to it.”

He showed her the hilt. Where once had been — she assumed — only a lion’s head engraved into the handle and a scattering of rubies, there were now sapphires as well as the stars and moons of Tarth. It was beautiful.

“Why didn’t you give it to me a few months ago, then?” she asked. He pursed his lips.

“I told myself I was waiting for the right moment,” he said, furrowing his brow. “But probably because then you’d know I was in love with you.”

The sword hung between them.

“It’s your sword,” she said again. “You can still use a sword.”

“But not as well as you. It’s yours. Give it a new name.”

She still didn’t grasp it. He kneeled before her, so that he was eye level with her, his lips so close to her own. He whispered.

“Brienne. Take the sword. Go to your father. See that he becomes well again. And then. Come back to me.”

She took it. It looked right in her hand. She gazed at him, and despite the circumstances he smiled.

—

And so, with a heavy heart, Brienne boarded the small ship that was headed for Tarth.

“Don’t forget to watch for mermaids,” her husband whispered in her ear before kissing her goodbye. It was almost too much to think about how things had changed in a day. Before, she found the way he looked at her confusing, almost disconcerting. And now that she knew it was a
look of love? Of love for her? She could hardly tear her eyes away from him.

She didn’t look for mermaids as the ship sailed away. She stared at the docks, at her husband who stood there until he was out of sight, and maybe even a little longer after.

It was so strange to be on this boat now, sailing for Tarth. For months it was something she had imagined, casually in the back of her head, when she was lonely or tired or sad. “I could charter a ship and go home,” she thought, imagining the ocean breeze in her hair, the sun as it hit the blue waters around Tarth. She would never do it — she was too stubborn to give up on anything. But she imagined a joyous welcome at home as she finally left the Rock and it’s maze of tricks.

So to be finally making that journey with completely opposite feelings? To feel like she was leaving home, not going to it? To leave her heart behind in Casterly Rock? It was almost too much.

Once they were clear of Lannisport, she went to her quarters and lay in her tiny bed. Between her emotions and her actual lack of sleep, she was the most tired she’d ever been. Had she really been at a wedding just the day before? She quickly fell asleep, with thoughts of her husband’s lips in her head.

Days later, when they approached Tarth, she was on the deck, looking out at her beautiful island. She couldn’t see Evenfall through the canopy of trees, but she could feel it before her, a hearth calling her home. Even though she was Lady Lannister, she would always be Brienne of Tarth.

As the ship drew closer to shore, she wished her husband were there. She tried to remember every detail so she could relay it to him exactly the way it — the particular warmth of the sun, the perfect blue of the ocean, the rhythmic slapping of the waves against the boat. She imagined him next to her, his golden hair shining in the bright light, his green eyes sparkling.

Then she remembered her father and felt guilty. Her thoughts ought to be just with him. He could be dying, he could be... she didn’t even let herself think the word.

When they reached the dock, her father’s steward, Ser Markos was waiting for them. “Lord Jaime sent word of your arrival,” he said as explanation when she disembarked the boat. She saw his eyes graze over her trousers and sword and short hair, but he said nothing. Good.

“And my father? Take me to him,” she said, immediately walking away. Ser Markos had to hustle to keep up with her long strides.

“In truth your father is stronger than he was when he wrote to you,” Ser Markos said, and Brienne let out a breath she hadn’t realized she’d been keeping in. “But he’s not out of the woods yet.”

Brienne nodded and they walked in silence to Evenfall. It was both smaller and more beautiful than she’d remembered. It wasn’t as ostentatious as the Rock, but it made up for it with design that showed true artisanship. Not that Lannisport lacked artisans, she thought, passing her fingers over the pommel of her sword.

Ser Markos led her to her father’s chambers. He stopped outside, letting her go in alone. She took a steadying breath as she opened the door.

Her father sat up in bed, propped up by pillows, reading a book. He was thinner than she remembered and his skin was a little gray, but considering that she’d thought he was on death’s door, it wasn’t so bad. She let a smile spread over her lips as she looked at him.
“Father,” she said, and he finally looked up.

“My Brienne,” he said, tossing the book aside. “Let me look at you.”

She strode across the room and kneeled at his bedside. He wrapped his arms around her in a warm embrace.

“Father,” she said, her voice breaking just a little. “I thought you might...and we would never...and I...” He felt weaker under her hands. Old.

“Shh shh,” he said, stroking her hair the way she had when she was a child and had a nightmare. “The maester said I’ll be OK. You came all this way for no reason.”

“I couldn’t have lived with myself if I didn’t come. Ser Jaime —“

“Ser Jaime,” he said with a dismissive laugh. “Well the maester I’m sure will admit now that he was overreacting. But I’m glad you are here, with your people, where you belong. I’ve regretted sending you away every moment.”

Brienne frowned. But at that moment, two servant girls came in to bathe him. She excused herself from the room. Ser Markos was still outside.

“Thank you Ser,” she said. “I’ll retire to my chambers — assuming they’re still mine.”

He nodded. “Before you go, your husband also sent a letter for you.” He handed it to her, bowed, and departed. She wanted to read it right away, but she waited until she found her own room. It was exactly the same as she left it, the old clothes she hadn’t taken with her still in the wardrobe. She studied herself in the mirror a moment. Technically she was the same person. Technically, she still looked the same, in men’s clothes with short hair. But she knew the face looking back at her wasn’t the same one that had left. She felt bolder. Stronger. Proud.

She unstrapped her sword, took off her boots and made herself comfortable on her bed. Then she finally opened the letter. She immediately recognized her husband’s shaky hand and smiled.

Dearest Brienne -

I hope this letter finds you in good spirits and your father in good health. All of us are praying for his speedy recovery. I’m not sure how good my prayers are, but I figured they couldn’t hurt.

It’s been just a day since you left and I already miss you so much it’s possibly embarrassing. Tyrion keeps teasing me about it. He told me all sorts of cruel jokes at my expense that he wished for me to relay to you, but I’ll let you imagine them for yourself.

My brother and my sister have both decided to stay a fortnight. Cersei said the castle would feel too empty, and Tyrion said he wasn’t bringing his bride back to King’s Landing until he absolutely had to. My father left the day you did, so some good news there.

Despite my siblings’ constant company, my thoughts are always with you. What you might be seeing, what you might be wearing, whether you might be thinking of me too. Last night I couldn’t fall sleep without you next to me, and when I finally did I dreamed of you and what we did — and what we almost did — the night before. It wasn’t as good as the real thing.

I write this not so you’ll feel guilty — your place is by your father’s side — but so that you’ll know how deep and true my feelings are for you. When I think of all the time we wasted...I’m not interested in wasting any more.
I look forward to your reply, when you get the chance. Until then -

Forever yours,

Jaime

Brienne had thought it silly when ladies in songs swooned, but if she hadn’t been lying down she might have felt her legs buckle herself.

She found old paper and ink in one of her drawers and immediately wrote a reply.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry didn’t update this sooner. I first had to let out all my energy about cursed episode 4. Hopefully I’ll update this before 5 comes out and wrecks me again. Thanks for reading, the kudos, and the comments.
Dear Jaime,

My father is already on the mend. Maybe the gods do listen to even your prayers.

He’s acting as if he were already at full health again, but the maester warns he’s still not fully out of the woods. It is good to be by his side again while he recovers. Thank you for urging me to come. I’ve yet to find reason to use the sword — still nameless — but maybe something will present itself soon.

A confession: this is the fifth draft of this letter. Every time I try to write about how much I miss you...nothing sounds quite right. The greediest part of me wishes I had told you to leave your duties and come with me, but the reasonable part of me is glad I did not. By the time we came back, Tyrion surely would have claimed the castle for his own and we would never get him to go home.

For someone who hates writing, you’re really quite charming in ink. I lack the romantic words to match your own. But know that leaving the Rock was one of the hardest things I ever had to do.

Yours,

Brienne

Jaime smiled to himself as he reread the paper. He’d never received a love letter before. Sure, his wife hadn’t used the word love, but it was there beneath her pained phrasing, there in her discarded drafts. He put it in his pocket.

Waiting for her reply had been agony. He worried about her on the boat. He worried about her father. He worried that, with space, she’d realized she didn’t really love him, and had just gotten caught up in the moment, the wedding, the wine. But she did. His lips tingled with the thought of her.

If only everything in his life were that simple. His family was driving him up a wall. Tyrion was so nosy about everything. And his steward had delicately told him that Cersei and her children were causing chaos amongst the servants. At least Robert had decided within a few days that the Rock was too boring and left days ago. If only he’d taken the whole crowd with him.

His sister was acting strangely, too. Well, she always acted strangely, but even for her she was being odd. To him, her twin, she was nothing but differential and polite, which was unlike her. He kept waiting for the other shoe to drop, but it never did.

He tried to do math in his head. Cersei and Tyrion has said they’d stay two weeks, and they were at the start of week two. Brienne had said her father was doing better...but she had given few details, so that could mean she was returning in days or weeks or even a month. There was no way to guess how long it would take for things to be back the way he wanted.

—

Brienne, meanwhile, was the talk of Tarth.
She’d always been a strange girl, but she’d at least had the dignity to feel awkward about it. Now she seemed proud of her oddness! Wasn’t a husband supposed to form her into some wifely shape?

If Brienne heard snatches of these conversations, she didn’t care. She didn’t need to explain herself, or her marriage, to anyone.

Well, she did wish she could make her father understand. When she visited with him — in his sick bed, or, if he was up to it, on the balcony — he diligently avoided any discussion of her husband or Casterly Rock, no matter how hard she tried to steer the conversation that way.

She didn’t understand it. He was the one who had sent her away. Shouldn’t he want to hear about it? Didn’t he want to know?

Ser Markos explained it to her one day, when they were leaving her father’s room at the end of an afternoon. She had started to tell her father about Lannisport, about the merchants that came from all over, and he had ignored her like his only daughter hadn’t spoken at all.

“He doesn’t like it when you mention those people,” Ser Markos said darkly as they walked together.

“Those people? The people of the west, or my husband?” Brienne asked. Ser Markos shrugged.

“He sent me there,” she said, turning on him, cornering him against the wall. He clearly wasn’t comfortable, which she tried to use to her advantage. “Why shouldn’t he want to hear what became of his choice?”

Ser Markos gritted his teeth.

“Your lord-father didn’t sleep after he came back from the westerlands, after your wedding” he said instead. “Even as Tarth has grown strong and prosperous with Lannister money, he hasn’t enjoyed a moment of it. He felt he betrayed you. I’m sure his lack of sleep didn’t help with his illness.”

“But if he’d listen to me —,” Brienne began, but Ser Markos shook his head.

“Your father is as stubborn as you are. You’ll have to figure it out yourself.”

And with that, he ducked under her arm and walked away as fast as he could.

Even as her problems with her father continued, she still loved being on Tarth, where she could do almost anything she wanted. She rode her horse down any town road, until her thighs ached and she couldn’t ride anymore. She read on the beach, even taking off her boots to enjoy the sand between her toes. She ran the squires through their training drills, and they didn’t even snicker behind her back anymore.

The main pain she knew was not having Jaime by her side. She promised that once she returned to the Rock, she would convince him that they should come back to Tarth together.

He wrote her all the time, short little notes. It was wasteful to send a raven for every single one, but he obviously didn’t care. She made sure the maester was kind to the birds that had come so far just so she could know a one-handed man on the other side of the kingdom was thinking about her. She worried her own replies were short and stiff, despite her best efforts. There are only so many ways to say, “I miss you.”

She kept the notes in a small bag, physical proof of her husband’s love. At this point, he’d given
her so much proof, from the kisses they’d shared weeks ago to the sapphire around her neck to the sword at her waist. And that’s when she realized she might know how to get through to Lord Selwyn.

One morning, she swept into her father’s room and knelt before him, where he sat in his chair. Before he could finish asking what she wanted, she withdrew her sword from its sheath and held it before him.

“Whose sword is that?” he asked, not recognizing it.

“Mine, father,” she said in reply, looking him dead in the eye with a fierceness he wasn’t used to.

“Where did you get it?” he asked, still not comprehending. “Is it one of ours? I would have —“

“My husband gave it to me.” That was not the answer Lord Selwyn had expected.

“Why would Jaime Lannister do that?” he asked, almost spitting the man’s name.

“My husband knows I’m stronger with a sword than he. Jaime respects me.” She took a breath. “And he loves me.” She’d never said it aloud before. It made her smile.

Lord Selwyn wasn’t sure what to do with his face. He didn’t doubt that someone could love his daughter, who he loved more than anything. But he did doubt that Jaime Lannister of all people did. It was preposterous.

“I know you don’t understand,” Brienne said, returning the weapon to its sheath. “But I’m happy.” And then her father did the last thing she expected: He started to cry, big wracking sobs. After a moment’s hesitation, she put her arms around him, comforting him. It was a new feeling.

“Brienne,” he mumbled into her shoulder. “You don’t have to protect me. You don’t have to lie for me.”

At that, she drew back. “Lie for you?” she asked, baffled. He took her hands into his.

“I never should have married you off to that man, those people. You don’t have to pretend to like him to soothe my weary heart.”

She tried to drop his hands, but he wouldn’t let go.

“I sold you off, for Tarth. And you were too dutiful, too good, too kind to do anything except what I asked. But it was wrong.”

“Father—,” she tried to cut in, but he continued.

“But now we can make it right.” He’d stopped crying, which was even more worrisome. “Stay here. Don’t go back.”

“What?” she asked. She finally wrenched her hands from his own.

“The maester will annul your marriage, things like this happen all the time. And you can stay here, and be the lady of Tarth, the way you were always meant to. Tywin Lannister has given us enough money. And he won’t start a war because a sad girl wanted to come home. He probably has three women waiting for his cripple son.”

Now she was crying, but he mistook her tears for sadness or happiness, not white hot anger. He reached out to wipe them away, and she ducked out of his way.
“You are correct in some ways, father,” she said, rising up. “You did sell me to the Lannisters. You shouldn’t have. I was angry with you then. Livid.”

She looked down at her father. He never looked so small. Her anger slowly began to fade, as did her vicious tears.

“But my husband is a good man. He is honorable and kind and smart and loving. He respects me. He loves me.” Her father was crying again.

“Don’t feel guilty about my marriage anymore. I would not lie to you. I’m happy.”

Lord Selwyn dried his eyes.

“You’re sure he is a good man?” he asked. She wanted to say that he should’ve checked that before he tied them together, but she knew it wasn’t useful. Her father was old. She didn’t want to be unkind.

“Yes,” she said instead. “The very best.”

—

Tyrion and Margaery left after three weeks. She wanted to show him Highgarden.

“I’m sure you and your beautiful wife will be reunited soon,” she whispered to her brother-in-law as she hugged him goodbye. Jaime liked her. She was open and kind. They were qualities he wasn’t used to, qualities Brienne also had.

Tyrion was less sweet when he bid him adieu.

“If there isn’t a little Jaime Lannister in her belly by the next time I see you, I’ll assume your cock is broken.” Jaime would’ve hit him harder, but he didn’t want to embarrass his brother completely in front of his bride.

So that left Cersei. Her conduct remained unimpeachable, and she even got Joffrey and Marcella to calm down a little.

Still, too many mornings at breakfast she would turn to Jaime and say, “Remind me when Lady Brienne is returning.” And he would remind her that he still didn’t know, and she would get a strange look on her face and say nothing, even though she looked like she wanted to say something. He knew he didn’t want to know what.

Still, he felt too bad to ask her to leave and to send her back to her brute of a husband. For him and Tyrion to be so happy wed and Cersei, the only catch among them, to be so miserable, was wickedly unfair.

One day he and his sister brought the children to Lannisport, to show them the docks and the beach. He told them to watch for mermaids, but Joffrey seemed more interested in kicking sand at his sister.

“I’m sure Lady Brienne will only bear well-behaved children,” Cersei said, humorously. “Lannister children are always so wicked. Lannister adults too.”

Jaime frowned. “Were we that bad?” he asked, more of a mumble, as they walked down the sand.

“Yes,” she said. “And we still are.” Jaime puffed up his chest, but Cersei was his twin — she knew
what he was thinking without looking at him.

“Tell me brother, did you lose that hand being honorable and noble and just? Were you on your best behavior?” She saw him deflate. “Would you be on your best behavior if you had two hands now?”

At that moment, Marcella fell and started sobbing, cutting their conversation. Jaime ended up carrying his niece back to the castle while Joffrey complained about how sandy he was.

But Cersei’s words haunted Jaime.

After another week, and a few strongly worded letters from her husband, Cersei announced that they would be leaving. Jaime was grateful; he was tired of being watched.

The night before she left, Jaime and Cersei ate dinner together.

“So when is your lady wife returning?” Cersei asked again, as she poured them both wine.

“As I’ve told you countless times, I don’t know. It depends on a lot of things.” He drank.

“I just don’t understand it,” Cersei said with a practiced air of nonchalance. “Is her father better? Is he worse?”

“Better,” Jaime said, picking at his potatoes.

“So then shouldn’t she be back already?” He sighed.

“She wants to be with her father. She loves her father. It’s a foreign emotion for us, I know.”

“But you’re confident she’s coming back,” she said with a smirk. Jaime dropped his fork.

“Am I confident she’s coming back? Of course I am! You think my wife ran away?”

Cersei took a long sip of wine. Jaime’s face was burning.

“I’m just saying that if my husband who I loved was waiting for me at home, I’d rather be there.”

“Your husband is waiting for you at home,” Jaime quipped, “And you’ve been here over a month.”

“I don’t love my husband,” she said matter of factly. Jaime was so warm and sweaty all of a sudden. He drank more wine.

“Brother,” she said with a sharp grin, “You’ve been fragile since your accident. I don’t want to see you get hurt.”

They didn’t speak for the rest of dinner.

And then Jaime was alone. And he was a mess.

Of course Brienne was coming back. Why wouldn’t she come back? She loved him! He loved her! When she left for Tarth it felt like his heart was being pulled from his chest. Of course she was coming back!

But they had been apart a long time. She wrote back to him less and less, and her letters were always brief. And she didn’t have a timeline for when she was going to return. He’d never asked outright, not wanting to pressure her. But didn’t she want to come back?
And it’s not like Jaime Lannister had the best reputation in the Seven Kingdoms. Maybe her father was in her ear, the way Tywin had tried to be in his, whispering about how he wasn’t worthy of her.

He wasn’t worthy of her! Even if he tried his best to be good, could it ever be enough? Could it make up for all the years when he hadn’t been good? He didn’t think so.

They hadn’t consummated their marriage before she left. That was the truth. She could just leave. She was within her rights. Why had we wasted all that time?

Was she just slowly leaving him? No, Brienne would never. She was too honorable. She’d tell him to his face. And yet, when was she coming back?

He couldn’t sleep. He didn’t eat. He wanted to write to her, but what could he say? “Just checking in that you still love me, even though I’m broken and bad. When are you coming home? If you decide not to, I’d understand, but it would also kill me.”

He wished Tyrion were here again. Tyrion would tell him if he were overreacting. He was probably overreacting. He wrote her a letter of nice words, but she still didn’t tell him when she was coming back in her reply.

One sleepless night in their bedchamber — his bedchamber, now — he lit a candle and put ink to the page in a mad rush. He didn’t read it over when he was done. He called a servant to make sure it was sent by raven immediately.

He laid down on his bed and he felt like crying, but the tears never came.

Chapter End Notes

angst angst angst. Thanks so much for reading and commenting. Prayers for j and b tomorrow.
O Wicked World

Chapter Notes

i plotted this out way before i knew season 8 was going to ruin our lives. this chapter's angsty, but i promise it all works out!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Brienne was sitting in her chambers, reading over Tarth’s tax records. Financially, things were looking up for the island. Even with her father’s illness, Ser Markos had made sure everything kept running the right way and the people were enjoying prosperity the way they ought to.

Lord Selwyn was almost back to full health, or whatever his new level of full health was. He was aging.

Still, she hadn’t made departure plans yet. As much as she held some lingering resentment toward her father and as much as she missed her husband, she liked being on Tarth. She knew her return to the Rock would hurt her father, and she didn’t want to injure him, especially after his illness. She would go back eventually; she just didn’t know how to put a date on that. She felt stuck.

A servant knocked and handed her another letter from her husband. She smiled as she recognized his shaky hand, but the warmth she felt quickly faded.

Brienne -

I think I’ve finally figured out what’s going on, though I desperately hope I’m wrong. Tell me I’m wrong. I’m begging you. But only say it if I really am. And I don’t think I am.

The smartest part of me understands why I’m right. I am broken. I’ve been cruel. I’m still hateful. Why stay with me, who you didn’t choose, who you didn’t know, who you didn’t like, when you can be home where you belong?

Brienne, if I am right, don’t reply and try to explain. I forgive you already — no, forgive isn’t even the right word, because you’re blameless. I’ll await the raven from the maester that will end it instead. I won’t write to you again.

And if I’m wrong...

Forever yours,

Jaime

She read it again and again. She was angry. She was confused. She was upset. Why would Jaime think she would just run away to Tarth and never come back? Did he really believe she could do that to anyone, let alone him?

If she didn’t recognize his handwriting, she’d think someone else had sent it, it was so unlike the carefree notes he usually sent.

Maybe it was a trick, she thought. Maybe he wanted her to stay on Tarth, and he was trying to get
her to be the one to pull the plug. But Jaime wouldn’t do that, right? Jaime loved her. Jaime loved her!

As she stared at the paper in her hand, she thought about how little she actually knew about her husband. Sure they’d been married for almost a year, but they’d only been friends a few months, and lovers — well, they weren’t lovers. That was the problem. How much did she trust him? How much did he trust her? Could she really go back to someone who had misunderstood her so deeply? Should she do it, when all of Tarth was open before her?

She walked out onto her balcony, looking down on the island and the blue sea.

Sapphire girl. That’s what he’d called her.

Brienne closed her eyes. She could picture two lives for herself. In one, she stayed here. Her father was happy. Everything was easy and simple. He’d probably find someone else to marry her — Ser Marko’s younger brother had been mentioned in conversation multiple times, and she didn’t think it was a coincidence. He wasn’t handsome, but that mattered little. She wasn’t beautiful. She knew him to be kind and smart. She’d teach their children how to swim in the ocean, just like she had learned. And everything would be simple. Steady. Secure.

And in the other life? She went back to Casterly Rock, to her husband. To Jaime. They learned how to be together, how to really be together, even if it was difficult and confusing and messy. Even if he was moody and she was stubborn, he was secretive and she was quiet. She dealt with the Lannisters who didn’t think she belonged and with the unkind words of people who hadn’t known her for her whole life. She taught their daughters how to fight, and Jaime taught them how to watch for mermaids in the bay. He spoiled them with gifts they didn’t need. And Tarth would never really be her home again.

She could pick either one and be perfectly content. But she didn’t want to be just perfectly content. It wasn’t a hard choice, in the end.

—

Jaime regretted sending the note the moment it was out of his hands. And yet.

She didn’t write back. He’d promised to leave her alone.

But the maester of Tarth also didn’t write to announce their annulment. He was half agony and half hope. Every member on the council was fed up with him and his complete lack of attention. The master of coin had made a joke about his missing Lady Brienne, but when Jaime shot him a dirty look, everyone got the message not to mention it again. Now they stepped around him like he was a boiling pot about to explode and burn everyone in the room. He felt that way sometimes, too.

He kept trying to write to his brother about it, but he knew he sounded like an idiot when he put the whole story down on paper. And Tyrion would probably have no sympathy for the situation he’d found himself in, a situation he’d created all on his own by listening to his father and his sister.

Cersei did write to him, but he ignored her letters. Hers was the last voice he needed to hear, he realized now.

A week later, he was in his study, trying to go over some maps related to a farming dispute. This was the type of stuff Brienne was good at, but he was trying so hard not to think of her. He was driving himself wild with trying to not think about her.

A knock on the door. The maester entered with a severe look on his face. Jaime’s heart sank into
“What is it?” he asked, his voice not above a whisper.

“Your wife, my lord,” the maester said gravely. So that was it. She had decided to end it. His throat was tight.

“Your wife,” the maester said again. “She was on a ship headed back to the Rock.”

Wait, what? “She was?” Jaime asked, with a terrible fluttering in his chest.

“It was a small ship. It was boarded by Iron Born pirates.” Jaime left from his chair.

“Did they...is she... where’s my wife?” he croaked out. The maester hung his head.

“We don’t know. All we know is the ship was seen under attack. But there’s been no word of survivors. They’re not optimistic.”

Jaime said nothing. After a few moments, the maester nodded and excused himself.

Jaime had been sad before. Jaime had cried before. He knew now that all of those times had been dress rehearsal for this agony.

He was on the floor, on his hands and knees, and he didn’t know how he’d gotten there.

He hurt, everywhere. Big wracking sobs shook his whole body. Every time he tried to stop, he cried harder.

Gone. She was gone. She couldn’t be gone. Surely she wasn’t gone. But how could she not be gone. Brienne.

And it was his fault. She’d left when she did because of his dumb letter. If she’d waited another week or a month, if he’d had faith in her constant devotion, the way she deserved, then she’d be alive. She’d be safe on Tarth. Instead he had forced her hand with his stupidity — the stupidest Lannister — and now he’d lost the one good thing in his life. He’d killed her.

Brienne. To never say her name to her anymore. To never hold her in his arms again. To never see her bright eyes again. It felt impossible. Surreal. Some other Brienne was on that boat. Surely his Brienne was going to storm in any moment. Maybe a different boat had been captured. Not her boat. Maybe she was safe on Tarth after all.

But he knew it wasn’t true, and then the sobs would start again. He was all alone. There was no one to comfort him.

He found that if he stretched his jaw he could get the tears to stop for a few moments. He collected himself. He couldn’t stay here. He rose to his feet and stumbled, half blind, to their bedchamber — his bedchamber. He saw no one on the way. Surely news had already spread and every single person on the Rock knew to stay away.

But coming here was the wrong choice too. Though Brienne hadn’t been in the room for weeks, she was everywhere. Her brush was on the dresser, her clothes were in the wardrobe, and her pillows were on the bed (she had a particular way she liked them that he dare not disturb). Like a zombie, he walked over to her vanity and fingered the times there. A bottle of perfume he’d never seen her use. A comb. A quill. She’d left him nothing.
He picked up a small box on the edge of the vanity, which he’d never noticed before. Slowly, he opened it to discover dozens of little notes. He snatched at them greedily — had she left him words after all?

But no. They were the scraps of nothingness that he had left her. She’d kept them all. All that wasted time.

He collapsed to the floor again, but this time he didn’t bother to get up. In the morning, an unlucky servant was forced to bring him breakfast, but even that young boy didn’t dare wake him up where he lay on the ground.

—

Life went on at the Rock. Well, other people’s lives went on. The servants bustled. The maester wrote to Lord Selwyn. And to Tyrion, who promised to come as soon as he could. Jaime didn’t want him there.

Jaime went through the hours in a daze. He couldn’t remember what had happened the day before or what was to happen the next day. His grief was all the worse because he knew it was his fault. His jaw ached all the time from trying to stop himself from crying.

He sat on a balcony. It was the only place that didn’t remind him of her, even though she knew how much she liked to look over the ocean. But everything inside smelled like her, even things that rationally shouldn’t have. It made him feel like he was choking. Outside still smelled like outside.

He watched the boats come into Lannisport. He’d barely been sleeping at night, kept awake by his anger and sadness and terror, but he started to doze in the sun.

The light felt so bright on his skin. The air smelled so clean and pure. He didn’t deserve these simple pleasures when Brienne felt them no more.

He could almost hear her saying his name now. Jaime. He liked the way she said it. It was almost like praying. He could almost feel her hand on his cheek. Brienne.


He creeped open his eyes a little. And a little more.

It was Brienne, standing over him, saying his name and stroking his cheek. She had a cut above her eyebrow, a bruise on her chin, and far too much dried blood on her shirt for his liking. But she was here. Alive. He choked out a sob as he jumped to his feet.

“Brienne.” He said it like a drowning man who’d finally gotten a lungful of air.

He reached for her. She slapped him in the face.

Chapter End Notes

really i was gonna cut this chapter at when jaime finds out about the pirates, but i decided that was too sad for our mood right now. happiness is coming! thanks as always for reading and commenting
“You look terrible,” she said.

“You just slapped me!” he croaked, his hand on his cheek.

“No, in general,” she said. He did — his hair was too long and greasy looking and he hadn’t trimmed his beard in weeks, maybe. There were dark bags under his eyes.

“I thought you were dead,” he choked out. He was crying. He reached for her cheek again, and this time she let him. She felt all the angry words she had planned drain out of her in an instant.

“I’m too stubborn to die,” she said, trying to make a joke, but neither of them laughed. “I was intent on coming back here and tearing you a new one.” Her voice broke; she was crying now, too. His fingers brushed the cut on her cheek and she winced.

“Do it,” he whispered. “Tear me to shreds. I deserve it.”

“I’m not sure you do,” she said, barely audible. He was still only touching her face, like he didn’t believe she was real, like he didn’t believe he was entitled to more. Like he thought she might disappear again. Carefully, she put her hands on his shoulders, pulling him closer until their foreheads touched. They stood like that in silence, just looking at each other, tears rolling down their cheeks.

They both started to speak at the same time, then stopped, then almost laughed. Brienne felt giddy and scared and nervous and sad and happy and, still, a little mad. She had so many things to say, she didn’t know where to start.

“Why don’t we get you cleaned up?” he murmured, after a long while. They’d both mostly stopped crying by then. She nodded.

“And you cleaned up. Your hair is disgusting,” she added. He barked one sharp laugh.

“Anything for you, my bride,” he said. She blushed, despite everything.

He brought her down to the baths, holding her hand the whole time, like he was afraid to let her go. Obviously word of her safe return had spread throughout the castle, since towels and clothing was set out for them both. It was probably Johanna, she thought. She would be so glad to see Johanna again.

Suddenly she was overcome with tiredness. Jaime must have sensed it because he took over completely. He untied her shirt and pulled it over her head. He bent down and unbuckled her boots. He unstrapped her belt — and her sword — and removed her trousers. Then he led her by hand into the bath. Once she was submerged, he quickly stripped and slid in next to her.

He lathered up the soap in his hand and reached for her face, washing away the dried blood, impossibly gentle. She felt a stirring in her navel that felt inappropriate for the circumstances.

“We have to stop meeting like this,” she whispered, another attempt at a joke. He gave her a small smile that warmed her chest.
“We’ll work on it,” he said, running the soap through her hair, so tender she could almost cry. It wasn’t easy with one hand.

“I can do it,” she said, reaching up to take over, but he stopped her with his other arm. He wasn’t wearing the golden hand — she hadn’t noticed until now.

“Let me,” he said. “Please.” He sounded almost desperate. She nodded. He slowly cleaned her head, then moved his way down, running soap over the bruises on her shoulders, her arms. She had some small cuts as well, but they were mostly healed now. She prickled all over wherever he touched her. She’d missed him so much.

Brienne could see a million questions forming on his lips, but he didn’t let them slip through. He was waiting for her to begin on her own. She took a deep breath.

“I left Tarth the day after I got your letter.” He sucked in air quickly.

“Brienne, I —” She shook her head to stop him.

“We’ll get there. But not now.” He nodded and went back to scrubbing her shoulders, her back. She let herself enjoy his attentions for a minute before continuing.

“So I left Tarth. I didn’t even pack — they’re supposed to send my things. And the first part of the journey was easy. Until we were boarded by Ironborn pirates.” She felt his hand stop moving for a moment, but then he started scrubbing her arm with more vigor.

“Obviously, we won,” she said.

“Obviously?” he asked, his voice low. She met his eyes and pouted.

“Obviously. What did you give me a sword for if you didn’t think I could kill a few pirates?” she said, trying to make it sound funnier than it was. He held her gaze. He saw right through her attempts at lightening things, she thought.

“It was terrifying,” she finally admitted, in a furious whisper. “They killed the first mate and they cut our sails. But there weren’t that many, and I think they were drunk, and we got the best of them.”

He fingers traced the cut on her cheek again. She closed her eyes.

“I killed him,” she said. “A few of them. With your sword. And when it was over, I threw up.” Tears sprang to her eyes. “I don’t know what I wanted to be a knight for. It’s terrible. Death.”

He finally took her into his arms then, and she let him. He rubbed little circles on her back with his thumb as she sank into his shoulder, her hard chest. Neither of them said anything for a long time, just listening to each other breath.

“I’m OK,” she said at last, letting him go. “Here,” she said, lathering up her hands and washing Jaime’s hair. He closed his eyes as she touched his scalp, rubbing her fingers against his head. Already he seemed more himself.

“Like I said, they slashed the sails, but we patched them up a little bit and kept going, slowly. We didn’t really have a choice, the pirates had ruined most of our food stores. And we were all terrified their friends might come back.”

There was more to the story, and she would tell it to him later, again and again, sometimes a little
and sometimes a lot. But that was enough for now. He looked at her like he knew she was holding back, but he wouldn’t ask until she was ready. She was grateful.

“Then we finally made it into Lannisport this morning, and I came up to the castle, and found you.” She finished as she washed his beard. She liked the prickle of the hair against her fingers. She remembered the last time she’d felt it and she started to blush. She wanted that again. Surely he did too?

“You came back,” he whispered, like he still couldn’t really believe it.

“I came back,” she repeated as she rinsed his face with water.

“Brienne, I — “ She shushed him.

“I’m cold and hungry. Let’s go eat.”

He helped her out of the bath and quickly grabbed her a towel. She wrapped herself in it and he left her to dress on her own. But she just watched him pull on his own clothes. She felt a pang when she noticed he was thinner than he’d been when she left. As he pulled his shirt over his head, she finally got dressed herself. When she was done, he reached out for her hand, like he was still too afraid to take it, like he thought she was going to say no. She was tired of the gloom, but she didn’t quite know how to lift it yet.

She took his hand and they exited the room. On the walk upstairs, they ran into Johanna.

“My lady,” Johanna yelled, dropping the linens she carried in her arms. She was embarrassed, hurrying to pick them up.

“Johanna,” Brienne said with a smile, letting go of Jaime’s hand and pulling Johanna into a hug. “It’s good to see you.”

“I’m so glad you’re safe,” the younger girl whispered. “And Lord Jaime was a mess without you,” she added, with a little laugh. Brienne heard Jaime grunt behind her and she smiled.

“I’m not surprised” she said, letting the girl go. Jaime had picked up all the linen and handed it back to the younger woman.

“Could you have the servants bring lunch to our chamber?” he asked. “Or dinner? What time is it?”

Johanna just smiled. “Yes milord, milady,” she said and hurried away. Brienne took his hand unprompted. He squeezed her fingers and gave her a blinding smile. They took the long way upstairs, walking in companionable silence.

By the time they got to their room, a whole spread had been laid out. Looking out the window, she saw it was night, somehow. She started munching on grapes while he picked at the cheese. She poured them both wine. She didn’t know what to say to break this — tension. Clearly he didn’t know either.

The food was good; she really was hungry. She noticed he wasn’t actually eating, though.

“Aren’t you hungry?” she asked. He shrugged, not meeting her eyes again. She kicked his leg with hers. That made him look up. His hair fell into his eyes, thought at least it was clean now. Maybe she’d trim it herself.

“What do you want to say Jaime?” she asked.
“What do I want to say?” he parroted back. She held his gaze. He slid his head into his hand.

“I’m so sorry, Brienne,” he said. “It’s all my fault.”

“What is?” she asked, trying to take his hand. He kept it away from her.

“For everything,” he said. “If I didn’t send that letter, you wouldn’t have been on that boat, and you wouldn’t have had to … kill fucking pirates.” He bit his lip, hard.

“Jaime,” she said in her softest voice. “Look at me. Come on.” She slid her chair around the table, closer to his. She just wanted to touch him, but she didn’t. Eventually, he did look up at her.

“I’m still mad about the letter,” she said, “I won’t lie. But I’ll get over it, if we talk about it. But pirates? Are not your fault.”

“If you’d died,” he said, taking her hand again.

“But I didn’t,” she said. “And if I had, it still wouldn’t have been your fault.” He didn’t believe her, she could tell. She put her hands on either side of his face and slowly kissed his forehead.

“I’m alive,” she said, kissing his right eyebrow. “I’m alive,” she said again, kissing the left one. “I’m.” His eyelid. “Alive.” His nose. “I’m —”

He reached up and kissed her on the mouth then. He wasn’t gentle at all. He was hungry. It was messy and rough, like he was claiming her. She wanted to be claimed. She slid off her chair and onto his lap, wrapping her arms around his neck. He reached around her waist, pulling her closer and closer.

“Jaime,” she whispered against his lips as they kissed. She thought he growled in response, a low and deep resonance. A lion. His tongue was in her mouth; he tasted so salty. Her face was wet, suddenly. She pulled away.

“Are you crying again?” she said, with a laugh. He smiled up at her.

“I’ve never cried so much in my life,” he said, shaking his head. “What have you done to me?”

She kissed him again, slow and sweet this time. His fingers tapped lightly against her hip.

“We should eat,” she said, as she pulled away. He groaned just a bit. “You’re too thin.” She pinched his arm to prove her point. He winced and she slid off his lap and back into her chair.

And so they ate. He asked her about Tarth, and she tried to remember all the things she’d wanted to tell him about it: the way the light hit the ocean first thing in the morning, the way the sand on the beach felt between her toes, the way her father had made her play card games to keep him occupied. She told him about the enormous library and her favorite horse and the way the cook always grilled fish the way she liked.

He didn’t know how long he sat there, listening to her, but he noticed she was starting to close her eyes a little too long. Her head was heavy.

“Brienne,” he said.

“What?” she asked, her eyes not quite open all the way.

“You’ve got to go to bed,” he said, standing up.
“I don’t wanna…” she mumbled. He helped her stand up.

“I know,” he said, as he led her over to the bed. She sat down, and he started to help her into a nightgown.

“Why are you always undressing me,” she said, “But never the way I want you to.” He laughed and pulled the dress over her head.

“Soon,” he whispered into her ear, before dragging his teeth on her ear lobe. She was the one who growled this time. “Now get in bed.” She obliged. He quickly changed out of his clothes and climbed in on the other side. She rolled over to him and he pulled her close.

He thought about saying something about the letter. He thought about trying to explain himself more. But she was already asleep. He soon followed.

Chapter End Notes

as always thank you so much for all your kudos and comments. writing this has been the best because of you.
Jaime woke up feeling well-rested for the first time in . . . he couldn’t remember when. And Brienne was still in his arms, still asleep, her blonde hair sticking out at a million different angles.

He’d done nothing to deserve to be this lucky, he knew. But for once in his life he didn’t want to beat himself up over it. Instead, he held her closer.

But there were things he had to take care of before he could enjoy her completely, which he fully intended to do. Slowly, he slid out from underneath her, trying his best not to disturb her sleep.

Once he was up, he dressed in a hurry and quietly closed the door behind him. He had to send a raven to her father — he would’ve done that yesterday, if he were less greedy — and to Tyrion, who also knew about Brienne’s disappearance. He wanted to tell his brother not to come anymore, that’s how badly he wanted her all to himself, but even he knew that was too rude of a message to send someone. But he was tempted. Maybe Tyrion would take a hint for once in his life and stay away.

His tasks quickly completed, he slid back into their bedchamber and was pleased to find her still asleep. A servant had also laid out their breakfast. He planned on getting back into bed with her, but he caught his reflection in the mirror first. Brienne was right — he did look like a mess.

He found his razor and some soap and water the servants had laid out for him. Carefully, he started to trim his beard. He wanted to be fast, wanted to be done before she woke up, but he didn’t want to slip and take too much off and have to shave the whole thing. He remembered the way it’d felt when she ran her fingers through it, like it was sacred. Like he was sacred. He got goosebumps just thinking about it.

When he was satisfied, he considered his hair. Maybe he could give it a little trim himself. He picked up the scissors thoughtfully.

“Don’t,” a hoarse voice behind him said. He turned: Brienne was awake. She was lying on top of the blankets, in the little bit of light that got past the curtains, looking like an angel.

“I thought you said I look terrible,” he said as he leaned against the vanity, drinking her in.

“You did,” she said, lazily. “But I changed my mind. It makes you look like a lion.” Her grin could only be described as wicked.

He ran his fingers through his hair, smirking at her. Since losing his hand, nobody compared him to that stupid mammal anymore, not the way they used to. But when she said it, he felt a little burst in his chest.

“You’re so vain,” she said when she saw his smile.

“Only for you, Lady Brienne,” he said in a low voice, almost a growl. She bit her lower lip, her eyes sparkling in the limited sunlight. That wouldn’t do.

He walked over to the nearest window and pulled the heavy curtain open.
“What are you doing?” she asked, wrapping a sheet around herself.

“Letting in more light,” he said as he opened the second window.

“Why?!” she asked again, watching him like he was insane.

“Because, sapphire girl,” he said, untying the top of his shirt, “I’ve wanted to ravage you for almost a whole year, and now that I’m finally going to have you, I want to see it all.”

“Oh,” she said, not missing a beat. “You think you’re ravaging me?” Now he really did growl as he walked over to the bed, taking off his shirt. She moved backwards until her back was against the headboard. She had the perfect view of him as she crawled up the bed toward her, looking absolutely ravenous and glorious and deranged and perfect. When he reached her, she pushed his hair behind his ear. She was glad he hadn’t cut it off yet.

He wrapped his arms around her waist, holding her there, and sat between her thighs.

“Good morning,” he purred into her ear. She ran her hands over his shoulders, his collarbones.

“I thought about this all the time on Tarth,” she said, drinking him in. “What we didn’t do. What I wanted to do.” She kissed his chin, rubbing his stubble against her lips.

“That’s what you should’ve written about in your letters,” he mumbled, trying to catch her lips with his. But she kept evading him, instead rubbing her face all over his.

“I wanted you so badly,” she whispered. “I stayed up all night thinking about you.”

“Brienne,” he grumbled into her cheek. “You’re killing me.”

“Good,” she said, nipping at his ear. She liked watching him squirm on her account. “And I’d think about you and I’d touch myse—”

“Brienne,” he roared, finally catching her mouth with his. He was fierce, greedy, needy. He pulled her closer, his hand running up and down her back. She couldn’t think about anything but the feel of his lips, his fingers, his breath. She just wanted him. Her husband.

He let go of her waist to run his hand through her hair. She grabbed him by the shoulders and pushed him down onto his back. He yelped in surprise but smiled up at her as she straddled him.

“Who knew you were so aggressive?” he said, crinkling his eyes. She ran her hands across his chest, his stomach. She had the strongest urge to lick every single muscle, and then she remembered that she just could.

“We’ve been sparring for months and you didn’t know I was aggressive?” she asked. “Some husband you are.” Again he tried to sit up, and again she pushed him down. She bent down and licked her way up his body, past his belly button, over his muscles, over his heart, up to his collarbone. He shivered.

“You’re still too thin,” she said, and she felt the rumble of his laugh on her lips. She smiled as she reached his mouth.

He had been all fire and fury and speed, but she wanted to take her time. She was going to savor the look in his eye, the look that said she was the only thing that mattered in the whole entire world.
She kissed him like they had 1,000 years to get it just right. He kissed her like he’d die if they stopped.

As she leaned over, she felt his left hand playing with the edge of her dress, his fingers grazing her hip. She pulled away and sat upright, batting his hand away. He looked up at her, a slight pout on his lips.

“Let me see you,” he whispered, rubbing her leg with his thumb. “Please.”

And she knew it was dumb because of course he’d seen her naked before — he’d seen her naked yesterday — but it felt different, like this, with him looking up at her like she might actually be beautiful. It was terrible and awesome all at once. She was scared.

But she wasn’t a coward. She closed her eyes and in one quick motion, she lifted her dress over her head.

It took another burst of courage to open her eyes. He looked half a god lying beneath her, bathed in sunlight, his golden hair flying every which way.

And he was looking at her like … like she was the sun. In her whole life she’d never imagined someone would look at her like that, and here he was, giving it away for free, breaking her heart and sealing it back together all at once.

He shifted so that he could sit up, but she was still in his lap, straddling him. He put his right arm around her waist and raised his hand to her cheek, brushing her cheek. She was crying, she realized.

“What’s wrong?” he whispered, so tender. She shook her head and smiled.

“Nothing. I never thought I could be so happy. I never thought anyone…” Her voice broke off. He pressed their foreheads together, his thumb tracing her jaw.

“Brienne of Tarth,” he said, deadly serious. “If I have to spend the rest of my life proving how beautiful you are to me, it’s a burden I’ll gladly take up.” His hand fell to her shoulder, rubbing across the bare skin. She shivered under his touch. She hadn’t realized how starved she was for … this.

She nodded and kissed him as he took her breast in his hand. His skin was rough but his touch was so light and gentle. She moaned into his mouth as she felt him hard against her leg. His lips moved to her other breast, and it was too much, it was so good, she was losing her mind. The only thought she had was “more, more, more.”

Which she’d apparently said out loud, because Jaime was laughing as he licked her nipple.

“Insatiable,” he said, as he kissed his way between her breasts. She ground into his lap and then he moaned too.

“Why am I the only one who’s naked?” she quipped. He grabbed her legs and slid her off him on to her back, then stood and quickly rid himself of his trousers.

“Happy now?” he asked, his hands on his hips.

“No,” she said, raking her eyes over his body. “Come back here.” He grinned and launched himself back on the bed, on top of her.

“And now?” he said, holding himself up on his forearms.
“Much better,” she said as he dipped down and kissed her. Emboldened, she reached out and grabbed him. He growled against her chin.

“Brienne … gods … if you don’t stop I won’t last.” She laughed at him and he silenced her with his lips.

“Impossible woman,” he muttered, which only made her laugh more. Then he slid two fingers into her, and she wasn’t laughing anymore. She closed her eyes, it was so much.

“Jaime,” she whispered. “Jaime…Jaime…”

“I’m sure my other hand would have been…” he mumbled.

“No, I think you’re doing pretty well…Jaime!” How could he make her feel this good?

“Open your eyes,” he whispered into her ear. “Look at me.” She did; he was sweaty and crazed, his hair went every which way, and she wanted to die like this, with him on top of her.

She was so close, she bit her lip to try to hold it off. But he must have known what she was doing, because he slid his mouth down her body, wet and hot, until he reached her there and, gods, it was the best feeling she’d ever felt in her whole life. She wrapped her fingers in his hair, was basically thrusting against his mouth, and she couldn’t stop screaming his name. Jaime, Jaime, Jaime. He smiled up at her when she hit the top of it, shouting his name. He climbed back up and held her close against his chest.

“Jaime,” she whispered, nuzzling his beard again. “We should’ve done that … ten months ago.”

“I’ll do it every day for the next ten,” he whispered back. Once she caught her breath, she took him in her hand again. He moaned. “You’re sure?” he asked.

“Fuck me, Lannister,” she said. He didn’t need her to say it twice.

“It might hurt,” he said, as he braced himself above her.

“They tell girls that before they get married,” she said, snarky and impatient.

“Gods, I love you,” he said as he entered her, kissing her neck again.

It didn’t really hurt; it just felt strange, at first. And then it felt incredible. He started slow until she matched his strokes, and now he was the one who couldn’t stop screaming her name. She kept one hand in his hair and the other on herself and a few moments after he climaxed, she did again, too.

After, they laid in bed, all tangled up, sticky and smelly and far too in love to care.

“Are you hungry?” he asked into her hair. “They brought us breakfast before.”

“Oh no, the servants,” she said. “Do you think they heard us?”

“Definitely.” They laughed. He went and fetched fruit from the table and returned to the bed. He fed her strawberries, staining her lips and the tips of his fingers.

“I was engaged once, you know,” she said, as she ran her fingers through the hair on his chest. “Before you.”

“You never told me that,” he replied, watching her carefully.
“When we finally met,” she continued, “He told me I was far too ugly to marry, and he threw a rose at me. A rose. I always found that part so funny — well not at the time, but later. He brought a rose just to throw at me.”

Jaime said nothing, but she could see the fury growing behind his eyes.

“It’s OK,” she said, stroking his hair. “If he’d married me, then I wouldn’t have married you. And he definitely wouldn’t have known how to do that thing with his mouth.” Jaime laughed at that.

“The first girl I kissed was one of the girls in the kitchen,” Jaime said. “I was … 13?”

“Johanna told me all the servant girls were crazy about you,” she replied. “You must’ve been good.”

“You tell me,” he said, trailing kisses down her arm.

“The first girl I kissed was one of the girls in the stables,” Brienne said. “I was 11.” Jaime laughed again. “She wanted to practice for her future husband! I was just excited someone wanted to kiss me.” After a moment she added, “Also, she was very pretty.”

“And she had great taste,” he added.

They kept trading stories and secrets back and forth. She told him more about her brother Galladon, what little she remembered before he drowned. He told her all the things he remembered of his mother — bedtime stories and walks on the beach and how much happier his father had been then. She told him just a little more about the pirates, about how afraid she was that she’d never see him again. He told her about his siblings terrorizing the Rock while she was gone. They still didn’t talk about the letter, in silent agreement to wait another day.

“I can’t believe how lucky I am to have you,” he said hours later.

She nodded. “Sometimes I think about all the things that could’ve kept us apart…” But he shook his head.

“I don’t think anything could’ve kept us apart,” he said, looking her right in the eye. “In every lifetime, I know I’d find you.” She laughed. “I’m serious!” he added.

“I don’t think you’d look at me twice if we weren’t forced together,” she said with a smile.

“You’re wrong,” he said, pouting again. She loved when he pouted, when she got under his skin. “But I’ll just be grateful that in this lifetime, I get to be blissfully happy with you.”

She rolled on top of him and kissed him again. They spent the whole day wrapped up in each other, trading secrets and drinking wine and kissing all their secret places.

Chapter End Notes

The last exchange they had is inspired by an actual interview Nikolaj and Gwendoline did where she says she thinks Jaime never would’ve looked at Brienne twice if they hadn’t been forced together and Nikolaj disagreed and said he always thought Jaime would find her. :'}
This took me so much longer to write than any other chapter because I’d never written
a sex scene before, so hopefully it’s not total garbage!!! Unfortunately, we are
extremely close to the end of this now, and I’ll be sorry to let this AU go. Thank you
all for reading and commenting and leaving kudos. J & B 4eva.
Brienne had never slept naked before. But as she woke up the next morning, she realized it was much more comfortable than the alternative.

They’d apparently never closed the curtains yesterday, because their room was flooded with sunlight. Her golden lion was snuggled up on her chest, almost like a kitten, gently snoring. She tried to remember every little detail of this moment, to burn it into her brain – the way his hair tickled her skin, the way the sun warmed her, the way his fingers pressed on her hip.

She thought about how things had been before, when she’d laid on her side of the bed, wishing she could think of a reason to reach across the chasm between them. If she could turn back time and whisper to Brienne of six months ago that things would end like this, she wouldn’t have believed it. She idly ran her fingers through Jaime’s hair just because she could, to remind herself that this was really happening, and was going to keep happening.

Brienne grew up knowing that some women were loved and cherished. They had men who wanted them and husbands that honored them and lovers who lusted after them. And those women were beautiful, and that’s what made them worthy.

Brienne always knew she wasn’t beautiful. She had imagined what it would be like if she were, sometimes, when she was all alone, in bed at night just before she fell asleep. But gradually she stopped imagining, because even thinking about those things she knew she would never have had been too much. She was breaking her own heart.

So she decided to focus on other things, things she could control — being kind and loyal and strong and fierce and brave. Taking care of her people. Learning to fight. That’s how she would make a happy life, without romantic love, but still worthy and good and fulfilling on its own. And she would’ve been happy, she knew.

But then she got Jaime. And somehow all the things she never thought she’d get a single moment’s taste of were hers forever. He looked like the princes in the old songs and he looked at her the way she only hoped someone would look at her in her deepest, wildest, most secret dreams. It was so much that she wouldn’t have been surprised if her heart couldn’t have borne it, if she just didn’t have to capacity for it.

But her heart had just expanded. The parts of herself she’d tried her best to kill were alive. It was exhilarating. It was scary. She’d told her father she trusted Jaime, that he was a good man, but still...she was placing her one, fragile heart in his hand. Did he realize?

She twirled his hair around her finger as she puzzled it out. Soon he woke up, blinking his eyes in the sunlight. He turned and looked up at her.

“Good morning, sapphire,” he said, a smile spreading on his face. She’d never seen him look so young and well-rested. She kept running her fingers through his hair. She thought he might purr.

“We should get dressed,” she said. “We have things to talk about.” Now he frowned. She placed a kiss on his forehead, trying to soothe him.

“Come on,” she said, pushing him off her lap. He didn’t like that either, but he also didn’t
complain.

An hour later, they were dressed and eating breakfast on one of the balconies. Jaime was too nervous to meet her eye as he moved around the oatmeal in his bowl. He knew it would be fine—he really did—but having this conversation... There was a stone at the bottom of his stomach.

But Brienne wasn’t saying anything either, pretending to be consumed in thoughtfully buttering her toast. He took a breath.

“I’m terrified, Brienne,” he said, not looking up from his oatmeal. He heard her put her toast down. “I don’t want to fuck this up. I always fuck things up.”

She took his hand. He almost started to cry. When did he get so emotional?

“I’m terrified, too,” she said, matter of factly. “My father used to always tell me that being scared was good, because it meant something was important.” She squeezed his fingers. “But I don’t think you’ll fuck it up. As long as you start talking.”

He looked up at her. Her hair was shining in the morning sun; her eyes were wide with… trust. She trusted him. When was the last time someone had done that? He had to be worthy of it.

“The letter,” he said, his mouth suddenly dry. He took a drink of water. “Really it started before the letter,” he continued. She nodded.

“When my father was here” — it was so hard to look at her during this part, but he did—“He suggested, well, ordered, me to annul our marriage so he could wed me off to someone else.” She nodded, biting her lip.

“But I told him no. That was the night before Tyrion’s wedding.” She nodded again, remembering how she hadn’t seen him that night or that morning. “And that’s when I knew for sure that I didn’t want to lose you.”

“But the letter…?” she injected. He nodded.

“So then the wedding…and after the wedding…you were there for this part.” He couldn’t help but grin.

“Idiot,” she mumbled when she saw his smirk, but she smiled back.

“And then you were gone. Which was fine. You were where you needed to be and I was waiting for you. You might remember this from one of my…numerous letters.” He blushed a little bit.

“I still have them all,” she said. “It was very romantic.”

“I found the old ones you kept, when I thought you were…” She was alive, but he still couldn’t say the word. She nodded, giving him permission to keep going. He chewed on his lip, searching for the right words.

“So then it was just me and Cersei. And she can be very persuasive…”

“She hates me,” Brienne offered.

“Not as much as she hates me. Or herself.” Brienne ran her thumb up and down his palm, giving him silent support. How was she so good? “And my sister reminded me of all the reasons why…why I’m bad. All the bad things I’ve done. All the ways I’d hurt you, and all the ways I’d probably
hurt you again.” He couldn’t look at her now.

“And then...you never said when you were coming back, and your letters were always so short, and I just thought...” He stopped and took a big breath. Brienne handed him his water, and he greedily drank up. He took her hand again before he started.

“It made sense to me that you’d figured it out. That I was no good. And that you’d want to stay on Tarth and you were just too kind to tell me outright that you didn’t want me anymore. Seemed like the sort of noble thing you’d do. So I wrote the letter and sent it off in the middle of the night to let you off the hook because I thought I was just saying the obvious — that you were too good for me — and I regretted it immediately but I couldn’t take it back.”

“You really thought I would just leave you?” she asked, her voice small.

“I’m always ready for people to leave me,” he said, matter of factly. “I’m a dumb, one-handed former knight who lashes out at the people he loves. Sometimes I feel like an open flame, waiting to spark and burn everything down.”

He held his head in his hand, leaning against the table. “And sending that letter proved that I would hurt you! So then you really shouldn’t have…” He just didn’t have the words anymore.

They sat in silence for a long time, not moving, not even really looking at each other. Jaime did, improbably, feel slightly better for having said it all now.

“So I got the letter,” Brienne said after a long time. “And it was sickly funny because my father had suggested the same thing.” Jaime looked up at her then. “That I stay on Tarth. He felt guilty for selling me to you.”

“Good,” Jaime said. “He should. Married you to the Lannisters.” His voice dripped with disdain. She ignored him.

“But I told my father that my husband is a good and kind and loyal man, and that he shouldn’t feel bad about it anymore. I don’t think he really believed me until I showed him the sword.” Jaime smiled again.

“He liked it, did he?”

“I think he thought you must have lost your mind,” Brienne said. “A wife with a sword. But he was happy for me.” More reasons to be glad he’d given her the still nameless sword, then.

“But then,” Brienne said, the lightness in her voice dropping, “I got your letter. And it hurt. When I left the Rock, you told me you loved me, and then you sent me this incomprehensible letter…”

“I’m so sorry, Brienne. Did I say that yet?” he asked. She gave him a sad smile and shook her head.

“At first I thought, maybe it’s a trick. Maybe he just doesn’t love me, and he’s trying to get me to be the one to end it.” He hated that, but he nodded anyway. “But I couldn’t really believe that. Maybe I was just being stubborn —”

“I love when you’re stubborn,” he said, moving his chair closer to her side of the table. She laughed at that.

“I knew I could stay on Tarth and be perfectly fine,” she said. “But I didn’t want to be perfectly fine.” He moved closer to her. She put her head on his shoulder.
She laughed, then. “I did plan all sorts of terribly mean things to tell you when I got back. Who do you think you are and you can’t just dump your wife in a letter, stuff like that. But when I finally got home, I couldn’t be mad anymore.”

She nuzzled his neck with her nose. He smelled so good, always. Like incense and fire and home.

“You could’ve told me when you were coming home.” Jaime offered.

“You could’ve just asked,” she said, and he grumbled. She felt it more than heard it. “But maybe you were a little right. I stayed longer than I had to. I was enjoying being Brienne of Tarth again.”

He caught her lips with his then. Honestly, he thought he deserved a prize for waiting so long to kiss her. It was languorous and heady. He realized neither of them had actually eaten anything.

“You’ll always be Brienne of Tarth,” he said as he pulled himself away. “You could live on Casterly Rock 100 years and it wouldn’t change you.”

“You’re a good man, Jaime,” she said. “Not perfect, but good. But if you can’t believe that, then we’re already doomed.”

He turned her words over in his head. Their truth was obvious.

“Ok,” he said. He sealed it with a kiss to her forehead.

“And I’ll forgive you your dumb letter,” she said, smiling again. “And I’ll work on being better with words, so you’ll never doubt it again.”

“And I’ll never hurt you again,” he whispered like a prayer, running his thumb down her crooked nose.

And she laughed. He jumped, that’s how surprised he was. She saw his frown and laughed again.

“Don’t be stupid,” she said, and his scowl deepened. “Of course you’ll hurt me again.”

“That’s not —”

“And I’ll hurt you,” she said, running her finger tips over the corner of his mouth. “And we’ll have arguments and we’ll be mean and you’ll probably stop talking to me for a week, that’s how mad you’ll be.”

“I’m thinking about stopping talking to you now.”

“But,” she said, smiling so bright and wide it was contagious, “That’s what being married is, I think. Some days you won’t be able to stand me and some days you’ll think I’m the sun. But we won’t give up anyway.”

He kissed her temple. “I’ll always think you’re the sun. Even when I can’t stand you.” He tickled her side and she laughed loudly again.

“But really!” she said in between gasps. “I choose it all. The good days and the bad ones. Even when you’re broody and secretive and a little too mean and I’m stubborn and difficult and a little too quiet. I’d choose you every time, Jaime Lannister.”

“And you said you’re bad with words,” he mumbled, kissing her again. He thought, again, about what he’d done to deserve Brienne, and then he decided to stop thinking about it that way. Maybe no one deserves anything good that ever happens to them in their whole lives, but it’s their job to
try to be worthy of it anyway and never, ever throw it away.

He pulled away from her. Her eyes were still closed, his kiss still lingering on her lips. “I’ll never walk away,” he whispered into her ear.

“I’m not going anywhere,” she said, pulling him close again. And he believed her.

They did not finish breakfast.

Chapter End Notes

it makes me so sad to admit it, but there's just one! chapter! left! thank you all soooo much for reading, commenting, kudos-ing. braime forever.
Jaime first floated the idea two weeks later. They were sparring in the training yard — he didn’t see any reason to hide what they were doing anymore. He wanted everyone to know that Brienne could and did beat him every day. He was more proud of her than he’d ever been of himself.

He was improving, though — even with their long break in training — and he had a new strategy he was working on to distract her.

“Your eyes look particularly bright today, my lady,” he might say as he planned an attack. She would blush and, if he were lucky, miss a step and give him a tiny opening. But soon, it only worked with the most bawdy compliments, which he tried to avoid when the young squires were watching. They always cheered for Brienne, as they should.

“You’re insufferable,” she said as they took a break and drank water.

“That’s why you love me, my bride,” he said, taking her hand and kissing it. She rolled her eyes — she was still getting used to him being affectionate when other people were around — but she liked it.

“Speaking of,” he said, feigning nonchalance. “I had a thought.”

“Was that a new experience for you?” she said as she took her hand back and refilled her cup. He nudged her with his elbow.

“Our anniversary is coming up,” he said, uncharacteristically nervous.

“It is…” she said, wondering where he was going.

“And when Tyrion and Margaery got married…” He took her hand again. It always surprised her how touchy he was, how he needed it to ground him. It always surprised her how much she liked it, knowing he was there because of the pressure of his fingertips. “Well, I was jealous.” Her eyebrows shot up. He kept going.

“We planned a beautiful wedding for them, and ours... It depresses me to even think about ours.”

Brienne knew he had a point. She didn’t like thinking about it either — her terrible dress, how cold
he was, how alone she felt.

“But it was the beginning,” she said, tugging on his hand, “of this.” He smiled.

“Exactly,” he said with a grin. “So I was thinking that we could have a big anniversary party. Invite everyone we know.”

She put her hands on his hips and looked down at him. He loved when she looked just a little annoyed. She had a line at the center of her eyebrows that he always wanted to smooth out with his thumb. He somehow stopped himself from doing so when other people were around.

“We don’t like most of the people we know.”

She had a point.

They negotiated. It would be a smaller feast, only with people they liked. He was in charge of all the details, but he wasn’t allowed to get her a new dress.

“Maybe I’ll get someone to write a song about you,” he said when they discussed it in bed later, her head on his chest, his hand on her waist.

“No!” she yelped, punching his arm softly. “That’s another rule, no songs.”

“You’re taking the fun out of this,” he whined, grabbing her wrist.

“I’m sure you’ll find ways to annoy me that I just haven’t thought of yet,” she said with a sigh, rolling over to kiss him. He was such a good kisser. Not that she’d ever tell him that — he’d never let it go. He already constantly mentioned the one time she told him he was the most handsome man she’d ever seen.

Sometimes he kissed her like they’d done it every day of their lives and sometimes he kissed her like it was the first time all over again. And sometimes he kissed her like he hadn’t seen her in ten years and sometimes he kissed her like she was a part of him. Sometimes he kissed her like she was fine china, and sometimes he kissed her like it was an argument that he very much intended to win. If she listed every type of kiss, it’d take the rest of her life, but she wouldn’t mind.

“Oh, I definitely will find ways to annoy you,” he whispered against her jaw, tickling her with his beard.

Even though Jaime had wanted to spend every hour in bed — or … near the bed — by the third day after their reunion Brienne had convinced him they needed to go back to their jobs as lord and lady. Winter was still coming, after all.

But at the end of the day, when they should have been tired and sleepy, they hungered for each other. Jaime was so much faster at getting her undressed than he’d been when they first wed, though sometimes in his excitement his fingers still got caught in the strings and buttons and ties and she’d have to help him out. Sometimes it still took too long and they didn’t bother taking their clothes off at all. She finally started to see the appeal of skirts.

But nothing surprised Brienne more than the depths of her own desire. Her septa had made it seem like sex was simply a woman’s duty, something to be endured. She’d known that wasn’t completely true, feeling how she desired touch, feeling herself at night in the dark when she was alone and everyone was asleep. But she still hadn’t expected this — an unquenchable longing at the pit of her stomach, a desire to have Jaime near her, touching her, inside of her every chance she got. Sometimes, when she reached for him, for a moment she worried he might laugh at her bold-
faced desire, but he always matched her, just as desperate as she was.

They knew each other in every way two people could know each other, and yet Brienne knew they’d discover countless new things in a lifetime together. Thinking about it brought a smile to her face.

Tyrion and Margaery arrived a few days before their anniversary feast.

“I heard you fought off two dozen pirates, sister,” Tyrion said as he embraced her. Jaime made a face — he didn’t want Tyrion to offend Brienne by making light of what happened — but she laughed it off. “I’m glad,” he added, giving her a squeeze.

He was less sweet with his brother. “And I heard you’re like a horny teenager who can’t keep his hands off of her,” he said to Jaime when they hugged.

“Is this whole castle full of spies?” he said, punching him in the arm.

“Nope, it’s just the lusty look in your eye,” Tyrion said with a smirk. Jaime wondered, not for the first time, how Brienne put up with the insufferable Lannister men.

But the other couple had news, too: Margaery was already pregnant. Brienne embraced her like they were actually sisters. She made sure the servants catered to her every whim, even giving up Johanna to Margaery so she’d know she was well attended.

“You shouldn’t have made her come all this way in her condition,” Brienne chided Tyrion.

“She demanded we come!” Tyrion shouted back. “Do you think my wife is the type of woman you can say no to?” Margaery grinned, absolutely beatific in a loose pink gown, a messy braid over her shoulder.

“I wanted to celebrate you,” she said, taking Brienne’s hands into her own. “There’s such little goodness in the world, we need to cherish every drop of it we get.”

Jaime did keep to the agreed upon rules: He only invited people they actually liked, like the Kennings. Tywin and Cersei were not made aware of the occasion. He didn’t buy her a new dress — she wore the one from Tyrion and Margaery’s wedding, which was still the best looking gown she’d ever owned, by far.

But it was Jaime, so of course he still got her something. He snuck into their bedchamber as she was finishing getting dressed.

“Happy anniversary,” he whispered against her neck. His fingertips traced the chain she always wore, playing with the sapphire there.

“What did you get me?” she said, feigning annoyance. She felt his grin against her skin, which was quickly becoming her favorite feeling.

“So presumptuous,” he said, putting his right arm around her waist. He placed a little box in her hand. “I hope you like it…” He was nervous, she realized.

She opened it — inside was a little ruby pendant, matching the sapphire around her neck. It was stunning.

“I thought you could wear it with the sapphire. Like…” his voice trailed off. He was … embarrassed?
She turned around to face him. He was biting his lip, looking her not quite in the eye.

“The sapphire is me. The ruby is you,” she said. He nodded, finally smiling again. “I love it.” She took off her chain and slid the ruby on to it, then put it back on. He kissed her neck again.

“Stop,” she whined, not really wanting him to. “We have to get to dinner. And I have to give you your gift.”

“My gift?” he said, pulling away. “You got me a gift?”

“Of course,” she said, walking over to her chest. “You don’t have a monopoly on grand gestures.”

He watched her bend over and take out something long and heavy. She turned back to him and held it out, handle first. A sword.

“Brienne,” he mumbled, reaching for the hilt, but not taking it. “You shouldn’t have.”

“Why not?” she said, smirking. “You don’t have a sword.”

“I don’t deser– I don’t want a sword,” he said, frowning. She hated the look in his eyes.

“I thought you were going to stop rejecting good things because you don’t think you deserve them,” she said, still holding the sword out. This what it feels like when someone really sees you, he thought.

He took it, finally. It was simple, sturdy and felt good in his hand. The pommel was engraved with a lion’s head and stars and moons. The lion didn’t seem angry, or proud, somehow, the way Lannister lions always did. It was almost smiling.

“I love it,” he said, choking back tears he hadn’t realized had formed in his eyes. “Thank you.” He turned it over in his hand.

“What will you name it?” she asked, softly.

“Not The Roar,” he said, with a little laugh. “You still didn’t name yours.”

“No, I did,” she replied.

“You didn’t tell me!” He put his sword back in the sheath.

“It was a lot of pressure!” she said, blushing. She laid his sword on the table.

“What’s its name?” he asked in a singsong voice. “Tell me,” he whined, when that didn’t work.

“Annoying husband,” she said, checking her hair in the mirror. He snorted.

“Tell me,” he tried again. “It’ll be my anniversary gift.”

“I just gave you your anniversary gift!” She straightened the top of her dress. It didn’t need it; she was just biding time.

“I could have two gifts!” he said. “I’m worth it.” She snorted; Gods, she loved him. She turned and pulled him close again, his chin nestling perfectly on her shoulder. They stood like that a few moments, breathing each other in.

“Love Song,” she whispered.
“What?” he asked, forgetting.

“That’s what I named the sword,” she mumbled.

“Love Song,” he repeated, enjoying the way it sounded on his tongue. “And I thought I was the romantic one.” He kissed her cheek.

“We have to go,” she said, pulling away.

“Do we?” he asked, darkly, sending butterflies to her stomach.

“You’re the one” — he interrupted her with a kiss — “who invited” — another — “all these people.” And another.

“And now I regret it,” he mumbled as he kissed her nose. “When will I learn to listen to you?”

“Right now, I hope,” she said, taking his hand. “Come on.”

They made it to the feast only slightly rumpled. Margaery complimented her new ruby right away and Tyrion sniggered at the red spots on his neck.

Jaime had done an amazing job, Brienne could admit. The food was perfect, the flowers were beautiful, and seeing everyone they loved together in one place filled her with a type of happiness she hadn’t known before. Usually she shrank from being the center of attention, but, with a push from Jaime, today she enjoyed it.

“You know what the only bad thing is about how much I love you?” Jaime asked, pouring her more wine. She scrunched up her face. “It gave me one thing to be grateful to my father about.”

While they dug into a much too large lemon cake — Johanna said it was the best the kitchen had ever made — Tyrion rose to make a toast.

“Brother,” Jaime said, a little warning in his voice. Tyrion waved him off.

“I just want to say,” Tyrion said, standing on a chair so everyone could see him. “That I love my brother dearly, but he’s never been a pleasant person. He was grouchy. Rude. And not even in a funny way, like me.” Brienne and Jaime both laughed.

“But now,” Tyrion continued. “Well, he is. He’s happy. Friendly. I’m not saying the love of a good woman changed him, I’m saying he changed so he could be worthy of the love of a good woman. And there’s nothing more worth celebrating than that. To Jaime and Brienne!”

Two months later Brienne walked into Jaime’s study while he was working on a letter to his father. Silently, she laid down on the couch. He could tell from the way she hung her head back, eyes closed, that something was on her mind.

“What’s the matter, sapphire girl?” he asked, not even looking up.

“Nothing,” she said, not opening her eyes. “Finish your letter.” He pouted.

“It can wait,” he said, setting down his green quill.

“Finish,” she said more fiercely. “Then we can go for a walk.” He knew better than to defy her when she was like this.
They walked in silence on the beach, their boots set aside, her arm wrapped around his elbow. He wondered what it was that she didn’t want to tell him, but he knew better than to push it. He tried to just enjoy being together.

But then he realized she was crying.

“Bri…” he said, stopping their walk, turning to face her. “You have to tell me what’s wrong.” She shook her head.

“I’m just being silly,” she said, wiping her eyes.

“You’re never silly,” he said, squeezing her shoulder. “Just tell me. You’ve got to trust me.”

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. He was right, she knew.

“I’m pregnant,” she bursted out, opening her eyes. The look on his face was pure joy. She started crying again. He wrapped his arms around her and she sobbed into his shoulder. He rubbed circles into her back, the way he knew she liked. It helped her calm down. After a long time, she pulled away enough to look at him.

“You’re not happy?” he asked, a carefully neutral look on his face.

“I am,” she said, wiping her nose. “It’s just…” She took his hand so they could keep walking.

“Your mother died giving birth to Tyrion,” she said, her voice shaking. “And my mother died giving birth to me.”

Oh. Jaime hadn’t even...he was an idiot.

“Fuck,” he said. That made her laugh, at least.

“But that won’t happen to you,” he said, knowing his words weren’t enough, knowing he couldn’t promise that, but having to say it anyway. “My sister had two healthy children and she’s fine. I’ll write to the citadel, I’ll get the best maesters, I’ll…”

“I know,” she said. “But even then it still could happen to me. And then I’d leave you and our child…”

They sat on the sand for a long time, her head on his shoulder, his arm around her waist. For once, Jaime had nothing to say.

“You just have to promise me,” she said, after a long time, “That should it happen, you won’t be like our fathers. You won’t be silent and cold. You won’t act like I didn’t exist. You have to promise me you’ll be the best father, still.” He didn’t want to agree, because he didn’t want to admit it could happen. But he knew what he had to do.

“I promise you,” he said, kissing her forehead.

“Good,” she said. “Now we won’t mention it again. Let’s just be happy.”

And that’s what they did.

Jaime got the best maesters from the citadel and he made sure the cooks made all her favorite foods and he paid way too much for strawberries just because she was craving them. Johanna embroidered a blanket for the baby and Jaime tried to go easy on her when they sparred, until she swept his legs from under him, sending him crashing to the ground, and hurting his back for a
They sent Margaery and Tyrion gifts when she gave birth to a baby boy, Kevan.

And they argued over baby names. Jaime thought they should name a boy Selwyn, after her father, but Brienne didn’t want to.

“What nickname would we even give him? Selly? Wynny?” she asked, as he argued for it again while they were wrapped up in bed.

“He can be sapphire boy,” Jaime said, kissing her growing stomach. Brienne wasn’t used to being so curvy. She wondered if she’d ever get her straight lines back.

“What if he has green eyes?”

“Emerald boy, then.” He kissed her lower and that stopped the conversation there.

But as the day of the baby’s birth approached, they both grew more frantic. Neither spoke of the reason why as they quickly made love every chance they got, or stayed up late tossing and turning in bed, wishing for sleep. And Jaime prayed all the time, a constant stream running in the back of his head. *Mother keep her safe, Maiden keep her safe. Please.*

He was meeting with his council when Johanna burst into the room.

“My lord,” she said in a rush. “It’s time.” He nodded to the men assembled with him.

“My apologies,” he said, practically sprinting from the room, Johanna at his heels.

Brienne was in labor a long time. The maesters weren’t worried, but Jaime was. He held her hand and put towels on her forehead and talked without ceasing until Brienne told him to shut up, which he did.

Eventually, the maesters tried to get him out of the room, which he refused.

“I want him here,” Brienne said in the middle of a contraction, through gritted teeth.

She was brave and strong and *heroic* and all of a sudden the baby was here. A girl. They heard her cry and then Jaime and Brienne were both crying, too. Everything had been OK. Their baby girl.

They placed her in Brienne’s arms, wrapped in one of the blankets Johanna had sewn. Brienne looked at her daughter and looked at her husband, standing over her, softly crying, and she only thought one word.

“Joy,” she said, leaning in and smelling the baby’s head, her super fine blonde hair. “Let’s name her Joy.”

Jaime looked down at them, his two girls. “Joy,” he said. “Perfect.”

Joy got a sister, two years later: Alyse. This time, Brienne and Jaime were so busy parenting a toddler they had less time for existential dread, though it still hung over them in quiet moments.

Joy had green eyes and Alyse had blue, and they both had blonde, curly hair that their mother was terrible at braiding, despite her best efforts. Jaime learned how to do it with one hand, instead.
Brienne taught them to swim and Jaime taught them all the best places to play hide and seek in the mines and Johanna taught Joy how to sew — Alyse had no interest and no one was going to force her.

Jaime bought them swords to spar with when they were arguably still too young, but they loved them so much neither parent could bear to take them away, until Joy got in trouble for beating up her cousin Kevan, who hated fighting.

They visited Selwyn on Tarth every year and Brienne got to show them all her favorite spots and Grandfather Selly regaled them with tales of what trouble their mother was when she was their age.

And sometimes Brienne was too stubborn and sometimes Jaime was too down on himself and sometimes they fought but they never stopped talking and they always worked it out, eventually, just like they promised they would.

And the girls grew and had husbands and children of their own and the Rock was always full of children and laughter and warmth in a way Jaime had rarely imagined it could be.

And Jaime loved Brienne and Brienne loved Jaime until the day they died — and probably after.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you SO MUCH for reading this. It was the best outlet for my season 8 angst, and your comments and kudos made my day, every day. The idea to write an arranged marriage fic came from a clip I watched of the reality show “Married At First Sight.” The title of this fic came from Lady Gaga’s “Always Remember Us This Way” from “A Star Is Born,” the most Jaime and Brienne song of them all. Multiple chapter titles, including this one, came from Bruce Springsteen songs. The new Vampire Weekend album, “Father of the Bride,” also provided inspirational vibes. Other influences included the movie “Brooklyn” and the musical “Hadestown.” I also quoted Jane Austen’s “Persuasion,” which one person noticed, and Lil Nas X’s “Old Town Road,” which no one noticed. Again, thank you thank you thank you.

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