**A Dance of Shadows**

**Summary**

It’s been one year since the death of Daenerys Targaryen, called by some "the mad queen", and the North and the Six Kingdoms try to rebuild all that was lost. Jon Snow had disappeared beyond the Wall, his wolf last seen near Hardhome. Queen Sansa "the Wise" is facing unrest in the nearby villages, which leads her to make questionable choices in the eyes of her people. In the South, king Bran the Broken fell seemingly ill and fear for his life makes people uneasy about the succession.

As once again instability risks to break the kingdoms, a hero reappears, with the name of a long-feared enemy, and an old song is beginning to be sung once again, with fire and ice meeting for one last dance.
Not mentioned, but coming: Some news from the iron islands and Dorne, trouble coming from Essos… oh, and some resurrection, perhaps.

Notes

Here’s the first chapter of my fanfiction set one year after the last episode of GOT, with Sansa’s POV. The second will be Arya’s.

This fanfic is also posted on my tumblr account (same username, with -yet at the end). do not hesitate to take a look to see the progress) and on fanfiction.net

Some characters are mine, others belong totally to ser GRR Martin and the franchise.

You can participate in choosing the title!

Do not hesitate to review!
When had the snow stopped falling? She wondered. Beyond the window, where her gaze had wandered, spring seemed to take possession of the land. She remembered her beginning, as a little girl full of dreams, the green grass that always seemed so dull compared to what she could imagine, the houses that were always so small, so rustic, and their walls grey from smoke and dust. And the people, austere and quiet, with few smiles, when her mind wanted colors, vibration and euphoria.

But spring was not in her heart this morning. And the color of the grass was now much less shiny than what it had been, and the houses now were immaculate due to their recent repair. The people were now hers, more than she ever thought it was possible. Yesterday, that comparison would have offended her, but now she felt it. She felt the ice in her veins, just as them, just as the cold wind that were straying in such a quiet morning.

Where did the North and her end, exactly? She wasn’t quite sure anymore. She was the North, and the North was her. When it suffered, she could feel it as if it was her own wound. Of her body, she couldn’t really feel anything now. Hunger perhaps. Anger too. But no pleasure. No, it wasn’t for her anymore. She could still feel unwanted touches on her skin, unwanted presence behind her, tormenting her, ordering her again and again to break.

But not again. No, she would not break this time. Her skin has changed from porcelain, to ivory, to steel. And even her tormenter had doubted it. He shouldn’t have underestimated her. His loss, her win.

‘Your Grace?’

Sansa blinked and turned her head away from the window, towards the man that interrupted her thoughts. She couldn’t remember his name, but she knew his face. A warrior, ill-suited for his task as a messenger. From the emblem, he must be from House Hornwood. Righteous at wrath.

Seven gods, she did not fear his wrath. Where was his lord?

“I beg your pardon, your Grace,” he said. “We come here today to ask for… prot… protection. As I said, there’s been people who… slaughtered… at the village of Pealsnow and…”

She interrupted him.

“How?”

He lowered his head, as if frightened.

Was she that terrifying? She wondered.
He bowed, looked around at the men around him, and seemed to find some courage, finally.

“Wildlings, men said, your Grace. There’s unrest in the villages. People fighting over chicken and crops, and babes being stolen in the night.”

His speech was followed with quiet but firm “Aye”, and nodding.

She was tempted to laugh.

“Wildlings, you say?” She wondered. “Are you entirely sure of yourself? They are children of Winter, they don’t like the life on this side of the Wall. They all decided to move out as soon as the Great War ended. You’ve seen them as much as I did.”

He seemed a bit ill-at-ease.

“Well, I… I did, such as you. B-but…”

“Do you have any proof of what you said?”

The Hornwood man shook his head nervously. She almost thought he would piss on himself if she would continue staring at him.

“No? That’s disappointing. Then I will ask you, ser, to bring me one, in the name of your lord.”

“Your Grace, I… I will. B-but… we hadn’t thought… We thought… Well, now it’s done…”

Could he be any less articulate? Sansa bit back a remark. She was supposed to be good, to make them talk. She sighed instead.

“We thank you for your information, ser. I dare hope your lord would join us soon for the festivities next week”

He seemed to shrink a little.

“He… did not survive, your Grace. Me and my men… we are the survivors of the attack. We couldn’t… We had to flee, if we stayed…”

She raised one of her eyebrows.

“So you let him be slaughtered?” She raised her voice, cold as snow. “You broke your vow to protect your given lord?”

He shook, looked around him for support, and continued, with more precipitation.

“But… there were no chances… You have to understand, your Grace, we were outnumbered.”

“And I believe you remember, ser, that you swore your life to protect your lord, and that your desertion means that this oath was broken. Plus, you come here, asking for protection, when you hadn’t even stayed for your lord. And my men said that you stole pigs and threatened their owners in one of our nearby farms. My lord Cerwyn”, she asked, turning to the lord in question. “It seems that I have trouble to remember. Could you remind me what law recommend for men who have done such deeds?”

Lord Cerwyn smiled. He had been friends, she knew, with the young lord Hornwood, and when he learned of his demise, he had almost come for the man, he knew. She had heard it when his hand clang to his sword.
“Death,” he said with a snarky smile.

The leader of the Hornwood men began to shake, but he could not say a word. Nor his men for now.

She nodded, deeply in thought.

“My father used to say the man who passes the sentence should swing the sword.”

She raised from her throne.

“I am no man, ser.” She continued “And your hand is important for the North.”

The man raised his head, relief on his face.

“Oh, your Grace…”

Once again, she cut him short before he would fool himself more.

“I’m not finished. You will, as an example, be led to the Night’s Watch,” she turned her head toward Lord Cerwyn, who nodded. “Here, you could see by yourself if any wildling crossed the Wall. Some of my men will escort you, with others that decided to take the black. But not now. Not before you’ve seen what happened to your lord. In my name, I will ask one of your men to take the mission I asked of you. Then, when the mission is finished and you realize your failure, you will go.”

He stopped, petrified, but then nodded, broken.

“Yes, your G-grace. As you… said.”

She overlooked the rest of his men. Most of them did not dare to cross her eyes as she wondered which one could replace their leader. None of them had defended him. They all seemed to act as one in their cowardice. But then, her gaze stopped on one man. He was shaking, as the others. But not from fear, she gathered from the way his fists were tight. The top of his head was clumsily wrapped in thin bandages, but she could still see blood on it. A scar was drawn from his left cheek to one side of the bandage, and she wondered how long it was. His clear green eyes were staring back at her, with anger and sadness. Not an anger directed at her. More like a thirst to revenge.

He was slighter than the other men. Maybe a bit older than her. But it didn’t matter. Age and built, she had learned, were not signs of competence.

“You.” She asked him. “Who are you?”

“Your Grace…” the leader said. “He’s no one. N-not even a ser… Just one of the playmates of my lord, bastard to one of my… Not someone with any importance.”

“I haven’t asked you” She glared at him, and then asked again for the young man. “Who are you?”

“Malwyn Snow, your Grace.”

“And where were you, when your lord died?”

He lowered his head, seemingly in order to gather his thoughts. One of the men answered in his stead.

“Don’t be too hard on him, your Grace. The lad tried to defend one of the families, but then…”
some of the enemies knocked him down. He’s a good lad, your Grace, I’ve known his father. We found him near a fountain, barely alive.”

“Aye” said others.

The leader glared at them. They shut their mouths. Visibly, he did not like the young man.

Good, at least some people seemed to respect him.

“And you say it was wildlings”

“I say they were dressed as wildlings.” The young man replied.

She raised her eyebrows.

“Oh.” She said. “So you seem to have some doubts.”

He raised his head, suddenly nervous, seemingly aware of the whispers of his group.

“I wouldn’t presume…”

“Your presumptions are what interests me at the moment. Humor your queen, Malwyn Snow.”

He fidgeted a little, then continued. “I’ve seen Wildlings, your Grace. Some of them took my mother away when I was a little boy. That was not wildlings, your Grace. They were far more disciplined to be only that.”

She pondered the question.

“Then, Malwyn Snow, I guess we have found an arrangement. You will lead the men for your investigation.”

She could see the plead In his eyes. That was not a easy task she was asking of him, given his status.

“But… I’m not…”

“You will gain the rank of a knight if you succeed, and you will have revenge for your fallen lord and friend.” She continued. “And if I ever hear of any mutiny against you, let it be known that I will take the offence personally.”

He looked at her with surprise, while the others stared at her with awe.

“You can’t!” the leader said one last time.

She turned back to her chair and glared at him.

“This is my decision. You can take your leave, now, and rest. Food will be brought to you. As for you, ser, I believe lord Cerwyn can show you the rooms prepared for the ones who have the honor to take the black.”

With hesitation, the Hornwood men bowed to her. The former leader bowed a bit more reluctantly, but she saw that he had no will to fight more. She would have to look at him a bit more closely, maybe. Weak men like him could be easily manipulated.

Lord Cerwyn joined her when he was done.
“An admirable decision, your Grace,” said lord Cerwyn. “You were just and kind, when others would have killed him… I would have.”

She nodded, waiting for the next report. “I know, my lord. But I would certainly need your wrath elsewhere, I believe. It is the third time this week. Something is going on, and we’d better be prepared.”

“My arm is yours, your Grace.” He bowed to her.

She was their Queen. Ice flowed in her veins. They were her men: Hornwood, Cerwyn, Manderly… They all had already fought for her. Fought for Jon in the wars that came.

Not the Karstark or the Umber, not anymore. And now, of Hornwood… Who was really left of it?

Queen Sansa the Wise, they had called her. They certainly would not have called her that if she stayed silent and bent the knee, if she hadn’t done what they wished she would. She would have preferred the Red Wolf, honestly.

She was known to be smart and pragmatic. Still, it seemed like the only ones who wanted to claim her hand saw her as a price to be won with a pretty face, a girl who had always pleaded to get what she wanted: an army for Jon, the independence of the North. These persons saw her beauty, but not the iron underneath. Not the she-wolf underneath. A she-wolf who wanted to bite anyone who threatened her pack…

A pack who was now gone. Jon farther North, Bran South. And Arya… Who knew where she was at the moment? She was not one to write letters, and Sansa had not awaited it. But she was still alive, that she could feel it.

Poor lord Gendry Baratheon had waited the first month since her departure, in Winterfell in order to have some news of her. All this month he had been pesterling Sansa, as if she was concealing him her location. He would certainly have stayed a lot more, had he not had his own house to rebuild at Storm’s End.

Sansa sighted.

It was love, it seemed. Once upon a time, she dreamt of a love like this, of a lord coming to Winterfell to sweep her off her feet. But then, love in her family seemed to go the wrong way. Duty was to be observed. It was what was necessary for the security of the realm.

An image came to her, haunting her. Jon, with his silver queen, eyes locked as if they were the only ones in the place. Voices that came, but that didn’t break it. A bit of jealousy and envy in her heart, feelings she thought she would never experience anymore.

That was another day, another dream. A fool’s dream.

She hadn’t wanted to be right. She just wanted to be safe. Jon could procure that safety. ‘He’d understand’ she thought at the time. But did he? She saw the glimpse in his eye, the uncertainty. He loved her, as a true brother would, she thought. Or cousin, maybe. Time had troubled that assumption. But trust her? No, she didn’t want his trust. If there was something she had learned from Littlefinger, it was that she couldn’t trust men. Nor women. Life wasn’t a song where knights would save distressed maiden from dragons and tyrants.

She wasn’t a maiden anymore. And dragons and tyrants were not her problems anymore. Both were gone. She did the right thing. Or, more like, she pushed one button, and the others followed, as she planned it.
But now, here she was, alone in a world of men that thought they could one day tame her, make her theirs, somehow. She could see the lust in their eyes, as much as the admiration. Many of them had travelled in the year to ask for her hand, some just sent letters. Sometimes, she had been tempted to say yes, for the North to have more allies. But then, her blood turned cold when she met them. She could always see straight through them.

She was always a key to the North for them. If she let them, they would want to take her away, to sent her in the bedchamber, where she would be just a womb.

It was her duty, she learned when she was young. But now, there was other things she’d learned. And being entirely passive wasn’t one of them. It she had to step back, it had to be for the North to gain a powerful ally, one that she could make listen. One that wouldn’t want her or her people to bend the knee.

So here she stayed. And the more she waited, the more they were waiting at her door. But none worthy for her to consider it.

She had never thought she could feel lonely when being so admired.

Queen, she was now. But to what price?

Her fingers danced lightly on the arms of her throne as she counted all the losses and gains. All the faces that she would never see again. All the faces she would see day after day. And faces that belonged to another past, one where Such as that one, who was now standing in front of her, waiting for her command.

She motioned him to talk. The man smiled, bowed and stood back to let another step forwards.

“There’s someone who I would like you to meet, your Grace.” The first man said.

She raised her eyes.

“What?”

“Ser Harrold Hardyng”

Harrold Hardyng. Also named Harry the heir, for his claim on the Eyries. If Robert Arryn were to die, such were suspected these days as he had been taken ill since the last tournament of Harrenhal two months ago, he could become a strong ally.

If rumors were true, he already had two bastard daughters.

But then what the rumors said of her, again? She wondered, seeing the well-built sandy-haired man in front of her, his deep blue eyes staring at her with confidence.

The perfect image of the knight in shining armor.

Well, she would have to wait and see, she decided.
Chapter Notes

Here’s the second chapter, with Arya’s POV.

On another hand…

Who put that smut in my fanfic? I wonder…

You’re warned,

Song mainly used: “Bad Girl”, Kid Francescoli

Next chapter will be Malwyn Snow.

Let me know what you think of it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
A big thank you for the lovely and talented @ditto-moon on tumblr, for this picture of Arya that I commissioned. This is beautiful! Feel free to check the other amazing art on her blog (https://ditto-moon.tumblr.com/) :)
That being said, good reading!

“On the count of three… One… Two…”

She set down her card. Queen of hearts. Against seven of spades. She won. The man’s face in front of her fell, as his eyes were fixed on the beautiful lady drawn on her card. An image quite similar to that of Sansa, in a way, with her red hair and her classic beauty. His mouth was agape. He couldn’t believe it.

Because in fact, this card wasn’t hers. It was the one that he hid on his handle, intended to trick her.

He was going to murder her in her sleep after that. Or at least, he will try, Arya thought with an amused smile. If he swung the dagger with the same acuity as he played, she would have time to end his life ten times before that.

“Another time, Larry,” She said, taking the money that was bet on this game before he could protest.

She reached the counter, thirsty for another beer. The innkeeper stared at her, a smile on his face, as he poured down the liquid on the goblet.

“Y’ know you mad’ an en’my out o’a born k’lla and he’s not gonna let you g’ away with it, right, lass?”

Her smile grew larger.

“He will try. If he can catch me”

He laughed loudly.

“Ya’ve got sp’rit, my lass, I like it!” He said. “I’d be that sorry when I’d see ya body in b’d cover’d in blo’d next m’ning.”

“Not mine, I believe. But I will be sorry for you, having to clean that up.” Arya replied, putting a gold coin on the counter and taking her goblet with her.

His laugh deepened, and she thought he was going to throw up by the strength of it. She drank, feeling the cold liquid ran through the inside of her body. She felt refreshed, and a bit hazy by the alcohol.

But not enough for her to be THAT hazy. She could still murder all of them in their sleep. And they wouldn’t even feel a thing, if she wanted.

She looked around her, taking the atmosphere of the inn. Dust and rancid drinks on the tables. Mostly men drinking both. Some women, lightly dressed, visibly here to be the company of men who would only see the roundness of their breasts and of their butt.

The city where she was now was called Mukhtar. City of silk merchants and prostitutes, but also of games and drinks. A city of pleasure for some, of murders for others. Excesses, everywhere. For men, of course. But her status as stranger seemed to make her in the eyes of these people either sexless, either a conquest. Some tried to abuse her just to prove the last point.
These ones did not have eyes anymore. She was the one coming in this strange country, willingly. She wasn’t going to be their sex-slave.

Only in this inn, she felt in known country. Such atmosphere, she had also seen it at Westeros. And maybe it was because her travels had led her actually back nearer. She had seen in these lands moralities, stories, that made her feel like home, but still, each word seemingly unaware of the other.

What’s west of Westeros? She had asked her brothers and sister. She had seen things she never knew existed. People, smells, flavors, textures. Everything was different and exciting. But everything was also strange and dangerous, and it couldn’t fill the void she felt inside.

Sansa must be married now, she thought. Or would she? When she was young, that was all she would talk about, how one day, she would be swept away by a brave knight who would treat her like a queen and how their children would be the most magnificent ones the world had ever seen.

But that wasn’t Sansa anymore. She was a queen of her own right now. Nor was she the same Arya from her beginning. She remembered the raised eyebrows of her father, amused by the mud on her robe. She remembered her mother’s disapproving frown and her attempts to keep her hair tamed.

They both saw who she really was, what she really wanted. But that didn’t mean they were totally accepting. They treated it like fantasies, Father maybe with more fondness, but fantasies nonetheless.

“You will marry a high lord and rule his castle.” Father said. “And your sons shall be knights and princes and lords.”

But Father was gone. And, at the end, he understood. That wasn’t her. She wasn’t born to be anyone’s obedient little wife. Now, here she was, with all the eyes she closed, eyes that she would see sometimes in vulnerable nights.

“Be with me. Be the lady of Storm’s End”

She shook her head. Why would she think of him now? That wasn’t what she wanted at the moment, and it still wasn’t what she wanted now. She wasn’t a lady. She wasn’t her sister. She was Arya Stark, she had killed the Night King, she had fought against oceans and seas. She didn’t need a man. Nor anyone else to be happy with what she was. She was enough.

She sighed. No, she would not think of THAT night again, she thought. She would not remember of touches on her skin, of blue eyes staring back at her and…

First time wasn’t even that good.

But the other ones….

She closed her eyes, then looked back. She decided to get back to her room at the inn. When she closed the door behind her, she sighed and fall on her bed, thinking.

The man who lost to her at cards would certainly try to make a move. To kill her or fuck her. Or both. But seeing him that engaged in a discussion now, it might take a while.

Thirteen minutes, maybe. In these thirteen minutes, she could do a lot of things. She could even get away, and no one would even find her again.

But then, it wouldn’t satisfy her.
But maybe something could, for a while. She looked from right to left (an habitue she had took each time it happened, private rooms weren’t always THAT private), then put her hands under her pants.

Like this, she could almost imagine he was there, with her. Gendry Baratheon. Gendry Waters.

She had had other men. Three, maybe, in the year that came. Women had needs too, she thought with a lazy smile, and he made her discover that. She had known other things. She never attached herself to them. She never had really the feeling to.

But what was it in that man that even one year after, she was still thinking of his touch?

His hands must be soft now, she thought. A lord’s hands, now used to “nobler” tasks than forging blades and swinging hammer. She guessed that these hands must be on someone else now. A soft-spoken lady perhaps, skilled with a needle and singing all day for her knight. Not a ruthless warrior as she was.

Three women, he had before her. She remembered.

She closed her eyes, bit her lips. Three women who had known him like that, who had felt his hard cock inside them, taking pleasure after pleasure, again and again…

She moaned, her fingers having found just the right spot. With her eyes shut, she could almost believe it was his fingers, who were on her, pleasuring her like that.

Then came the loud bang on her door. A bang so loud she thought it would break it;

She cursed and raised up. Eleven minutes. That guy was actually less sharp than she thought. She thought he would actually manage to get inside the room, so she could kill him more discretely.

Running to the door, she opened it and caught the man by the collar, raising her dagger to meet his throat.

“You’re going to regret interrupting me” She snarled, all fangs shown and fever in her eyes from her previous pleasure.

“Interrupting what?” said a familiar voice.

She let the man go, as if touching him had burned her.

“Gendry?”

Here he was, the same as when she left him, and he had a smug smile on his face. And blue eyes staring at her with sparks that she refused to give signification to, and which just made her fuzzier inside.

Damn that man, entering her life like that, with a hammer on his hand.

“Hello Arya” He said. “Did you miss me?”

Her heart missed a beat, and she almost lost it.

“Damn it!” She turned back, frustration on her tone. “I almost killed you!”

“I’ve seen.” He replied. “Wouldn’t be the first time. But I’ve seen you more cold-blooded, before.”
She looked at him, disbelieving.

He chuckled, and looked behind him. That’s when she noticed it. The corpse of the man she had prepared herself to kill tonight. Now with a scrambled face, due certainly to an attack with a hammer.

Hammer that still was in Gendry’s hand.

This man had had the same timing she had thought. But then, both of them hadn’t expected the former blacksmith to come.

The nerve of him. She wanted to see that death. He just robbed her of it.

“I knew there would be tons of men at your door, “ Gendry said, irony on his tone, “but I hadn’t expect them to actually try to stab you before I do.”

“Oh, because you think you could?” she replied.

He chuckled.

But she had to think of the practicalities.

“That body should be hidden. Else, people will see it.” She said, beginning to take it by the feet to lead it to the room.

If people saw it, there would be screaming. And she wouldn’t get any sleep. That wasn’t like what she planned.

He looked at her, flabbergasted.

“Seriously?” He said. “I just came here and that’s the first thing you do? No hello Gendry? I missed you too?”

She ignored him. The body was almost inside.

“Arya.”

Almost.

“Arya.”

The feet were in, now. She just had to close the door and ignore the warmth that was revived on her belly.

Gendry took her arm, making her focus on him. His eyes were positively burning.

“I don’t care if it alerts some fool who will cry murder.” He shouted, and she remembered the motto of his house. It excited her, more than she would admit right now. “Do you know how hard it was to find you?”

“Apparently not hard enough.” She said him, trying to put her hand on his mouth so that his loud and deep voice wouldn’t attract other people.

He kissed her. She was tempted to respond to it, succumbing to the nostalgia that was making her blood boiling in her veins.
Yes, nostalgia.

But then, nostalgia was a bit too much for such a reaction. She pushed him a bit.

“Why did you come here?” She asked him, trying to regain her calm.

“To take you away from here.” He tried to steal a kiss. “What does it look like?”

He was persistent, she had to give him that. Last time she saw him, it was before she even sailed. She had left him in bed, not telling him it was the last time.

“You can’t take me. Don’t you have other ladies to see?”

“I don’t like ladies.” He said between her lips. “They tend to disappoint me.”

“Oh” A flare of jealousy ran through her body. “How many?”

He raised an eyebrow, pushing her away a little.

“Does it matter?” He replied with an amused smile.

She took his lips once again with hers. “No”

And it didn’t. He was here, that matters.

A least, she added with an afterthought, for the need she had at the moment. The need she had built without knowing he would be at her disposal to finish it. She had been prepared to finish it herself.

Well, now that he was here….

She closed the door behind them and raised her eyes towards him. He profited that moment to push her against it, raising her hips to meet his, and wrapping her legs around him.

He kissed her again, and she let his tongue in, meeting it with her own, needing, taking, but wanting always more. He groaned, and she smiled.

The need tickled her everywhere, from her sex that she felt warmer and wetter against the breeches. She took off her shirt at the same time as him, between kisses that felt more like battles than tender love such as was presented by Sansa’s romances. But she liked it nonetheless.

“What were you doing, actually, before I even came here?” He asked, fever on his eyes, reflecting her own.

Unwillingly, she lowered her eyes on her fist that was on his chest now, the one that had been pleasing her earlier.

His eyes widened in recognition. He took her hand in his, licked her fingers and eyed her crotch, the cloth having been slightly opened to let her do what she wanted. She bit her lip, refusing to let out any cry.

“You naughty girl” He said with a voice that sent shivers on her skin. “For who exactly were you preparing yourself, exactly?”

She smirked.

“For myself, actually”
“… Why doesn’t It surprise me?”

She raised an eyebrow, pushed him off her and walked towards the bed.

“No, no, don’t take it the wrong way,” he protested. “Damn, you’re so… stubborn. And independent. And beautiful. And…”

She took her breeches off, turned towards him and smirked.

“Shut up and take your bloody pants off”

He smiled, his eyes full of mirth and lust and joined her.

“Geez. You’re always so commanding.” He said with his deep voice. “As you wish, my la-“

She kissed him before he could finish his sentence and pushed him until he was falling on the bed. She touched him, he touched her. It seemed as if they were trying to find where his body ended and where hers began.

When his cock entered her, it seemed as easy as if he just put gloves on his hands. She felt every inch of his, fitting every part of her, and then pushing her, just like she was pushing him till she felt open and warm in every pore of her skin. She felt dizzy, exhilarating. She couldn’t think clearly, time after time leading to another wave of sensation, of pleasure that was surpassing the rest.

And when he came, she cried with him, feeling the ecstasy take control.

He looked at her, heavy breath making his large chest raise and it felt a little bit like she belonged.

“How I missed you,” He said, wrapping his arms around her.

She almost said the same. Almost.

Her arms around him, she let herself believe that it would be enough. She would have to be out before he woke up, she thought. If she were any longer, she would almost be tempted to stay. And that, exactly, terrified her.

Why that, she couldn’t figure it out. She didn’t want to think of it now.

She counted his breaths according to the beatings of his heart. Warmth surrounded her. She let herself getting lost in his scent and closed her eyes.

……

She ran wild, a she-wolf hunting. On her tongue, she could still feel the taste of blood and ashes. It stuck at her lips, ran down from it to her chest. It smelt delicious, and she was wanting more of it.

The night was clear and snow was falling, building a white bed on . She was almost tempted to stop a little. But then, her prey wouldn’t stop.

Far away, her brother cried at the moon, and she cried with him. She tried to reach him. She could almost see him. Then she stopped. Her paw had touched a sharp thing, hurting her.

She looked at it, fangs out.

Here lay a long sword, almost buried by the snow, the hilt decorated with a white wolf’s head.
She realized. Her eyes opened. Her brother cried once again, and she cried with him, smelling the ash and the blood in the air.

“JON!”

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked it, and that it wasn't too OOC. Let me know what you think of it! Oh, and by the way, the comment section isn't here for any discord between Daenerys fans and Sansa fans. Or Jon fans vs Jon haters. Peace, people! There are forums for it!
He woke up at dawn, as usual, straw sticking on his clothes, and on his bandage. Ringing in his ears disturbed him, such as the images that were stuck in his mind of the recent massacre, mixed with the event of the Great War. Darkness and chaos, screams in the night that diminished little by little to let a terrific silence in. Faces with fear in their eyes, their mouths. Blood running through skin, dripping on the floor.

He had been in Winterfell, then, with the other men. Men he had known all his life. Edwin, great archer, who had taught him to play with the bow and the arrow. Jan who he had been running errands with when he was a young fool (well, younger than he was now). Finn, with always a joke in mind and playing the lute like no one else. Rickard, who always said aye to everything, without really thinking about it. Denys, who couldn’t hold a feather properly without breaking it but who could swing the lance expertly. Eddy, who was always whoring around as if it was some sport. Reagan, a distant shadow, always looking at him and his mother with hostility. Darren, who could sometimes stop to bring his mother some flowers, pat him on the head when he saw him behind her skirt, and bring him pastries when he was a boy. As if a boy couldn’t comprehend such things.

And then, there was Larence. Larence Hornwood, born Snow as him, but who was chosen by the King in The North, when he had been named, to take back the lands of his father. Wise, kind Larence Hornwood. Brave when needed, always attentive to the need of the people. And his closest friend too. They discussed every plan and trusted each other to have the other’s back, like brothers would.

Larence had been so alike the King, in fact.

The King in the North, born a bastard as himself, who raised and raised, until he was at the top. Spited in the Night Watch as steward, then named Lord Commander after having disappeared mysteriously. Who then let Wildlings in to protect them against the White Walkers.

A contestable choice, but Malwyn, despite his hatred of one Wildling in particular, couldn’t blame it on them. In fact, it made him respect the man even more. A man who cared so desperately about the livings that he welcomed wildlings on the other side of the Wall and inspired them to fight for him, at the Battle of Bastards, then at the Great War.

Larence and Malwyn admired him, revered him. He was the hope that they did not have to stay only bastards all their lives. In him, they found confidence in their destiny. He wouldn’t be only the “poor young Malwyn Snow”, whose mother died in front of him, and who was raised by soldiers who did not understand a child’s needs.

But then, the King was no longer King. He had bent the knee to her. The mad Queen.

Good ones never seemed to stay good too long, he thought.
An image of the woman came in his mind. Her beautiful silver hair floating lightly behind her despite its thick and intricated braids. And eyes, deep purple eyes, with such a spark of melancholia in them. A mouth that opened only a little, but with a strong albeit soft voice. As the others, he had looked at her with suspicion and hostility, that foreign queen coming with her armies of strangers and criminals. And dragons. Two ferocious monsters that breathed fire and ate tremendous food that the North needed.

How could the King bend the knee to that terrific woman? He had asked himself the question.

He couldn’t understand at the time, having never loved.

But then the monsters defended them against the dead, and he couldn’t have been more thankful.

Then came Reina, a dream in the aftermath of the fight, dancing in the snow as if yesterday had just been another day under the sunshine.

Hair the color of honey and tender brown eyes that followed him with such a love. Born a nobody, like him, but raised as queen. She was loved, admired by all. And when she sang, his heart would beat fast. And boy, she could laugh. She was saucy and could break any man.

She did not break him. But she stole him. And after that, he had never wanted to leave her side.

He had almost forgot, then. About the man who killed his mother. The man he saw again then, in Winterfell, when the Great War began. The man with flaming hair and blue eyes, and furs enveloping him as if it was a second skin. He was the same as he saw him last time, as a little boy. As if ten years hadn’t taken their hold on him.

He could not kill him that time. Not yet.

He had promised himself to Reina that night, before leaving to King’s Landing. He had said he would bend the knee ten times over if only he could have her in his arms. She had laughed at him then, telling him to stop. That it was impossible.

And it was. After this Great War came another and he had to follow the others.

He shouldn’t have, for all it had been worth it. The queen that he had begun to admire turned mad, leaving a burning city and corpses behind her and his hero was dishonored and exiled.

And because when he and Larence returned, only their friends’ sorry faces were waiting for them.

Reina had been married in the South, he learned. Some knight serving the Mad Queen, and who now was loyal to king Bran.

Some unknown knight that still lived, and who took her away from him.

“You’ll get over it, boy” they all said. And, to his own surprise, he almost did.

Women, he had had some after Reina. But he never really forgot. She was here, somewhere. Maybe waiting for him, who knew. She swore she would never think of a man the same as she did him. Even if she was forced to marry, she said. She swore.

Now, there was only Jan, bitter as an old man. Rickard was still a fool, but a weak fool. Denys had lost his fighting hand. Eddy had added drinking to whoring, and it seemed sometimes he couldn’t think clearly. And Darren, who still saw him as a boy, and couldn’t help but defend him, as if he was a puppy. He was no dog, nor wolf.
There was also Reagan, of course. But Reagan never seemed to warm up to him. Not that he cared. Since he was a boy, that man was always looking at him with spite and hatred, as if him being born was an insult to the world.

After whole months at trying to rebuild Hornwood, feeding and motivating the men, women and children that had survived the late Ramsey Bolton and his men, and then the Great War, Larence had found it was time to renew their allegiance to the Queen. He believed in her, Malwyn had seen it. He saw his eyes sparkled when they put the crown on her head.

And then, Larence was left alone to fight and die. And he couldn’t fight alongside him. He couldn’t even protect the ones he wanted to save. He could still hear their scream in his head.

How was he still alive? Why did they let him?

That question remained unanswered and made him uneasy.

He had almost believed in it.

But then his closest friend died, and so his plans with him.

He had no one else to look up to.

Sansa Stark may be the queen in the north, he thought. But he did not recognize any king or queen anymore. He was a bastard, a Snow. His lord was dead, and so was his vow of fealty. No more would he care for the realm, or the ones that pretend to be its master.

No one deserved it.

Especially not that man. Ser Harrold Hardyng.

He was up to no good, he thought. His gallantries to the queen were sickly to watch. At least to him. He could see some girls swoon, and he could also see the gaze of this man on them.

Sansa Stark did not seem to care that much. She responded to his advances quietly, her mouth only opening slightly. Sometimes, her remarks would provoke a roar of laughter on Harrold Hardyng. They seemed to be a match made in heaven. The Queen and her Knight. Both seemingly representing the very pictures of these concepts.

He couldn’t tell the feelings of that young queen. At least, they seemed to get along, Malwyn thought. At least, they seemed to have objectives in common.

He prepared his horse, added his bag to the charge. He would have to leave that damn city soon, he thought. They had alerted that queen, now that duty ended.

He could hear swords clinging to one another, and gasps of the trainees. In another time, it had been him, with Larence, or Jan.

“You seem pensive, Malwyn Snow” said a clear voice behind him.

The queen.

He bowed, but said nothing. He couldn’t. How could he tell that queen that he never knew, who he only saw three times before Larence’s death, what he was thinking about?
The first when he managed to sneak around, with Larence, at a great fest organized by her father Eddard Stark. She was a pretty thing then, with a sweet smile. She did not look at him once.

The second time, she was older, and she was with her half brother the king – former king, mind -, asking for help to win back Winterfell.

The third time, they actually stayed in that castle, during the longest night he had ever known.

He hadn’t been at the coronation. He couldn’t at the time. But Larence told him. And it had been obvious from the start that his lord was really enamored with her.

“Talk to your queen, boy,” Harrold Hardyng snarled, behind her.

Malwyn looked up at him. He was taller than him. Taller than even the queen. But still, he couldn’t inspire him respect.

“Oh but maybe Malwyn SNOW had had his tongue cut this morning.” She replied with cold gallantry.

“No, your Grace,” he said reluctantly. “My tongue is fine. I’m leaving at the instant.”

Harry the heir took a few steps forwards, his face turning red and his eyes glaring.

“The insolent!” he snarled.

His hand almost reached his sword, fury rushing through his veins, but then Sansa Stark stopped him.

“I thank you, ser, for your chivalry.” She said with an even voice. “But he is one of my people. I believe I can handle, even the lowest ones.”

Harrold grinded his teeth, but he bowed nonetheless. Malwyn couldn’t help the rage growling at his stomach.

‘Lowest’. He had been called worse. But that did not mean it did not sting the less.

But it seemed that Harrold was satisfied with it. He left them, but the queen’s guards didn’t.

As Malwyn was about to go, Sansa Stark took his arm.

“I remember you fought with us at the Great War.” She said. “You were brave.”

No she didn’t. He could see that. How could she? He had been a man among the others. But he was a bit awed to see that she would condescend to talk to him. In another life, it would have been enough for him to swear his fealty to her.

But that life was over.

“Aye.” Brave he was. Fool too.

“You have been a friend of lord Larence Hornwood, as I recall.” She said.

He froze, then nodded.

“I did not know Larence Hornwood very well, but I was very sorry for his loss.” She said. “He was a brave man. He will be sorely missed.”
His throat felt like somebody was strangling him.

“He was.” He managed to answer. “He will.”

She took a step closer to him.

“Now, you will have the opportunity to avenge him. Your lord, your friend.”

Pretty words. But pretty words wouldn’t bring all that had been lost. And it wasn’t only Larence. She did not know what he wanted.

“I’m still a bastard.” He said. “Title or no.”

She blinked a little, but continued. A hint of sadness glinted through her eyelashes.

“Yes you are,” She said. “My… the former king in the North, was too. In the end, does it really matter, when it comes to honor?”

She left him with that question unanswered.

He looked as she left.

She was beautiful, that queen, with her red hair and clear blue eyes. But she was so cold. Her gaze could freeze him and made him think she could read through him, like some book.

But she couldn’t. He was no book for her to read.

As for her voice, how unlike Reina’s it was. If Reason had a voice, he thought, it would be hers. Cold, hard and clear. He had heard that when she was young, she could sing pretty songs, and that she was exactly what was expected of a fair maiden. Polite, gracious and courteous.

He had not seen that, bastard as he was. And he did not really care. Reina’s was joy and sunshine all the same, tender even at its edges, but teasing him like the flipping candle he used as he tried to read at nights in his room. She always wanted him to catch her…

If only he could find her, he thought. She was certainly the only light in this world, now.

He met the other men at the gate, and silently, they rode the road towards Hornwood. But when they arrived at crossroads, and they turned left, he turned his horse right.

They almost did not remark it. He had been behind, as he had always been. And until then, he had always followed them.

But then, they remarked it.

“Boy, aren’t we supposed to investigate what happened at Pearlsnow?” Darren said, with a tired voice.

“I don’t care what you bloody do.” Malwyn retorted. “Too many of us are dead now. I believed the time for bravery has passed with Larence.”

Darren shut his mouth. But Jan rode back towards him, fury in his eyes. He managed to catch his arms, and Malwyn had no choice but to look at him.
“At least, go to the village, Mal’.” Jan insisted. “For Larence’s memory”

He didn’t want to. He couldn’t. Tears almost threatened to fall from his eyes at the thought.

What would he find in there? Only chaos and desolation. And the body of his friend, butchered by savages he did not really know.

“And do you think he would like it?” Jan hissed. “Everyone parting on their own way, his body rotting, his memory being brought to nothing because nobody cared enough for it?”

Malwyn glared. But then guilt reached him, and it wouldn’t let him go.

“Fine. But once it’s done, I’m gone.”

He would just go to Pealsnow, near that damn White Knife. He would look, bury his friend and leave. He had enough of all this snow. Of all these traitors. If he stayed longer, he believed, he would become exactly like them.

He went left, and the other men sighed with relief. But that relief, who made their two-days journey a rather peaceful one, turned to crisps by the time they saw the village.

Smoke had enveloped it, but it couldn’t hide the blood that was tainting the walls. And the lifeless bodies, men, women, children. Butchered all the same. It hadn’t been a fair fight. It had been a massacre.

But whose massacre, Malwyn Snow wondered. Was it really Wildlings?

A doubt settled in his mind. He had been sure, then.

But as he saw the burned houses, the bodies with blood all around them, he was reminded of other images, and it left him breathless, almost as powerless as the little boy he had been then.

Silent surrounded them now, as it always did after a battle. But this was no battle.

He remembered the last minutes. Laurence telling him to get to the house, and set the children that were screaming in there free. He would go to the maester’s house and save him so that he could help heal them all.

Guess he did not make it to that house. Malwyn, with an hesitant step, came towards it and entered it.

He stopped.

He had imagined it all nights, what he would see. But that wasn’t it.

Because what he found was Larence’s sword. Blood on the blade, but not on the handle.

And the maester at the end of it.

There was no body. Nothing. When others, warriors or small folks had all been left to rot.

Could it be?

But why?

He couldn’t help but hope. But doubt was the bitterest thing.
Larence wouldn’t have done that. But where was he? Where was his body?

Damn it, he thought. He’d have to take that mission, after all.

Maybe it would lead him to discover what really happened to his friend.
Chapter Notes

Well, I don't have any other answers, so I believe "A Dance of Shadows" wins. Thanks to the ones who participated!
Do not hesitate to review! Reviews are like chocolate for an author :) 
No bashing, just characters hating or loving some characters. But constructive criticism is appreciated :) 
Song mainly used: “Revolution”, The Score
Next chapter will be Tyrion's.
Now, just one question before beginning... Guess who's coming to dinner?

The wind was cold today, but it brought a delicious smell of the sea and salt, and Yara found herself dreaming. She longed for the sensation of waves rocking her ship and seagulls crying at her ears. Of the delicious sting of the salt, burning on her eyes. And the sun, above them, caressing them vigorously, rubbing the grains of salt against her skin, drying the sensation of the sea from her.

Damn, she could touch herself right now at the thought. She missed the sea, as much as she would a very skilled lover.

Maybe Arik was available. Or maybe Kiara. She could be up for a little love once in a while, between two boring duties. And the night was still fresh...

But then, something stopped her. A feeling. Images. And the coin that she had received recently, from a surprising ally.

Her father killed by her uncle. Her uncle killed during the burning of his fleet. The other dying a nobody in foreign lands. And her brother....

She closed her eyes firmly, not wanting the tears to fall. They had never fallen once. Now was not the time to begin.

Her family was still defeated, her house nearly on the brink of extinction.

Once again, the Iron Islands were vanquished, this time without even one battle. They were at their eyes now just some lands among others, led this time by a crippled boy, not even able to run for his life. A boy who wouldn’t even have survived in the Islands, and who certainly knew nothing of its culture and of its people.

People who had now to pay the gold price for it.

The shame. Her ancestors must be rolling in their graves.

The Iron Islands had only her, now. But maybe it was enough. She could rebuild it, brick by brick. She already had begun. But her people were weak now, without a cause to defend.

At least, not for now.
She looked at the coin in her hand, with the face of her enemy on it. The boy she was supposed to call king. The boy who now had asked even more of her people recently.

Not a very lookalike picture, but still, it made her imagine what she would do to the real face, as her nail hit repeatedly the coin.

She threw it in the fire. It would not melt entirely. But it would be enough for her not to look at it for the night. She waited a little, consciously ignoring the fidgeting of the little man in front of her, then looked at him with a spark in her eyes that her feigned annoyance could not hide.

“Urion,” she said. “It looks like you’re about to piss yourself if you wait more. What’s going on?”

He smirked with that crooked mouth of his and green eyes glinting at her, and curtseyed comically.

“News from your inconsistent Majesty, “your Grace”” He bowed once more.

She froze a little, then laughed loudly.

“If I didn’t have you, I would be bored to death right now.” She said to her fool. “Well, let’s hope it’s actually worth that pile of papers I’ve been working on all day.”

“Well, at least one of the two, I gather, may bring a smile to your face. “

She raised one eyebrow.

“If it’s another of these letters from Tristifer, you better let it rot under the farthest rock, where they belong. Seagulls won’t even want it, I gather. I’m not in the mood for his whining.”

“Well, I doubt the prose will be as poetic as that young sire, m’lady, but I’m sure you will find it more useful.”

She smiled at him, but gestured him to go. Now was not the time for his jokes.

He smiled back and left the letters in the table near her. And then he left, with the same agile grace as would have a cat.

She watched him leave with a smile on her face.

She had hesitated in hiring a fool. Only fancy folks would do that, she thought. But then time went on and on, waiting for something that did not seem to happen, and without one foot on ship, she felt herself deflate. Her men were loyal, sympathetic, but no one was in the mood for jokes these last few months.

That one was discrete and with an insolence that really pleased her. He wasn’t beautiful to see, with his crooked teeth and pointed nose. But he was clever, and could give good advices. She had actually known him since she was a child, and had always lived in the Islands. He almost drown when they put him in the sea. Weak, her men had called him. But still, he managed to be useful, even if he could not fight. And he had been loyal to a fault until that, without even she named him her fool.

That title was just a joke by itself. He was certainly one of the cleverest people she knew.

Would he one day betray her? She wondered. That man was clearly in love with her. But love was not really something that could stop betrayal.

She thought about the former queen, who accepted to support her claim. She had loved, and burned
for it. She payed the iron price, and Yara would have died to see that damn city collapse in flames, and these faces who had mocked her, humiliated her, be disfigured from fear.

Jon Snow should have died, that day. It was only justice. And if she had seen that bastard’s face at that moment, she would have cut his manhood and both his hands, before letting the others do the rest.

He had no honor nor loyalty.

He had betrayed his queen, plunged a dagger through her heart. He had watched as she bled to her death, disbelieving that the one she loved could defeat her so.

Had he cried for it? He better had.

What was his family’s way, again? That the man who passes the sentence should swing the sword?

Or maybe such rules did not apply for a bastard, she thought. Or maybe it only applied when it was Starks who applied that sentence. Damn hypocrites, all of them. Always blaming, but never acting if that action did not serve them at the end.

Her queen had been true to her goals, and she had fought. She had paid blood for blood, as a true Iron-born would have. She had helped them, the Starks, to the end, had led her armies to the North, lost half of it for them, for loyalty.

All for nothing. For a reluctant help, then to an even reluctant treason.

Yara had no such allies anymore. Only people with whom she had arrangements, but who would betrayed her if they could see their interest in it.

Well, not for now.

But soon, hopefully.

She took the first paper on the table and read it.

King Bran was ill, it seemed. The boy-king that her brother had had to protect until his last breath was one step from the grave. His spirit had been gone a long time, but now it seemed his body was not long to follow.

Good. That was a good surprise, actually.

She took the second and then smiled.

Just one of the news she was actually waiting for.

The day couldn’t be any better, she thought as she raised from her throne and left the place. She dressed herself in black and took her best man-in-arm with her.

Rain was beginning to fall, and storm will be coming shortly. Good. She felt it too, in her veins, in her mind. During her walk, she forced herself to think of all the things that had been forced on her, and one thing in particular.

Her brother had died for the Starks. But what had the Stark done for him?

They had stolen him, taken his true identity several times, turned him over. They had placed him in the way of danger and diminished him.
And then they did not even send her his bones. He had been burned, his ashes buried in a coffin as a Northerner, traitor to his own country till the last breath. What an insult to his Fatherland.

She had allowed him to go back. But it was for him to come back. To leave that past behind.

He had to let the Theon owned by the Starks, owned by Ramsay Bolton, die.

But he didn’t have to actually die himself.

Men could be disappointing when it came to loyalty.

Now, bitterness filled her heart, and she had enough of it. She would not stay isolated with her men, following another’s orders no longer. Not if she had a way out of it. She would not be tricked once again. She would not plead for independence, as it would not be given to her anyway. The Starks had played her, and they got everything and more than what would have been possible to imagine.

‘Why do you think I came all this way?’ the boy had said.

These words sickened her.

Well, no more now.

They wanted crowns, and still thought they did it for honor and the sake of the people.

They would keep these crowns. But soon, they would melt with it.

She continued to feed these thoughts until a strange satisfaction came burning in her belly.

She may die at the end of it, she thought, but then, it would not be for nothing. Trouble was already brooding in Westeros, but with what was going to happen, there would be no going back, no issue for her enemies.

She looked at the sky, expectant. But nothing but seagulls flying in the night met her gaze. Her shoulders were lowered, but soon she relaxed.

She should have known. It wouldn’t have been very discrete.

But then, it would have been much more impressive.

Wind came caressing her face and she closed her eyes a little, a smile on her face. Then, with a resolute look, she headed towards the creek the message was referring to.

Here, a woman with black hair was waiting for her. She was beautiful, and the red of her dress came beautifully with the cream of her skin. Strange from someone coming from Essos, she thought.

Behind her, there was a little boat, with a dark hooded silhouette in it, four blind men with daggers in their hands surrounding it.

Yara’s breath caught in her throat. The woman smiled and bowed to her.

“My name is Kinvarra.” She said. “And there is someone, I believe, who would like to see you.”

Yara smirked and prepared herself.
She had been waiting months for it to happen. She had almost thought somebody would find one letter. One letter would have been her undoing. And so much more.

Until that moment, she had no allies, no true friend, aside her people. She had forced herself to stay on land, waiting and waiting for it to happen. Her men had been impatient, had asked her to act as if it was a true rebellion. They had called her a fool, not to seize the opportunity to reclaim independence for the Iron Islands, as the young queen in the north had.

As if it would have been accepted.

She had had to tell them to wait. To wait for chaos that would be brooding soon in Westeros.

Chaos was here now. And as surely as salt could melt snow, no winter would settle in this storm.

Well now, she thought, looking at a familiar face under the hood, with that determinate look on purple eyes, things were about to get interesting.

The Starks, both that little queen and her crippled brother, will never survive this wave.

Not this time.
The wave was hard, this year, Tyrion thought with an amused smile.

Colors, everywhere. Crimson red, vivid green, bright blue, golden orange and soft pink. Purple, also. Flashing on the ceiling, on the floor, on the walls. Fabrics of silks from Lys, moving graciously, carrying these colors triumphally, giving them life and flow. A chaos of colors to make people forget about the holes that were still showing on the walls.

No grey, surprisingly. The king hadn’t wanted it, despite Tyrion’s protests about the utility to remember people of his family. The color seemed to displease him now, somehow.

Well, actually, grey wasn’t such a happy color. Tyrion hadn’t really liked it, but still diplomacy would have been better with it. With these Northerners who somehow found their way to the party and were sulking in a corner, ignoring the joy and lust radiating from every pore of the newly repaired castle. They were almost as broody as the only two members of the faith that deigned to join it. It had been difficult to convince them, but they did anyway. These stubborn men who were quite offended by their king’s choice of faith.

Dornishmen were the absentee of the feast, sadly. And that absence quite unnerved Tyrion. At least, they were some Dornishwomen… if it could appease him (surprisingly, it didn’t).

What could they be plotting? He wondered. News were hard to get, these days, and the king’s attentions were more in the north than in the south.

Still, wine was flowing from fountains. Boys were jumping in it, while some men chose to bath instead.

Girls giggled, euphoric from all the festivities. Women dancing, with their nipples bouncing as they moved. No ladies, these ones, no. But entertainers. Some whores. And the ladies, with a bit more clothes, judging them from afar as their husbands goggled them.

What a sight he liked to have in the afternoon.

Yes, today was a good day, Tyrion thought. Today was a day he prepared himself. A day to make illusions, and perhaps miracles.

“Cunts. Cunts everywhere.” Said a rough voice on his right.

Tyrion smiled, inhaling the smell of wine warmed by the sun, sweat and spices.

“Without it, there wouldn’t be any man. It’s a pleasant spectacle to behold.”
Bronn shrugged, a nonchalant smirk on his lips.

“Well, I can get used to it.”

“Don’t you have a lady wife to contend?”

“She said she didn’t want to go. She had other affairs to contend,” Bronn said. “That makes more for me.”

Tyrion smirked.

“Beware of them, my friend,” he said. “Some of them may be more dangerous than you think.”

“That makes the matter more exciting, don’t you think?” Bronn retorted with a smirk, leaving to take one glass of wine.

And maybe one other person as he came too, Tyrion supposed.

Where was the king now? In his chambers? He wondered.

People needed to see him. People needed to hear him. The most important person in the realm could not stay in his chambers with his eyes returned without people wondering if he was still fit to rule.

Tyrion hoped he was present enough. Words would soon spread about him dying.

He looked for the king with worried eyes, and moved, until his sight greeted him.

He was here, on his wheelchair, listening to a minstrel’s songs, just near the entrance.

Good, that was good, he thought.

Aerand Flowers. According to him, son of a long-lost princess and a wildling gone too far south. His features were as delicate as those of a woman, and his eyes as soft as a doe. His hair was blond and shiny, and somehow it made him remember young Lancel Lannister when he was only a little squire at Robert’s orders.

And now, he was singing and playing about the events of one year ago with a soft voice, as if telling a secret to those who cared to listen. And that damn bastard could very much do that! Young girls were already on their knees, staring at him adoringly as he continued his song.

… White as snow his fur was
But no true Wolf he was
With blood tears fate was settled
With fire all was meddled
He only heard the dragon’s roars
And its folly made his heart soar
O pray, O Mother
For his cry to reach its armor

“This song is inexact.” The king said, with suddenly a melancholic voice. “Northerners pray the old gods. Not the news.”

“You don’t seem to include yourself in it, your Majesty.” Tyrion remarked.

“I do not. Not anymore. I cannot really include in anything, now.”

“You are the King.”

“I am a lot of things.” He said. “That doesn’t mean I’m in anything.”

… For when barbarians rode to the city
Mothers could not keep their babies
And the dragon laughed, and laughed,
As his fire burned all their bodies
Wolfs could not prevent it to spread
Neither could lions and krakens
Till it left only fear and dread
Joy for the queen who listens

Young Bran chuckled a bit. A surprising sound from someone with so few expressions these days, Tyrion thought.
But then, another thought came to him, frightening.
“What about Drogon?”
The king said nothing, just smiled lightly. But not with the eyes. Never with the eyes.

… And the she-wolf, she howled, and howled,
To the moon and back they followed her lead
In the North she would remain until she was old
And in the South, he would reign with ease
Such was the pact with other animals they made
For no dragon would come to miss
And no winter would make it cease
As one, but far from each other they would reign
Such were set the fates of these sovereigns.

“Sansa always loved songs. But I don’t think she would like this one.” Bran the Broken said.


“It would remind her of what she lost.”

“But also what she gained in return.”

Smile, wanted to say Tyrion. Show me something. Anything.
You’re human, aren’t you?

Bran Stark smiled a little, but it did not reach his eyes.

“You remember the girl she was. But not the woman she is now.”

“Perhaps.”

Was there any songs at little Queen Sansa’s court? He wondered.

Well, she was not THAT little. She was a woman grown. With full breasts, although slender silhouette. Eyes like ice, but mouth like a button of rose. And rich auburn hair, like the colors of a weirwood tree in winter.

He had almost loved her, once. Not that she would ever had him. Even with a kiss on her hand, he could not have a blush out of her.

No, Sansa Stark was no woman for him, even if sometimes, he could imagine it.

“Ironic, doesn’t it seem?” The king continued. “That such a song would sing things that in fact are flitting and feeble.’

“I don’t know, your Grace.”

He had no answers for that. At least, no answer that would satisfy him.

“There are things that allude me.” The young King said, suddenly tense. “I must try to see this.”

Tyrion’s eyes widened even more as he looked from right to left.

Everyone. Almost everyone had their eyes on them. On the power in place.

If it failed, they would be screwed. It could lead to civil war.

“Do not leave us yet, young King,” He pleaded.

Do not leave me with those memories, he wanted to say. Do not leave me with them.

“I’m not young.” The king answered, with his monotone voice. “I have no age.”
Tyrion had grown attached to that boy. At least, to the body of this boy, and the stories that lived in him. Even now, it still fascinated him in the darkest of nights, when after a rough day, both King and Hand could talk more freely.

The man inside it, he wasn’t quite sure he would ever totally know him. He was a conundrum, a mystery. And yet, Tyrion almost feared what he would find behind all of this.

As should be every great monarch, he began to think.

But then, he remembered, and he took another goblet of wine.

“I’m South. Sansa is North. Arya is West. But who is east?” The young king mused.

“Jon Snow is north too, your Grace.” Tyrion added. “He is your family.”

He smiled.

“Jon is gone.”

Gone? What could he mean by that?

“Gone?” “Is he….”

“Kill the boy,” Bran suddenly said. “Kill the boy, and let the man be born”

Tyrion didn’t say anything, for he knew it would be useless. The shock had already dulled his senses. The answer to his questions would come in time anyway. But it won’t always erase the feeling of strangeness that came each time the young king spoke without context explaining it. Nobody could see what he saw. And this fact made him a terrific mystery.

“This is what Aemon Targaryen, from the Night’s Watch, said to Jon Snow,” Bran the Broken uttered, staring at the feast ahead them. “But he didn’t. I did. And Brandon Stark is no more, now.”

“You are Bran Stark. You are the king.”

He smiled, but said no more. Silence came once again between them. Until the song was heard once again, this time talking about a prophecy, and a sacrifice made with love and fire.

Tyrion wanted to laugh bitterly at the irony.

“They are talking about kings and queens.” He said, just to fill the void. “And heroes. I’ve never been one. And it seems to me we’re all out of heroes, now.”

This world doesn’t need them anymore, he thought.

“Heroes aren’t necessarily fighters.” The king uttered at last. “They are people who follow their destiny”

That speech reminded him of someone.

Someone prettier, someone real.

Someone dead.

“You’re thinking of her, right?”
Tyrion lowered his head, but he couldn’t say anything. He was no little boy, though how little he was.

“You’re always thinking of her when there is a party.”

“She’s gone.”

“I know.”

And she was a tyrant, he wanted to add. She was a criminal, a madwoman. She destroyed King’s Landing, mass-murdered half of its inhabitants

And yet, he couldn’t help but miss her. To miss the girl he met. That girl who made miracles happen. That girl who wanted a better world.

‘Ask me again in ten years,” he said to Jon Snow. If he had the opportunity, he would do it again. He would betray her once again, for the death of the innocent ones. And for the death of his siblings. He could still see in his mind their bodies, intertwined in agony under all the ruins they made.

She didn’t kill them herself, the bricks did. Cersei died, trapped in that castle as she had always been, where only one truly loved her, and was loved by her. Jaime died, trying to save her, even if he already knew she was beyond saving. A true fool.

And yet… When he saw their bodies, it was like a cloud of ashes had enveloped his heart. Rage, full rage consumed him as he hit the floor on and on with that stone he had found. Only dust came of it, and his despair consumed his soul, ripped it apart, until it left a dark hole on his chest, a shadow of his former self.

Cersei, the sister who had always hated him, always glared at him. Her eyes could not open up now.

Jaime. Jaime. Just by thinking of his name, pain still took its hold on him. Who would share his delusions now? With who could laugh with him? Who would fight for him? Save him? Bronn was good company. He could laugh with him. He could almost consider him as a friend. But still, Bronn had the heart of a mercenary; gold could sway him.

Jaime… Their bonds had been almost unbreakable: the golden lion and his brother the crippled cub.

But then, he remembered what he swore himself to forget as he said his last goodbye to him. An image, that he had forced himself each night to forget, for remembering would taint even more the memories he had of his brother.

Brown hair and green eyes, with sparkles of gold around the pupil. A warm smile…

A smile that was disfigured in a painful rictus when he took her, after so many others…

“You keep being distracted, Hand.”

“I’m sorry, your Grace, I…”

“Where do whores go?” Bran suddenly said. “You never found out the answer to that question.”

Tyrion froze. What? How could he know about it?
“What was her name, again?”

“Tysha”, Tyrion said, almost in a whisper.

No… just the ghost of her name on his lips was enough. He could not crumble now. Now after surviving so much…

“I believe I can.” Bran said, gesturing for his guard to come closer. “But do you really want the answer that will be coming?”

Drink. It was all he could do, now. Drink to forget. Drink to laugh, play, and drink some more.

Then, when he looked back at his king, he was already gone. His eyes were white as a sheet of paper, and that void distressed him. What if people saw?

But then, just as it started, it stopped. The king was here with him at last. And demanding to speak, ordering his guards just by the look in his eyes to silence

“The Iron Islands broke their fealty treaty.” He said with a clear and strong voice. “I believe we are in for a war, now.”

Then, he left, and Tyrion found himself alone in that room full of strangers with familiar faces. And the impression that a pot of wildfire had been dropped in the room.

How could he know that?

Oh, yeah. He was the three-eyed raven.

People looked at him, shock in their eyes. Discussion stopped, music rang one last note as silence filled slowly the room.

This king was not a leader with inspiring speech, at the right place, at the right moment. Truth was his speech, but truth was not always what people wanted to hear. Especially in a feast which celebrated his first year into kingship.

News were bad. With Dorne’s uncertainty and now this, it would never be the same.

So much for a good day.

The king was slowly losing consciousness of this reality. People had certainly seen it now. People will spread the word.

No pretty songs could ever hide it.

He could only pray for it not to become one in the following days.

Chapter End Notes

*Bloopers and added scenes*

No grey, surprisingly. The king hadn’t wanted it, despite Tyrion’s protests about the
utility to remember people of his family. The color seemed to displease him now, somehow.

Earlier in the morning…

“What happens to the grey color?” Sam said.

“It turned to black. Black as my soul.” The king retorted, out of nowhere.

“Cunts. Cunts everywhere.”

“I hope you don’t count me in it.”

They stared at each other. Then laughed.

“… The Northerners pray for the old golds.”

“…”

“…”

“golds? I believe it’s my family’s favorite prayer you’re talking about. “Good ol’ gold, come to mee!!”
A Man in the Snow I

Chapter Notes

Here’s one little chapter. I hope you will enjoy. Next one will be Sansa’s.

Song mainly used: “The Wolf”, Siamès

Do not hesitate to tell me what you think about it!

Good reading!

Snow. Cold, hard snow. Slipping through his fingers, through his hair. Biting his cheeks, making him sick.

How he hated that white powder. It seemed to have followed him all his life, like some sword ready to fall on his head. Snow like the place he was born, snow like the name they gave him. The name of the dishonor of one man and one woman, fornicating without care of property. He was the child of that dishonor, a tainted child. He had learned to think as much. He had learned to live with the blood of lord and one of some unknown woman, some woman whose identity he was desperate to know, as if it would change anything. As if knowing who she was could change what he was, could change his destiny.

They told him a bastard had no destiny. Look at the Blackfyres, they said. See what happened when their father the King legitimized them. Look at the chaos they made.

He had only few ways to be anything else, people told him. Either to go to the Night’s Watch. Or to serve as one soldier, hoping to elevate himself in the great wars that would be coming. In both ways, he could die without name, no one would really care.

Unexpectedly, he had raised.

But everything he did brought him where he was now. In this white hell, far away from the place where he was raised. Far away from the place where he thought everything was possible.

Where was he now? He did not know anymore. All he knew as that there had been fire, there had been death. Deaths by him, deaths by others. And a warning. ‘Fire and Blood’. It rang back in his head like a prophecy and stayed stuck on it since. He had run then, run until he reached sea. And when he reached it, he stole the first boat and rowed, rowed, as if the Others themselves were running after him.

He had fought them once. Yet, he still felt the cold on his neck, and the smell of rotting bodies in the snow in his nostrils. He had felt strong then. Strong and with a purpose. At that time, that kept him going, even when it was thought that all was lost. It couldn’t. He would have been ready to jump into a dragon’s mouth just to prove this point. It couldn’t end like this.

That was why he forced himself not to feel fear. To keep that hope alive, like a fire that needed feeding.

The Others were not what he feared, no. It was the hunger, and the oblivion that came slowly with
He was waiting quite a long time, now. One hour? Maybe two? He couldn’t really figure this out, the hunger and the cold progressively numbing his mind and body. It did not matter, for at the moment, he could only think of survival.

A boy was roasting a fish near the cave where he had taken refuge, five feet before him. Maybe no more than eleven.

He waited, but no one came. Was this boy an orphan? He thought. It seemed that nobody was coming for him. He had the same clothes as the freefolks, and yet, could he be so sure now, after all that happened?

And that smell… That smell was a sweet torture in that cold and hard night.

He walked forwards, slowly, as if not to wake a babe on his mother’s arms.

The boy began singing. His song talked about heroes and kings, maiden and warriors.

Not for him. Not anymore.

People had thought he was brave. That he was kind, compassionate and just. People, who had treated him as a bastard, as a nuisance. This time, they were following his orders, and he felt like a king. The king he had always wanted to be. They had chosen him to lead. And lead, he was prepared to.

Once upon a time, he had tried to do just that. To be the man people wanted him to be, a man that will be remembered. A man alike the one who had raised him. He had almost believed he could be like that, like the heroes he looked up to. The heroes he found in books, and the ones who appeared in his life later on.

This was what led him here. That vision, though pretty, was deceiving.

Heroes were no more. And now, he wouldn’t try to be one. It had already cost him so much.

He looked one more time at the boy, at his terrified eyes.

Kill the boy, a voice in his mind said. A stranger’s voice, tempting him so.

Would heroes do that? He wondered as he succeeded on getting behind him.

He slashed the boy’s throat and watched him bleed silently to death. He did not even feel anything as his eyes went from afraid to empty, and never left his face, with a unanswered question on his lips.

He pushed him back and looked no more. It was done.

He ate the fish, savoring every bite of it. The flesh was juicy and tasty, and it seemed to him that it was the best meal he ever had. And he had been invited in many castles… The bones clicked on his teeth pleasantly, and he used the bigger one to seek out the pieces that were stuck in between his teeth.

His meal eaten, he buried the boy in the snow, and suddenly, guilt assailed him.

In this cold tomb lied his childhood, he thought. In this cold tomb rested his dreams of chivalry, of songs and glory.
What had they lead him to?

‘Fire and Blood’

He knew what that meant, now. He knew the price. He had learned it begrudgingly, at first, but now. It was like it was imprinted in all of his being.

He was now reborn again. New blood in his veins, and a heart that was better-kept now. And eyes more acute now.

He was not the same anymore. He was someone else entirely. Someone new. Someone dangerous. Someone who would stay alive. No matter the cost, no matter the losses. No matter the pain in his heart, in his mind and in his bones. He would survive, if only to see…

He heard a horn. People were coming. He had to go, and quick. He stepped up, took his last belongings and ran as quietly as he could.

He had to go farther north, he remembered. Farther north was the answer to his last questions. He had to find someone, something.

What? He wondered. He did not know clearly. Just that it was here, waiting for him. And that if he looked back now, they would find him instead.

He heard a woman’s cry. But he did not look back.

Let her cry, he thought. It was only mercy. That boy would never feel hunger again. Never feel again. Never lose himself to delusions.

In the sky, he saw two crows flying. He ran faster. But he could not go faster than them. He stopped, when he was sure that nobody had followed him. That nobody could see him.

Crows were dangerous. They were intelligent, sneaky birds. Who knew what information they could transmit? What secrets they could divulge?

Who knew who could look through their eyes?

He took his bow and arrows and aimed.

One, two. He breathed. Then let the arrow take its course.

He heard the little noise of the two crows falling. Good. That was good. Only with one arrow. In another life, he would have been euphoric. He ran towards them, then froze.

One of them was alive. The arrow had only touched its left wing.

It croaked back at him. He looked at it in its small eyes, and felt rage boiling inside him.

Die, he wanted to shout. Die.

He took a stone and hit the bird with it. It struggled quite some time, blow after blow. But then, it was no more. Only blood, brain and a few feathers. And a message, with two words on it.

‘Jon Snow”’. A name from the past.

It could be of any use, he thought, as he slipped it into his pocket.
He stood back, ready to run again.

He tripped on something and cursed. But his curse was cut short when he reached the damn object that had made him fall.

He saw the sword, and the handle with the characteristic wolf on it. It felt like years ago, like some other life entirely. One where he almost found a home, love and glory. One where he belonged.

He was afraid to touch it. As if touching it would mark him as unworthy of his previous owners.

Would he dare try? His hands were shaking almost with anticipation, almost from the frost who had bitten his fingertips.

He heard a slight crack in the snow. Too light to be a human’s step. Maybe some snow lion.

Maybe a wolf. He raised his head, looking out for the culprit. He would not show fear. Not this time. Not once.

Fear was for the past.

He saw red eyes following him, but he couldn’t make sense of it. He almost thought it was a hallucination. White fur, like snow.

Once again that damn snow. He glared at the beast, preparing himself to fight to the death.

But then recognition ignited his eyes and he looked down.

It was gone, now. He was all alone. All alone with his thoughts.

What a terrifying thing, he realized. Because it made him remember what had been. Everything that brought him here. All his hopes and dreams. And then, the battlefield, the ruins of what had been once the most important thing for him.

He had betrayed his queen.

He had loved her. But that love was murder. It killed him inside, eating away all his hopes and dreams, until it became the one and only. The only thing he could live for. The only thing he could die for.

And no one had ever noticed, he thought with a bitter smile. Why would they notice that he was becoming a shell of his former self?

He had betrayed her. But he loved her still. And, maybe, she didn’t even know this.

The image of her beloved face came to his mind, he cried. He could still smell her perfume, full of summer and lemons, and the fire that surrounded her. He could still feel her eyes on him when he met her. When he bent the knee, and she smiled at him.

Did she feel the fire in his heart too? He had thought at the moment.

Now she would never know, he thought. She would never know how much he cared. How the sight of her with a crown thrilled him secretly as much as it pained him. How he felt the distance growing stronger, so much that he felt he had no chance of reaching her anymore. Of reaching that slight and grand silhouette that carried with her all the burdens of his country. How much he regretted what had happened. How the memory of her voice kept him going. How he remembered the precise way she would laugh.
Now, she would laugh no more, no. Not after everything that happened. After the chaos that prevailed now.

Would she even care if he tried?

Would she even recognize him?

The traitorous thought stopped him. He shook his head, trying to let go of it. No, he couldn’t even think of it.

Would she forgive him for weakness?

He could’ve been by her side, by now. If only he hadn’t…

He shook his head. Now was not the time to regret any more.

But maybe, now, with this sword, he could be stronger. He could find a way to go back in time. To find a place, a moment where he could be with her. He relished in this thought. He LIVED for this thought. Hope blossomed in his heart just as it left him when all fire and arms destroyed it all.

One day, he would find her again. One way or another. With magic if he had to. He would find her, and she would be his.

And this time, no one would ever stand on his way.
Chapter Summary

Who wants lemon cakes, with a little hint of angst? Well, I give it to you now!
Song mainly used: “Rival”, Ruelle (“King of Anything” by Sarah Bareilles for the discussion with Harry the Heir)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Sansa…”

“My queen…”

Whispers in the night kept her awake. Mostly men, but sometimes women. Each of them creeping towards her bed. Some she had known. Some she knew. Some she will know.

Here, the golden lion, slim and beautiful. But without any heart, without any soul. And the spirit of a child, who had never had enough.

“Mine” he said.

Joffrey.

“No, mine” said the men of King’s Landing, as they ripped her dress, lust and folly in their eyes.

She wanted to scream, but she could not.

“Your most powerful weapon is between your legs, little dove.” She could hear Cersei Lannister say as she looked at her as she struggled against these men. And smiled, always smiled, before taking a sip of wine.

Then, somebody snatched her of them.

“Sing me a song, little bird.”

The Hound. Still here, in front of her. Close enough so she could feel his breath on her face. Close enough to kiss her… She almost closed her eyes and leaned in, tempted to let him. But then he disappeared in the night, like dust flying because of the wind.

Then blood covered her hands and she looked at it fearfully, with tears in her eyes and sorrow emptying her from inside. In her dress, hidden in her cleavage, there was the letter she wrote to Robb, and who now was bleeding as well, covering her breasts with their blood. She wanted to wash it out, but she couldn’t. The more she wiped, the more it spread.

“The key to the north.” Came a strong voice. The voice of a man who looked at her, but without seeing her. She looked ahead, terrified.

Cersei. The Imp. Everyone, looking at her with these eyes, lusting after her, devouring her.
Margaery.

“We’ll be like sisters.”

Mine, mine, mine.

“Mine.” Said an intelligent voice, with a hint sarcasm in its tone.

Littlefinger. Coming towards her, his hand directed at her.

“A picture of me in the Iron Throne... With you by my side.”

He smiled.

“My queen.”

And all the eyes and voices said “mine, mine, mine...” all the same.

She could not go back.

And then, the words went out of his throat, choking him with blood. He fell back, with a hand on it, as if to prevent them to flow that easily.

Then, all disappeared and she was all alone. She screamed for someone. Anyone.

There was a shadow in a corner calling for her. ‘My queen,” he said to her. But she did not look at it. If she looked, she would be lost.

And then, she saw him. Jon.

“She is my queen,” he said with eyes that screamed of love and sorrow.

Love, love, love.

But not for her, no. Why? Why?

“You’ll have to promise not to tell another soul.” He said as she saw the dragon coming back at her.

It would burn her, she was sure of it.

No, no, no.

What was love, exactly? Was that lust? Possession?

“My beloved wife.” He called her with a smile, showing her the flayed body of the woman who tried to help her.
“Not so much a wolf, now….” He said, as he took her again and again. Always hurting her, harassing her. Locking her. Making her feel she was nothing but a hole he could fill. “You’re mine.” He said.

“Do you know what he intend to do to you, once he has a child out of you?” Myranda had said, with a snarky smile.

No, no, no, no…

“You are a bitch all the same” he had said to her

No. The hounds had devoured him. Bite by bite, until the only things that were left were bones and ripped leather.

Then, they had began to kill each others, to eat each others.

There was no loyalty among hounds, she discovered. No loyalty when survival was in order.

And now, she could see his skeleton smiling at her.

“I’m part of you, now.”

... part of you, now...

... you, now…”

“My queen…”

“Sansa…”

She screamed. Sweat made her thin shift stick to her skin. She felt sick and cold. But still her head was hot from the pictures of her nightmare that were still rolling in her mind. Her eyes were unfocused as she tried to calm the beatings of her heart.

She breathed slowly. One. Two. Three.

“Is it alright, your Grace?”

She jumped, her insides freezing with dread.

Damn her handmaiden, she thought as she calmed down.

She would not yell at her, no. She was not that kind of queen, shouting at people just because they saw them vulnerable.

But still, it did not mean she hadn’t wanted to.

She shook her head. Just a nightmare. These ghosts were gone, now. But still, they haunted her, coming in her dreams when she thought she had forgotten. When she thought she was not afraid anymore, they came crawling in her sleep, these monsters in her head.

“Yes, yes, Alys… I’m alright.

Alys frowned, visibly worried.

“But you screamed in the night, your Grace”
Sansa glared at her.

“It’s alright,” she said with an icy voice. “I would need a bath.”

Coldness was the answer. Coldness could freeze them all over with dread. Coldness would make them go back to their place. Like this, they would not get closer. Like this, they couldn’t hurt her.

“Yes, M’am!” the young girl said hurriedly, without even remarking her lack of etiquette.

Once alone, Sansa sighed. It was hard, to keep it going. But it was for the best. Friends got killed so easily. She couldn’t bear it, if she lost once again someone.

Arya was gone in her islands. Was she dead? Sansa didn’t know. She could only hope for her little sister to be safe, for she knew better. She had survived all of this. She was the killer of the Night King. What could a few savages do to her? And still, annoying as she was, why would anyone ever bother to try to attempt something? That thought, though futile, comforted her somehow. It made her feel like she was really home, with Father and Mother, and with only her stitching lessons to occupy her. Innocence, and dreams. The one things she lacked now.

She shook her head. That girl was dead. People killed her. They took away her innocence, thrown her on and on until she was nearly broken.

Now only stayed the queen. Unattainable, cold. A dream by herself. So why dream? She could live through the eyes of her people. These dreams were enough, she thought as she slipped in the bath the girl had prepared as she thought. She closed her eyes, pleased by the quiet warmth that filled her as she let out another sigh. Here, she could almost forget her scars and all that was lost. No scar on her body, no. These ones only lived in memory. But scars on her heart.

She plunged her head in the water and counted. One. Two. Three.

Enough. Once again, she felt it. The will to live, unbroken still. And that kept her prepared for what would happen for the day.

She got herself dressed up, the handmaiden fussing over her. Her eyes almost rolled irritably at it, but she let it slide.

And, as any other day, she came to the throne room and sat in, inclining her head towards those who bowed to her, to show them she had noticed.

This was a man’s world, and she was the one to rule it. And she intended to keep it that way. And men tended to get petty when they weren’t noticed.

“How are the preparations of the festivities going, Lord Cerwyn?” She began, her stature regal and her voice clear and loud.

Festivities. In a time where there was still so much to do.

It was necessary, she thought. To keep her people happy. To give them rewards, after all that happened. After all the efforts she asked of them. Burden after burden, they were beginning to be fidgety. And fidgety people was no good for the realm.

They all had accepted the invitation. Good. It was important that they saw that their queen thought of them, cared to entertain them.

But still, it was really expansive.
Silly little Sansa would have loved every minute of it. The choice of the dresses, of the activities…
All of it. Now, she couldn’t find joy in it.

“Good your Grace,” he said with a smile. “Everything will be ready for next week.”

She nodded thoughtfully. “You’ll thank your wife for the making of the banners. They are really fitting.”

His smile widened and he bowed.

“Thank you, your Grace. She will be honoured.”

Of course. But it wasn’t enough.

She raised.

“Next month will be a great time for celebrations. Winter had been hard for all of us. We lost people, we thought we lost our home. But we have survived. And look” She opened her arms, as if to embrace them all. ”Here we are. Our home is even grander!”

They all nodded, some more fervently than others.

“We have proved to those who underestimated us our value, that we still rise, again and again!”

“Aye” they cried for her, with joy in their eyes.

“Now is our time. And I’ll drink with every one of you, my lords, for my heart is with you, now and always.”

They raised their glasses at her and cheered.

The Queen in the North, the Queen in the North.

What a pretty song.

Yes. She had conquered them for the weeks to come. And it wasn’t even noon. With a smile, she turned toward one of them.

“Lord Manderly,” She called. “I heard you went to my brother the King’s feast recently. I hope the delicacies of the South would not prevent you to enjoy what we’ll have.”

He bowed.

“Nothing can compare to home, your Grace.”

She smiled. “You’re right.”

But then, he was fidgeting, she felt uneasy. Was something wrong?

Easy how just one thing could make her worry and forget what she just did.

“But then… My queen… There are sayings…”

“What sayings, my lord?” She asked.

Please don’t be dead, she thought.
“That the King in the South is ill, your Grace… That he is not himself these days.”

She raised one eyebrow. Her brother had not been himself since he returned. So these last words meant nothing to her.

“The King in the South is a Stark, my lord, a man from the North. He’s made of a sterner material than that.” She said, sitting back on her throne. And then, more softly. “You will talk to me about it this later.”

“Yes, your Grace.”

He bowed and joined the other. Then, another one came, holding a letter.

An ambassador, as he had presented himself. She did not know him.

“Come,” She said, extending her hand in his direction.

He bowed and smiled proudly. Young boy. Maybe his first mission.

“What is it?” She said.

“An offer of marriage, your Grace”

She raised an eyebrow. But took the letter anyway.

She read it. But she feared her eyes were deceiving her.

How could it be? The name mentioned was one from a very distant past. The name of a dead one or maybe…

Her heart skipped a beat a little.

No, it couldn’t be from him… She thought. Why would he…? Did he…? Why now, all the sudden?

Why that name, that cursed name?

She shook her head. That couldn’t be. Then turned towards one of the representatives of the Night’s Watch.

“Still no news from Jon Snow?” She asked with a strangled voice.

“No, your Grace.” The man said “The crow did not come back.”

It’s been months, now.

Last time she had news from him, he had been at Hardhome. She did not know the place exactly, but she heard it was dangerous and hard. Few people survived out there.

She was worried, always. Just by the thought of it, and the content of the letter, she could feel her heart beating and her knees weakening.

Oh no. She was back at it.

When would men stop to make her weak like this?

The mood was gone, now.
“Right,” she said with a calmer voice. “So I believe it is time now to settle on our daily routine. Any other thing?”

They looked at each other with questions in their eyes.

Nothing. Good.

“I’m going to take a walk.” She said, raising. “I wish you a good day, my lords.”

They let her and bowed, respect in their eyes.

Good.

As she left the place and went outside, her sight was greeted by something she hadn’t seen in a long time. Lemon cakes.

On a silver plate. With Harrold Hardyng holding it with a smug face.

She raised her eyes towards the man.

“Lemon cakes. How sweet.”

“Your favorite, I know.” He said. “A sweet treat for a sweet lady.”

How in the seven hells did he know that?

“Ladies might like it,” she said non-committedly as she walked past him. “But I’m a queen. Don’t forget it.”

He followed her.

“I wouldn’t dare”, he said, bowing lightly. But that bow felt like a joke, with that smile on his face. “But queens can also like sweet things, your Highness.”

She was almost tempted to smile. Flirting and joking with Harrold Hardyng were easy things to do. The man seemed to try to win her over at any cost. But it was dangerous all the same, and she wasn’t for the moment convinced to let it go farther.

People saw him courting her. She was a woman about to be taken. She had hoped that letting him would lead the other pretenders away. She could handle one at home. But not so many that came crawling at her door since they put a crown on her.

It did not seem to be the case, with the letter she received this morning, and which didn’t make sense for her (at least, that’s what you want people to think, a snarky voice said in her head.)

But still, it was quite enjoyable.

“Beware, my lord. Lemons can be bitter.”

“Oh, I believe I can add some sugar to make it good.”

She stopped, then looked at him, unimpressed.

“Can you?”

He nodded, took her hand and kissed it.
“Oh, I believe that when we’ll wed, it will be as sweet as these treats.”

Her eyebrows rose, and she was almost tempted to laugh at him. Or to hit him.

The audacity of that man!

“What makes you think my hand will be yours?”

At this, a spark lighted up in his eyes.

A spark that meant conquest.

“Who else would it be?” He stepped closer to her, so much that she could smell his breath, fresh with a hint of mint leaves. “You need a man by your side, queen or not.”

She put a hand on his chest to stop him.

“You are quite presumptuous, my lord.” She said as she took a cake from the plate and began to eat it.

It was as savory as she remembered. She felt giddy just by one bite of it.

There was a smirk on his face now. He was not one used to be refused, she realized.

“Am I?” He replied with a voice that screamed self-confidence.

“Beware, my lord. I am no merchant’s daughter for you to take,” she warned him. “I’ll be the one taking, no one else.”

His laugh was loud and masculine in her ears.

“Then take all you want,” He said. “But with me, there’ll be so much to take.”

And so much more for you, she was tempted to say. If Robert were to die, he would be the heir of the Vale. And with her by his side, he could join the two kingdoms. If he didn’t decide he would be enough with her gone, actually.

“It’s been weeks, now,” he said. “Weeks of me courting you. Trying to please you, love you. Yet, you do not seem to incline yourself more to me.”

Love was such a easy word for him to throw, she saw. He could say it to any woman. Love for him was fickle and flitting.

“I’m no base lady swooning at your sight, my lord,” she said with as cold a voice she could.

She couldn’t displease him too much. Displeased men were hard to handle, and could be quite unpredictable.

Would her bannermen let him overthrow her? Would they kneel for him? How long after she was put down? She wondered. Men didn’t like women in power. Just the idea was a threat to them, and it had taken a lot for them to accept. It had taken their disappointment over Jon’s bending of the knee. “Perhaps we should have chosen you”, they said at the new.

Perhaps, perhaps. They always played with “perhaps”. But the reality of it was harder to swallow. Even after she proved on and on her abilities. Some could see a mother in her. A mother that would tend their bruises, that would comfort them in the darkest of nights. But a mother without a
father… Could they even have this thought? This world was for men to take, they had been told, and they continue to tell. A woman among them, doing things that a man should do, was a terrifying thing for them. For it made them reconsider their place. Their place in a world that was already too complex for them to comprehend.

A world she knew, actually. Better than the likes of them. She had been placed under any man’s boots. An object, a prize to be gained. The key to the North.

A key can open doors. But who would turn it?

“Tell me,” Harrold Hardyng said with a charming smile. “Tell me how I could please you, my queen. Tell me and I’ll do it.”

She stared at that beautiful man’s face. Saw the dimples on his cheeks as he smiled. Charming, as so many were when they asked for her hand.

I can take you, she wanted to say. I can take you and every of these men combined. And still, it wouldn’t be enough to ease the pain in my heart. Throw me any courtesies my way, I would respond you in kind. Try to take me down, and I will rip you apart.

She had seen the way he treated his squires. The way he almost harassed Malwyn Snow.

She remembered green eyes looking at her defiantly.

Here, there were blue eyes, devouring her with that look.

Two persons.

One wanted her, body and power, and so much more. The other loathed her without daring to say the words.

Why? She wondered. She did not know him. She had done all she could for the North, and him… He dared to look at her like that?

“… promise not to tell another soul.”

She shook her head. No, that wasn’t it.

Both were here to serve nonetheless.

Then came the idea.

“Malwyn Snow still hasn’t returned from his quest. It’s been three weeks now, and without any news. Bring him back to me. He will answer to his queen.”

“I will do it, your Grace,” He said, looking very much the valiant knight she had in her dreams as a girl. “I will do it for you.”

She nodded, he smiled.

Her heart pounded in her chest. It felt like a dream, like a song come true.

Beware, she said to herself. You’re not a little bird.

Here, she would have time to figure it out. To make her decision, without her heart misleading her, as it has always been when she listened to it.
“Mine,” still whispered the voices in her head.

No, she wasn’t anyone’s. And the one who would dare to say that, she would tear their heart out with her fangs.

She was the she-wolf of Winterfell. She was no longer tame and polite, as they had wanted her to be. She was no little bird to be locked down in a golden cage. She would run her territory, protect her pack, however divided it was. No matter the cost.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked it!
Hello everyone!
Sorry for the delays, I had a lot of exams to do, this week. I hope you like this chapter.
Next one will be Arianne Martell.
Song mainly used: “Dreams”, Fleetwood Mac
Good reading!

The storm was only beginning. The wind was howling in the night, coming with the grey rain.

Everything was grey in this country. Grey the earth, grey the sea. Grey again the stones of their castle, each piece barely recognizable from the others. No true color could be seen. No red, yellow and blue. Not like it was when she was home. She had once been joyous by nature, always seeing the good in people, the world in general. Now, so much older and so much wiser, she still had to say that such a gloomy atmosphere wasn’t to her taste.

Kinvara shook her head from the seat she had taken near the window. She was the Flame of Truth, the Light of Wisdom. She had to go wherever the Lord told her to go. Wherever His chosen one had decided her to go.

“Why isn’t she answering?”

The voice of Aegon Targaryen came thundering across the walls of the old castle of Pyke. The bricks did not break from it, but still, it was a monstrous thing to see, Kinvara thought as he hit the table with his fists closed and began to pace nervously around it.

“Does she think I’m a fool?” He continued, shaking his head with frustration.

“She thinks you’re dead, your Grace,” intervened Yara Greyjoy with a bored tone as she looked at her nails on one of the corner. “As we all thought.”

“Well here I am, now.” He said, glowering. “And I’m not here to wait for one foolish girl to make her decision. Nor for the usurper to finally notice me.”

If he hadn’t already, the High Priestess thought. And the sooner, the better.

“I’ve known hunger. I’ve known fear. Now, I will take what is mine.” He continued triumphally like some mummer reciting verses.

As he had. Since his childhood, they all had been there to make him learn what he had to do, what he had to say. But then, even the best education could not hide nor temperate such a temper.

She rolled her eyes.

He had blood of the dragon, alright. But it had been so diluted that this fire was only talk, no courage.

But still, he was important and she had to guide him. To shape him into the form of a true dragon.
“We have an ally at Winterfell, your Grace” Yara intervened.

“Good. Good. “ He said angrily, with a hint of nervousness in his voice. “Who is he? Why didn’t he bring her to me?”

‘Maybe because he doesn’t work for you, your Arseness’ She could almost hear Yara Greyjoy reply in her head. ‘That man only works for his interest, which could change at any moment.’

Harrold Hardyng was an interesting piece in the game that was about to be played. A wild card, easily swayed but never tamed. And with him and the other things that were setting into place, so many drama could come… All the possibilities were mesmerizing.

She was not Quaithe, but still, there were things she could guess. Things she could see.

Like the shadow of a man coming from the North, growing with love, hate and despair. Coming for one woman. Bringing chaos with him. A shadow she only knew too well, for she had seen him in her dreams.

Like snakes fighting each other under two suns of Dorne, all fangs out till their venoms tainted the sand.

And a hero, uniting them for the last fight.

A hero… or maybe…

But there were still things to settle before that, she thought. So many things… One man remained to be found, in all this misery… But was he ready to be found?

The voice of Aegon interrupted her thoughts.

“Must I really marry her?” He said, like a petulant child, though he appeared like a grown man. “I’m tainting my lady mother’s memory with a bitch, and she still didn’t answer!”

“Sansa Stark is a clever girl”, Yara replied, her hands linked on the small of her back. “She won’t engage herself and her country until she sees what could be gained for it.”

This seemed to make the young King-to-be even more in fury.

“Gained? I am the rightful heir to the Iron Throne!”

“Which had been burned. Now her brother rules.”

She was going to wake the dragon, Kinvara thought. One, two…

“I will burn that bitch’s hellhole if she doesn’t answer back!” He swore. “Usurpers, all of them.”

“But you need her, your Grace.”

“Why didn’t we contact the prince of Dorne? Dorne had always been our natural ally. Dorne was my lady mother’s home. Jon had always said…”

“Ser Jon Connington is dead, your Grace.” Yara cut him.

“May the lord of Light guards him.” Kinvara added.

A good man, though maybe misguided by a passion that he never had power to fulfill.
“Jon honored the Seven Gods.” Aegon’s head was bowed, as if too heavy from the memory of his former guardian.

“But you do not, my king. Not any more.” The priestess said, raising from her chair and stepping closer to Aegon Targaryen.

He stopped suddenly, looking at her, transfixed. His eyes didn’t stop at her face though, they were attracted to the curves that were undulating under her red dress.

He wanted her. That was easy to see. A small fire was always attracted to a stronger one. And she knew how to use it to get what she wanted.

He was an easy boy, but a boy nonetheless.

He looked elsewhere, faltered by her interruption. But then he continued, pressing on the table in front of which he had turned. He did not dare to look back, for she could burn him. The way a naïve man looking for adventures could burn for a woman.

“My lord father had dishonored my lady mother by running off with a Stark bitch. Must I really lower myself to that point with another?”

“You’re not your father, my King” Kinvara said, caressing his hair with a tender smile. “And she’s not just any Stark.”

Aegon didn’t reply, but she could see he was not happy. His nails carved circles on the table, and blood was beginning to stain it.

Such a waste of a good blood, she thought.

“Go to sleep, my King,” She said to him softly in his ear. “You’ll find more relief, I believe, in what is waiting for you between your sheets…”

He turned to her, suddenly, with hope in his eyes.

“Will you come too?”

She looked briefly at these lips who didn’t really tempt her. He was indeed pretty, that little dragon, with his silver hair and purple eyes. But this wasn’t actually what she was after…

“… Later, my king,” she said. “Later.”

He sighed, then went away, maybe trying to appear more dignified than a kicked puppy. Which seemed an objective hard to achieve.

When he left, Yara sat abruptly on the main chair, and this time, it was a sigh of annoyance that came through her lips.

“Your pretty boy is all fire,” She said. But I have to admit that I expected something else, from our previous correspondences.”

Kinvara could only agree with that, for she had spent whole months with him, after he’d been found in a tavern, lamenting that he could have had the Golden Company’s Support had the Mad Queen, Cersei Lannister, not taken it from him with her damn gold. Jon Connington had been there at that time, trying to shut him up, for who knew who could report such thing?

“He’s still in training.” She said without batting an eyelash. “You expected Daenerys Targaryen,
Yara shrugged, leaning on the chair.

“Well, he is supposed to be her nephew.”

Kinvara smiled with humor, as if what had been said was a funny joke to her.

Yara sighed.

“If the Spider was alive,” she said. “He would have crowned him right away. Such a foolish boy.”

“The Spider knew. And he let him rot once he saw that there was a more powerful and faster option.”

Yara sneered.

“Loyalty for the little people, my ass.”

“But he’s still powerful.” Kinvara only said, looking at the storm that was still brooding. “We still talk about him.”

“Then let’s do not.”

One minute of silence passed, then two. Until Kinvara saw that Yara could not hold it any longer.

“Where is she?”

She looked away, toward the storm. She smiled once again, more lightly. More determinate.

“Somewhere where she can find her strength. Somewhere where she can serve justice.”

That was not the answer that her friend needed. But that was the only one she could make, with that little raven still out there.

“Ten months. Ten long months waiting, making curtsies at this little king while gathering ingredients for rebellion, all of that?”

Yara sighed, then settled more deeply into her chair.

“I thought this would lead to something. I wasn’t expecting looking after a boy who’s never had enough hair on his chest to be shaved.” Then, after a period of silence, she added, sorrow piercing finally in her tone. “I feel like I’m stuck in here. Waiting. Waiting for something that might never came. Waiting, waiting, always waiting.”

“Be patient, my friend,” She said to appease her. “Our time will come”

Yara only sent her a wary look.

“I heard Jon Snow was brought back by one of you, old witch.”

“When Jon Snow was brought back his soul was not ready to leave.” Kinvara said calmly “When the dragon arrived, she had already decided to leave. It’s difficult to bring back somebody who wants to leave.”

“Why wouldn’t she?” Yara protested. “She had everything! She had won the throne!”
“But she lost her heart in the way,” replied simply the priestess.

Angrily, Yara kicked lightly one foot of the nearest chair. She could not understand, Kinvara realized. She had never truly given her heart to anyone.

“Damn bastard. Then why bring her back at all?” She continued, irritation on her tone.

Kinvara looked straight at the ruler of the Iron Islands.

“Because her destiny has not been fulfilled yet.”

Like so many. But the Lord of Light had decided. And she was really glad it happened here, in her old temple of Volantis. That she would get to see the rebirth of the chosen of R’hllor… What a great honor it was.

Yara sighed, exasperated.

“What is she doing, now? Roaming through the kingdom on a dragon’s back, as a damn fucking ghost?”

“Some debts must be paid. And the ones that are filled with love and hate are the hardest to collect.”

“But the most satisfying, I gather.”

Kinvara said nothing, for she knew too much. An air of melancholia came to her. Oh, all the difficulties that were to come… But her queen had chosen. And the price for fire and life had to be paid.

But would she be strong enough to do it? Broken heart for broken heart, death for death. All for the creation of a myth. Death may have brought her a new strength, but on the matter of a heart, nothing could be truly presumed.

However, she trusted R’hllor to guide her decision. And that faith was what brought her here now, after so many days trying to appease that baby dragon, to coax him to find Daenerys’ Targaryen former allies, when all he wanted to do was to invade King’s Landing.

That proposal to that little queen was only a beginning, and would soon meet with a quiet refusal. But then, when trouble will come, how could she refuse?

She had seen it in the flames. A paper signed by an elegant hand. Blue eyes meeting purple eyes as fire surrounded all.

Yes, only the beginning.

And no pretender hiding in a raven could change that, she reflected as she saw it looking at her with grey eyes before leaving.

She said nothing to Yara, but she only smiled. Now he knew. Now he could fear. If such a man could feel anything. And fear would lead him to find Jon Snow. And then… every piece will come in place.

“Are you sure about it?” Yara said. “That it would work?”

Kinvara nodded.
“And pretty boy?”

“He’s only a piece,” she said. “In a game he can’t comprehend.”

“And… Sansa Stark”

The priestess smiled, the image of a man wandering in the snow coming to her mind.

“She has a role to play.” She said, sipping her wine. “And after that…”

After that… There was so many things that could happen. Who knew? Heart for heart, betrayal for betrayal. The circle never ended, the wheel never was broken.

Well, for the moment, she thought.

Yara continued.

“Did he see her?”

“He saw what he wanted to see.” Kinvara replied. “he saw the dragon and heard her voice telling him he was the rightful heir, and that she gave up her claim for him.”

Yara laughed loudly. “He had actually believed it, had he?”

The high priestess only smiled. But Yara wasn’t finished.

“So, what do we do now, with him?”

Her fingers danced on the hard and cold stone of the window sills, as she saw the storm becoming more intense. Then, she turned back and got closer to the fire.

Such a beautiful fire, big and strong, with only few blue shades. A deadly fire, she could easily make hers, and that could destroy everything on that island.

“We wait.” She finally said. “For trouble to actually become chaos.”

Yara stood up, seeming finally revigorated.

“Can’t we add some troubles in the way?”

The high priestess smiled amusingly.

“Like you already have, my friend.”

“I had a few terrible months,” Yara replied nonchalantly.

Kinvara nodded, then looked once again at the fire, that was, little by little, forming the shape of a woman. The shape of a princess seeking justice and recognition. She wondered what she could do now, that little princess of sand and snakes.

Then an image of her queen came to her, her expectant look turned toward an iced waterfall, as a man came from it.

That did not happened yet. But soon…

“He’ll do the right thing at the end.” She said, as if to reassure herself. “And so will she.”
Yara intervened.

“Does he know? Pretty boy?”

Kinvara smirked.

“She was the one to tell him to go.”

Yara’s eyes lightened up as understanding came to her.

“Then it means she has a plan.”

The priestess looked at the fire until it hurt, eyes sparkling with expectations and extasy.

“A storm is coming, my friend,” She said. “and the fire goes with it.”

Yara smirked.

“And the sea. Don’t forget the sea.”

Kinvara only smiled more softly. Then laughed, truly, for the first time in months.

“We serve the same Queen.”

Yara smirked. “That, we do”

For the night was dark and full of terrors.

How true was that, she thought as her hands got closer to the flames. At least, she had the fire to be their light.
Arianne I

Chapter Notes

Hi!

I’m sorry for those who followed this fanfiction and waited. I was delayed by exams and other planifications. But now, I’m free, and I have more time to concentrate on it.

This chapter is with Arianne Martell’s POV. The next will be about that infamous man in the snows, who might MAYBE just meet someone you may know. Some dragon queen, perhaps?

Song mainly used: “Castle”, Halsey

Good reading!

The wind was as soft and warm as a paramour’s caress, this night, Arianne Martell, princess of Dorne, thought. She could feel it touch her skin from her cheek to her breasts tenderly, delicately, as if discovering it for the first time. It wasn’t always that way though, for it could be violent and sharp as a snake, and just as lethal.

She was no delicate lady though, waiting to be touched, to be kissed, but too afraid of her own desires. She welcomed it all the same. This dry, thick, warm air was hers since the moment she was born, and instead of cutting her, she felt its pleasures like a true Dornishwoman would. It was in her blood. However, it was like an over-eager lover: either too gentle, either too pressing. Now, it was just good.

The princess closed her eyes and sighed.

Every day was just like the other. Waiting. Drinking. Loving. Playing Cyvasse. Bathing. Waiting. Drinking. Loving…

Waiting was not really what bothered Arianne generally. In waiting, she found pleasure in imagining what could happen. What would happen, actually. Certainty came to her the more the time passed.

But that kind of waiting, so near the release, was suffocating and numbing, and did not bring any certainty. Only doubts.

She stretched herself like a cat, trying to get rid of the numbness spreading in her members. Her dress stuck to her like a second skin, and the dampness of it made her shiver.

She had bathed today. She had decided it suddenly, surprising Ser Daemon Sand when she took off her clothes and jumped in the water. She asked him to join her with a sneaky smile. The sun had been so hot, and the water so fresh. He refused, saying he’d rather look at a snake than play with it.

That man seemed so satisfied with himself she almost evoked the memory of her uncle Oberyn, for it seemed THAT snake surely hadn’t bothered him. But then it all came back to her and she went silent, turning away from him.
He could laugh all he wanted. She did not care. Not anymore. It was all just a game, wild and sensual, fangs against fangs. A battle of teasing and desiring, but never daring.

She did not need that in her life. She could have any man she wanted with a blink of an eye. Her lovers always came back to her, one way or another. This one will surely, she thought. Sooner or later.

Well, all except one now. Arya Oakheart… her sweet knight had died because of her. Or maybe thanks to her, she didn’t really know. She was still a little bit convinced that he charged Aro Hotah in the hope to escape her. Men were fools when it came to love and honor. And, from the pretty songs that had been written after Daenerys Targaryen’s murder by her lover, it was still a subject that poets found solace in.

Love, lust, power and betrayal. All the ingredients of a catastrophe, but also of a good story. In any other day, she would have loved to hear it. But that story had taken such a strong hold on her own that she couldn’t bear to listen to it anymore. She had seen enough of the different parts that composed it, and now, she was determinate to make her own way, and to let go of these ghosts of the past.

Some of them being in her own family.

Each night, she recited their names in her mind, as if afraid to forget.

Ellaria, Obara, Nymeria, Tyene… She had done everything to set them free when they were confined in the Spear Tower of Sun spear. And they had betrayed her, by leaving her here, all alone, an unofficial prisoner in the Water Gardens, carefully watched day and night while they killed her father.

She had loved Tyene as a sister. But she still left her. She still betrayed her.

Arianne couldn’t really blame her. She had followed her mother, as she always did. It stung, nonetheless. And it stung even more when she learned of her death, and the cruel way her body had been treated.

But then, Obara, Nymeria… it was them who killed Trystane, her little brother. Arianne missed Trystane the most. Young, hopeful Trystane, always playing it easy for his princess to catch on.

And Myrcella… Arianne had been fond of her, of that naïve, though clever little girl who claimed herself in love with her betrothed. That girl was full of dreams and songs. She would have deserved to be queen, and if Arianne had had her way, she would have been.

Had Queen Cersei Lannister been one day like that? Arianne wondered. Mother and daughter had been apart for so long, and now, it seemed death only brought them together. Would they still get along? The mad Queen and the little girl with flowers and sunlight in her hair?

No, Myrcella hadn’t deserved it, for what happened to her was entirely against what Dorne swore to its people. No harm could come to little girls here, for Dorne knew the real cost of daughters.

But now? Where were they now?

Only Ellaria remained, still stuck in her cells at King’s Landing, and, if the rumors were true, still staring at her daughter’s rotting body. Young King Bran didn’t even have the decency, once in power, to bury her. Or maybe he did not really care actually. But he still held her hostage, for killing her would be killing one of the last memories of Oberyn Martell, memories that were still cherished all over Dorne. And keeping her was the surest way to keep the Sand Snakes at bay.
But not her. Not Arianne Martell, daughter of the sun.

Ellaria was alive. Good for her. But not for long.

Arianne had no regrets now. The woman her uncle loved, the one who hated revenge, had died with him. Now she was only the shadow of a bitter woman. A powerless shadow forced to see again and again the consequences of her actions.

There were now only five sand snakes then. Sarella, Elia, Obella, Dorea and Loreza. Only three of them, the oldest ones, could fight now, and knew their own mind. Dorea and Loreza were both still too young, though their skills seemed promising. She could still remember little Loreza trying to catch a snake with her own hands and managing to extract its poison without even getting bitten. And Dorea, that little minx, agile as a monkey, able to steal from even the most careful of guards. Both girls were now kept carefully by her brother’s side. If only she could reach them…

That was all that was left.

At least, sand snakes that were known. Oberyn had never really known how to take count of all of his bastards.

It was said, she learned, that some snakes could eat other ones of their species, even the ones who had birthed them. What better revenge, she thought, but to turn these little snakes against the one who called herself their mother?

The idea was terrifying, but she also found it quite captivating.

But not for now, no. This would be for another time. Now, she had a birthright to claim.

Elia’s answer was not here though. Elia, the one she had to save so many times for her careless behaviors. Little Elia she had cared for like a mother. Would she choose to be with her? Or will she choose her real mother?

Obella, though younger, was much more ruthless than she was. And she had already chosen, though Arianne would have preferred it to be her way. She would fight her own battles and preferred to go directly in King’s Landing, in hopes of saving Ellaria. Dorne’s affairs did not concern her, she said. Not anymore.

Well, she would find it more of her concern when she returned, Arianne thought.

She tasted the chicken, which had been seasoned with lemons and honey. The flesh was tasty, with a little bit of bitterness. As a child, she had always been fond of sweet things. But not anymore. And the bitterness agreed with her. She took one of the grilled almonds that accompanied it and put it in her mouth slowly, letting her tongue caress one side of the dried fruit as she closed her eyes in bliss. The fruit was crunchy under her teeth and added a lovely taste of smoke to the plate. She licked her fingers with greed.

Daemon Sand’s eyes were on her, but she couldn’t read what were in them. Was that desire? Irritation? Longing? She did not know anymore. All that she knew now was that he was her shield and that he had taken her maidenhead once. She wouldn’t mind if he did that again. She even asked him again, but he refused.

His loss, she thought as she looked at Feather, who was presenting her with cold drinks.

She had once prevented Elia from amusing herself too much with him. But then… Who was preventing HER, now?
The night had only just begun, after all.

She played the cyvasse once with him, and then with Daemon. The first was easily won. But the second… It was more stimulating, for sure. However, it was too long for her taste, as she was impatient tonight.

“You’re distracted, princess,” Daemon remarked.

She did not answer, only rolled her eyes as she put the Spearman in front of his Elephant. Her Dragon was still unused, at the back, like his. It was like the two creatures were staring defiantly at each other, daring the other to make the first move.

She put her chin in her hands, waiting for him as she reflected on what was left to her. What was left of her family.

Her lady mother was long sick now, since the day her father died. It was said she wouldn’t survive long, especially when she heard of her daughter’s imprisonment in the Water Gardens, and her sons’ fates.

About her brother Quentyn, though… She knew that he had once longed for something he called destiny. And that destiny was intertwined closely with a Targaryen queen. He tried to reach for her, but as he went closer to the Dragon’s bay and lost himself in it, she was already gone, fighting her own wars.

All he had when he returned was a crushed dream and the sight of the dragon queen’s silhouette in her ship as he landed, her silver hair flowing with the wind, towards him. If only he had been there just ten minutes before, he had said. He could have met her half way. If only the captain had accepted to chase her, and not to wait the next morning.

Then, it was too late, and their father had asked him to go back to him, for another queen was gathering her troops. To ally oneself now with the dragon queen was too risky.

What a fool, she had thought at the time. He had worried her, for, even if he had wed the little queen, would she have been nice to him? Arianne had already heard people saying she disposed of her brother to have a better claim on the Iron Throne. And then, after all that happened to King’s Landing…

But it did not matter anymore. When Quentyn returned, their father was dead, and she was a prisoner in her own home, caged like a wild animal.

Quentyn had not done anything then. He had fled, like the rest of them. And he had sat in her father’s place when it was sure for him to do so. Her little brother, the one she had known so little but cared so much, had not even deigned to look at her in the eyes at that moment. Only in front of him, as if something was waiting for him at the horizon. But what? She didn’t know.

One piece was moved. Then another. The dragons were still in place, staring.

Now, her little brother was in the seat where she was supposed to be, and he kept her locked in the Water Gardens like a bird in a golden cage.

She was no bird, though, singing for him as it pleased him. She had seen how he tried to give support to Daenerys Targaryen when she was away. She had tried to tell him once not to interfere, because nothing was sure. Nothing was certain, with the Targaryen. You just had to look at what happened to poor princess Elia, her aunt. Their father would have been ashamed, for him to jump so carelessly into such scheme, without even knowing what it could cost. Prince Doran was
everything but careful in his alliances. He would have wanted the little queen to come to him, to ask for him. After all, Quentyn had already come to Meeren, and for no result whatsoever.

But her brother tried to anyway. He had begged and begged, eagerly proclaimed he wanted to see her himself. To see that little queen he wanted to marry, like the fool he was. As if life was like these pretty songs minstrels used to seduce young maiden. And when she died, that dream died too. He had bowed like the rest of them, and then let a foreigner, some unknown Northern child rule them, jeopardizing Dorne’s independence in hopes to fulfill another dream, one she could only guess of the content.

But now, here she had been, with the hope of another Targaryen coming to help her. What an irony.

She had waited for that dragon’s help, fake as he may be, when days became weeks, and then months. But he never came. He disappeared as if he had been nothing but a cloud of dust in the night.

Now, she could only count on herself, and few ones.

At least, for these few ones, there was still a need for confirmation.

And this one may be contained in the little paper one of the serving girls left her this morning. She dared not look at it at the moment, afraid of what she might find in it. Afraid of another disappointment.

But now, as the moon was full and the wind soothing… And as she set her dragon in the place of Daemon’s King, she felt fierce and victorious. She saw him staring at it and she relaxed more on the soft cushions. She let out a little sigh of satisfaction and threw her head back.

Illyana Sand, she was named. Ten years old, daughter of some squire and a whore. She had found her bathing in one of the pool one day, without the guards knowing, and decided to hire her, despite them. Trusting her was another story, and it had taken time and a few trials for Arianne to decide to use her.

She was at first hesitant, for it came against what she had learned. Innocence was something that should be protected. But when Myrcella died, she realized she could not stay with that reasoning. Little girls were exploited everywhere. But they would not be killed in Dorne, she decided. Not without weapon, at least.

The little girl was fierce and loyal, and she could get her way anywhere without getting noticed. And she certainly had skills with knives. She had become her shadow, and then much more. Her eyes and ears.

This one would be safe. She had promised it to her. And she intended to keep that promise this time.

She took the little paper the girl gave her and smiled. It was not what she had expected, but she welcomed it nonetheless. It was signed ‘A. S.’. An ‘S’ that almost looked like an ‘F’, which made her wonder what kind of name the one sending this to her took, after all.

The young king was ill, or so it seemed. Words had been spread (or rather sung, as she corrected herself), just as she wanted it to. Good. It was a pretty thing to hear, she thought bemusedly. A smile danced on her lips, opening them to show her little white teeth.

The bastard of Godsgrave’s eyes were still on her, unreadable.
“What are you staring at me for, now?” She said, with annoyance in her tone as she disregarded the paper to glare at him.

“You’re playing with fire.”

She smiled and rolled her eyes.

“As if you never tasted it.”

She raised up and took her glass. Daemon Sand caught her wrist as she was about to leave and forced her to sit down and look at him in the eyes.

His hand on her cheek was hard, but surprisingly soft.

“Are you sure you want to do it?” He said.

She raised one eyebrow.

“Will you try to stop me?”

He leaned in, his eyes sparkling in the night. In the dark, they almost seemed black, and she could barely see his irises.

“You know I won’t.”

The bells rang, loud and clear, and she found herself counting. The noise, surprising them, had just as much set them apart.

Daemon stayed still, looking at her. His hand was on the hilt of his swords. He was on guard. But even he, she knew, could not hear anything beside the bells.

He had not to fear though. Not if he stayed by her side. Not if all worked according to plan.

The cyvasse stayed that way, with her dragon taking his king. And at that time, she realized. Why hadn’t he used his?

She stared at him with that question in mind, then waited for the inevitable to arrive.

When, after some time, they finally appeared, she found relief beyond compare. She did not raise up, only took another sip of wine to regain her composure.

“I’ve been waiting.” She said.

Sarella Sand nodded with a smirk, drops of blood still apparent on her tunic. Blood of their enemies.

“We’ve been delayed,”

She was free now. The realization by it was exhilarating.

Elia was here too. She dropped her weapon on the floor, near Arianne’s knees. Her eyes were downcast, but her jaws were squeezed determinately.

She would be with them.

There was no Areo Hotah to stop her now.
They would learn that dragons weren’t the only ones who could burn.

Arianne smirked.

“So now it truly begins.”
Hello!

I know I said to some of you that I would release this chapter much sooner. But I guess I was apprehensive about this one, as it is a very important chapter. And then some illness caught me unaware, but I think it was the result of a whole year of working without actually taking time to rest myself.

That being said, I hope you will like this! Next chapter will be with Malwyn Snow's POV.

Song mainly used: “What kind of Man”, Florence + the Machine

Good reading!

---

There was blood on his hands, today. More than yesterday, maybe. Hot, sticky to the fingers. Reassuring in a way. Not his. But those of the meat he had eaten. Raw, juicy, sticky and warm on his touch.

He was fond of birds, these days. Black specifically. He couldn’t afford to cook it, for setting a fire might alert others. But he found that he didn’t mind, actually. The more he stayed out there, the more he found himself lose everything that once defined him, little by little, like a fire consuming wood until there’s only ashes left.

Ashes… He remembered the ruin of King’s Landing. How they were falling like snow on the city, each petal of it flying away and recovering everything with white sheets of dust and destruction.

He had almost forgot about the blood, then. About the burned corpses, how they smelled when he passed right next to them. And the survivors, screaming in agony, waiting for release.

He had almost forgot about these soldiers in line, waiting for their queen to come out the ruins, and cheering for her as she talked.

He had understood nothing then. Nothing but the smells of the blood and ashes that were here.

His purpose had been meaningless, he had learned as he looked at his companions that day.

Except for one thing. One image. The image of his queen, of the memory of her perfume, warm and fruity, flowing right at him, and then, suddenly, piercing his heart with its sweetness and beauty. He could see her anywhere, looking at him with blue ice in her eyes. Could they not be warm again? Why that color was following him that way, as well with the snow that stuck to his skin?

So he returned and he saw her one last time before going home and rebuilding all that had been lost. But still, there was this hope to meet her again.

If he needed to survive, it was to see her again. And for that, he was ready to do anything. Forsake every vow, every law. ‘Arise, my lord’ she had said once to him. And he had every intention of obeying that order. But this time, being a lord wasn’t enough.
He would be her savior. He would keep her safe from harm…

Like you kept these villagers safe, the voice, the stronger one in his head said, cold, hard.

He shivered, then fell on his knees, taking his head with his hands as if to take the pain away. And to shut this voice, always harassing him since he went far north. Since he met beasts and monsters on his way.

Sometimes, it had the accent of a man he knew and admired. Sometimes it was like his beloved’s voice. Other times though, it was one of a stranger.

For him, it was still one, taking different forms. And even if it wasn’t, the thought was too much terrifying for him to comprehend. It was his. Until that point.

But it was when these voices were fighting each other that he wondered if he was wrong the whole time. Chaos reigned in his head, and he could only scream at the insanity of him.

That’s not me, he wanted to shoot. It’s someone else, someone stronger. Someone stranger.

“Leave me alone,” he whispered. This was not his objective. This was not his destiny. They all told him about what had been done. Not about what he wanted to do.

The voices were stronger since he fled the battlefield. But then, what could he have done?

‘Fight with your friend’ One of the voices said, coldly. ‘Die with your friends’

He shook his head.

No, no. That was not that.

“Get out. GET OUT!”

His own voice was coming louder from his mouth now, and then it all stopped. And he felt eyes, cold eyes on him. He raised his head and met them, frightened.

This wolf. This big dire wolf, white as snow, with an ear half eaten by war and frost.

It was always following him, relentlessly, like some kind of shadow. The silent white shadow of a past he had desperately wanted to forget, for it brought back memories of fights and icy blue eyes staring at him.

But it was also a memory of greatness. Of brave men leading them all, one man in particular. Giving them courage and strength to go on and on.

“Go!” he said. “GO!”

But the dire wolf stayed still, and did not even blink. It was looking at him with judgement in its bloody eyes.

Could such beast have feeling? He wondered. Could that beast think?

It was strange. Sometimes, he thought it had red eyes. Sometimes, it was grey eyes that were staring at him. And sometimes, it was a mix of the two.

He lowered his hand, putting it in his pockets, his eyes never leaving the wolf.
The knife must be there, somewhere. He felt its pointy head in his finger, and caught it. And waited. Waited. For the right moment.

If he could kill this beast, certainly he could go anywhere. If he killed that beast, he would be free. He could do everything.

But when he raised to do so, his hand leaving his pocket and showing that blank steel, the monster did not move, nor blink its eyes. And he felt his body froze, literally. The presences in him were stronger now.

Panic filled him.

‘Don’t fight it’ the voice said, the stronger one. ‘It’s the only way you can be of any good, now. Oath breaker.’

He struggled. Tried to move. But no way. He was standing, but slowly something, someone was taking control of him.

He shook, opened his mouth to scream. But no voice left it. And he was left afraid and powerless as the presence made herself at home in his own life, in his own body.

He felt himself taking his things and going away. And his soul getting number and weaker by the minute. And by his side, always, this white shadow, this ghost of a former life.

Sleep, he needed sleep. Desperately.

And something to hold on to. He needed to be stronger.

Long minutes, perhaps hours passed, and finally he stopped, and fell on his knees once more. Relief filled him, because somehow, something, his body was given back to him gradually.

He looked at the water in front of him and saw the hollow shell of the man he once was, with lifeless eyes and dulled brown hair. His beard had grown quite a bit, almost reaching his collar bones.

He opened the tiny paper and read the words that were on it, written by a hand he loved. Dear words, with a pretty calligraphy. Words of caring, of love, of hope. Words that enveloped his heart like a warm blanket.

Words not for you, a deep and strong voice came in his head.

But he did not care to listen to it.

“J-jon Snow,” he said aloud, as if to convince himself. “I am Jon Snow.”

His voice was shaking, weak and feeble, like an old man.

At least that’s what he wanted to be. That’s what the voices in his head told him he should be.

Be him, he said aloud, with his voice shattering at its edges. Be him and they will love you. And she will love you.

It wasn’t all about being like him anymore. It was a question of survival.

“I am Jon Snow,” he said more determinately.
His voice was not shaking now. But it was not yet the voice of a king.

The white dire wolf still looked at him curiously, and here he thought its eyes were not red like blood, but rather grey as steel, and with judgement in it. It looked so familiar, but he couldn’t put a name on this. He wondered why. He wondered how. Then shook his head. This beast was almost unnoticeable, laying in the snow like that, like it was its own blanket. It felt just like another big mountain of snow next to him.

That must be his own eyes, he told himself. Cold must have affected his sight.

He looked once again at his own reflection, then saw some wrinkles on the surface of the water. Dread filled him suddenly, freezing his insides. He stopped, listening, but never daring to look up.

He raised his eyes and froze once again. And once again, he thought it deceived him. For it couldn’t be. It shouldn’t be.

Next to him, on the same side of the river where he stopped, there was a black and red form glaring at him, huge, threatening. He blinked. And when his eyes opened once again, he saw its details, filling this form with scales, members and bloody eyes.

And next to it, there was a woman, clad in white fur, with silver locks flying with the winter wind. Daenerys Targaryen…

The Dragon Queen… Here, near the lake, filling her flask like some random wench. She wasn’t even looking at him. And he hated her so much for doing so.

He thought her dead. He thought her body was rotting in the Seven Hells. But here she was, as if time had never affected her in any way.

But when she finally raised her head, stood up and looked at him, his heart skipped a beat.

Or was it his?

Silence was between them now, and the dragon’s tail moved nervously. Threateningly.

“You…” She whispered, abashed.

He stayed still.

‘What kind of monster are you?’ He wanted to yell.

But in the end, it was her who asked the question. Like always.

“Who are you?”

He felt a force fighting within him, trying to take control. And he almost let it once again, for its hold was suffocating and its plead was desperate and heartbreaking.

Like his own. He shook his head, confused.

“Jon… Jon Snow.” He mumbled.

She didn’t say anything at the beginning, and he did not look at her. But then her voice broke the silence.
“Jon… Snow.” she said, disbelieving.

At the sound of her voice, something broke in him. Or was it him? He wasn’t really sure. He was only sure of one thing at the moment.

If she went closer, he could touch her. If she went closer, he could kill her.

No, don’t, said the voice in his head.

She looked at him with disdain.

“No, you’re not.”

Her voice was filled with contempt.

“Where did you find that sword?” She asked.

He looked at it briefly. He had not dared to use it yet, but maybe, with her…

No, she did not deserve such fine weapon, he thought. He raised his head defiantly.

She went closer.

Come, he wanted to say. Come closer. That knife is ready for you. His hand was now bloody gripping it.

“Tell me, thief!”

He said nothing, for he knew nothing. Only stayed with the reassuring sensation of the blade in his hand.

Soon, he thought. Soon.

‘You’ll fail. As you always do.’ Replied the stronger voice in him.

“TELL ME!” She screamed at him with her commanding voice. “WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO HIM?”

He had never seen her angry. He had seen her eyes flaring, but he never saw something that terrifying.

She’s beautiful, he heard a voice in his head say.

He shook his head, confused. Where did that come from? he thought.

“He’s dead, is he?”

Now her voice was broken, and he revered this for a while, until pain attacked him unaware and despair filled him.

But he couldn’t answer, though one voice was screaming in his head. The stronger one.

‘NO!’ it said. ‘Look at me!’

“His life is mine,” she said finally. “Not yours to take.”

Her voice was soft, yet deadly. And her eyes were alight with a cold fire that made him shiver.
Yours, always, yours… he heard, with a tone that screamed of longing and sadness.

No, no, no, no.

That wasn’t him. That wasn’t…

“Jon… Jon Snow.”

He saw her shake her head, visibly distraught. As if he cared.

“Don’t say his name.”

“Jon Snow,” he said, this time, taking pleasure in her pain.

She looked at him, but didn’t come closer. She blinked, then shook her head.

“You’re a fool” She said. “And you’ll die like a fool.’

She sighed, and then turned her back on him. She touched the beast’s snout, and leaned on it.

“A death by fire…” He heard her whisper. “No, you don’t deserve it.”

The dragon huffed, then turned its little eyes, embers on fire, towards him.

“Drogon… Shh… my son, we’re leaving now” She said softly, caressing him in the space between its eyes. “He’s not here. We have to go.”

A whine was heard, and she froze in place, suddenly.

The dire wolf. It had finally made itself noticed, after all.

The wolf looked at her with eyes wide open, as if it couldn’t believe what it was looking at. The man himself couldn’t believe his eyes. Especially when, after some time, it came, slowly, almost gracefully, with more determination in each step, towards the Targaryen woman. It went passed him like he was nothing, and he felt suddenly all will to live leave him. She blinked, all eyes on it, and lowered herself, her knees touching the snow though she did not seem to have noticed.

“Ghost…” She whispered.

Her eyes were sad, filled with doubts.

He had thought it would bite her, and that would serve her right.

‘Attack’ He wanted to shoot, with gruesome euphoria filling him. ‘Kill her. Eat her.’

But it didn’t. It stood frozen in front of her, and then, softly, it went to her and sniffed her. A moan escaped its lips.

She put her hand hesitantly behind the wolf’s ear and patted him, while the white beast closed his eyes and leaned in even more. She chuckled with relief at this, and he could almost see a falling tear near her eye.

He never saw her cry. He always saw her fierce, determinate. Unbreakable. But here she was, the dragon queen, petting a wolf and crying like a maiden. Then she stopped, closed her eyes as if to gather some strength left in her.
“Why is your master not with you?”

Not master. No one could own it. He wanted to tell her so. Somehow, he needed to. He wondered why.

“What happened to your eyes?” She asked, then.

What happened to you? What happened to us? Asked the voice in his head, deep and broken.

The man shook, broken with the ring of it, echoing in his mind. He put his hands on his head.

It shouldn’t be, he realized. No, it couldn’t.

Monsters, he thought. Both the wolf and that woman. He wished they could just die. Die and leave him in peace. Die so that he could run back to his love.

As that woman, that terrible woman was busy with the dire wolf, he felt the force that was stopping him, driving him mad, release him little by little once more. And he began to think.

If he had her head, if he could put his knife in that hollow chest of hers, maybe… maybe he could come back. Maybe she would forgive him.

He had to try.

“W… W-wait!” he cried.

He ran toward her, while the wolf howled at him, all fangs out.

He could succeed it. Become anyone’s hero. Become him. She was here, in front of him, mouth agape, vulnerable and very killable in his eyes.

Yes, he could return. He could be forgiven. And he will be a hero, saving her from the tyrant that had threatened her…

“Don’t!” He heard the woman scream.

He didn’t care to listen. She wouldn’t survive this time. Not with what would be left of her.

He was almost there, and soon he could touch her. Put that knife into her.

He could see his love right now, telling him sweetly “Kill her, my lord. My knight. My love.”

Soon, love, soon, he whispered. Soon, you’ll tell me that you love me as I do.

In all of his turmoil and ecstasy, he forgot one thing. One important thing, that should have been very obvious from the beginning.

It was the dragon’s head that he met instead. And then there was not escape.

It was too late. Its burning breath had already reached him. He closed his eyes, falling to darkness, without even a sound. His skin was on flame, and he felt slowly his consciousness leaving him. He heard the dire wolf howl at him.

‘Fool. Bloody fool.’ It said.

I must find her, he thought one last time. She’s in danger. He had to protect her. He saw her once
again in front of him as darkness began to fill him. He moaned her name.

His queen with fire in her hair and ice in her eyes…

Chapter End Notes

Guess he kind of forgot about the dragon.
...
Okay, that one was easy to do.
Now every important pieces are placed. The game can truly begin.
Hey!

Here’s chapter 11, with Malwyn’s Snow’s POV. Next one will be Arya’s. Be prepared for some Gendrya, and a bit of angst (the two lovers need to have a conversation)

(And the next one’s after that has a name that begins by a “D”... guess who it is?)

I’ve been reading Fire and Blood these days... I guess that gave me some inspiration for the end of the story, and it forced me to really put down to paper all the events I wanted to happen, and all the links between them (the end is already clearly established!)

Song mainly used: “Counting Stars” by OneRepublic

Any question? Remark? Do not hesitate to let me know!

Good reading!

Fire burned the flesh as surely as it would have done wood. Delicately, progressively, every layer of skin cowering itself as the juice and the blood came out and fed the flame. Some black marks soon would adorn the meat, adding a bitter taste to it. The taste of ashes and death. But it needed to wait a little time again, for the warmth had not reached its heart. It was a matter of seconds, perhaps a few minutes. Already, the smell was delicious.

This was no castle food. There was no butter, no honey nor salt to season it, only a few leaves of mint they somehow found near a tree, where Rickard had pissed. It was a fancy the man had laughed of at the time, and threatened to soil for true this time, but it was also something that made them feel like home, with the memory of old Ianna roasting them meat after the long trainings. She never told them the recipe, for she said there were secrets women ought to keep. They could only remember there was mint in it. Poor old woman died and took that one secret in her grave. She died, bearing no child of her own, having no husband of her own, but mother to all. A discreet, accessible feminine presence in a world led by men. Mother even to those who found themselves forgotten. Malwyn had been one of them when his mother died, and a little before the men took him in. But before he even knew of her care, there was Larence. Perfect, friendly Larence, always ahead of the others. Always strong, always brave. A true hero, without knowing it.

“We need to be strong, Malwyn,” he would say. “Strong like the king. And soon we’ll rise and rise, and no one would ever harm us.”

And young Malwyn would only look at him with big eyes, admiring the braveness of it.

“Sweet, gentle Larence”, Old Ianna would call him. “With ideas too big for your head. One day, this head of yours will explode from the strength of it!”

At that, he would only smile absently, as if that last part had been lost on him. The only moment he
ever snapped was when people called him Snow, but even with that, it seemed that he was managing very well to control the violence that each man had in his heart.

Malwyn lowered his head. He was no boy now, he thought. Long gone were the dreams of heroism and knighthood. They had been frozen, then burned until all that remained was ashes and haunted memories.

He removed the meat from the fire, and let it cool down a little. The night was fresh, yes, but it still had the hint of spring in its air. It was not like the cold there had been, not so long ago. The gripping cold that made you want to end your life as any of your tears froze in place. Now that they were nearer the Wall, it was colder, yes, but not the same. And surprisingly, that was the most disturbing thing to Malwyn.

Jan and Eddy were singing now. Softly, firmly. Jan’s tune was maybe a little too rough, but Eddy had a pretty voice, though maybe not as great as Finn’s had once been. But it was a song to warm the heart when all hopes seemed doomed. A song for love and for life.

“… for she was his secret treasure
She was his shame and his bliss
And a chain and a keep are nothing
Compared to a woman’s kiss
For hands of gold are always cold
But a woman’s hands are warm…”

They were passing the meat to each other now. Each took one bite, but neither dared to take more. Hunger may have been one of their problems before. But now, it was fatigue that turned their stomachs. Fatigue after all the fights, and the long peace that came after. Fatigue after all delusions, and all hopes going to the flames. Fatigue was just another word to hide the grief that settled in their hearts.

The Age of Heroes was long gone. It would not come back.

They had once again come to a village, assaulted by the same savages as Pearlsnow. Few survivors were left, but all talked of beasts ravaging them in the night, of men covered in furs burning their home and raping their women. No traces of any man fitting the description of Larence. At least the Larence they knew, as he had been.

Malwyn shook his head. These ideas came to him more often than not now, and he was quite saddened by this turn. How could he doubt so easily of his friend? After everything? He couldn’t. He had no right to do it. Not when he might once more be proved wrong.

But still… there had always been moments with Larence that had intrigued him, and made him doubt he really knew him as much as he thought. Malwyn closed his eyes. Try to look in his memories for signs. For something. A scene. Few words exchanged, just before the attack on Pearlsnow.

“Sometimes I envy you,” Larence had said that one time. “Sometimes I just want to run away and forget it all. Be myself. Be someone else. But then I remember…”

Malwyn had then asked what. What could possibly make him stay? What did these words even
“There is someone I have to protect.” Larence had answered.

“Would you tell me now who she is?” he had asked.

His friend had smiled. Larence had never said who it was, but Malwyn had his guesses. He had seen him looking to that special someone with eyes of love, eyes of want.

“My very own Jonquil.”

“That makes you Florian the Fool, then.”

He had wanted to tease him about it. Teasing was easy. Teasing did not require for him to think of his own lost hopes.

But then Larence had answered, his expression closed and serious.

“All geniuses are fools in their love. But all fools die for it anyway.”

The song stopped, and then only silence prevailed. At least for a time. Malwyn shook his head, trying to return to his own reality. The one he was in, with these men he grew up with, friends and enemies alike. Life must go on, he thought. But Larence needed still to be found.

Women, gold, and meat were subjects of predilection for these times in between. Sometimes it was soft and discreet, just as a fair maiden talk. Sometimes it was rambunctious and playful, as it was now. Most of the time, he contributed largely in this. But now, Malwyn did not pay attention. His thoughts were still troubled.

Some people had dreams of high standard. But these dreams did not last. He could understand though. He could really understand it, for he had seen that beauty. But then it was her eyes that froze him.

Ideas too big for his head. Yes, he could very much understand. But Malwyn, for his own sake, preferred to feel the warmth of a true, concrete woman, than to dream on a possible impossibility.

Reina had been more than concrete. He had felt the warmth of her skin against his, and the softness of her light brown hair slipping through his fingers. She had smiled for him, and when he kissed her, she tasted like honey and cloves.

He had not taken her maidenhead then. But maybe he should have. Maybe it would have changed everything. He could have married her near a heart tree then. Damn the consequences. She would have been his, forever.

He had been a fool then…

“… sure, Reina’s hands must have been really warm, but…”

“What’s his name, again?” Reagan’s voice was heard. “A bastard once again, I believe, turned noble. Some Velar…”

His blood ran cold.

“Shut up both of you.” Malwyn growled.

Thinking about her was pain by itself. Hearing about her was agony. He supposed that if he could
see her once again, he would die by the suffering of it. Or the great pleasure, maybe.

Oh, if only she loved him still. Maybe they could run away, leave all the mess behind.

Maybe. That word haunted him still, unsettling by its uncertainty. Maybe all of this was vain. But he could only hope. Maybe was the last word she ever said to him. But he had thought then it was a promise. A promise of happiness and peace.

A promise that was not for him.

He raised up, ignoring the worried looks of Darren and Jan, and left silently.

There was a river, with only a few minutes from the camp. It was a discrete haven, calm and solemn with its weirwood tree with clear, pure water, making its way between the roots and digging the dark soil by the strength of its streams. Once it had been frozen, and now here it was. And here he was. Cold, but trying to find his way. He wasn’t sure yet where it would lead, but there was no turning back now. Not until he had answers.

He put his hand in the liquid, and rubbed them. It was fresh and pleasing. He drank from it and then washed his face, closing his eyes.

He had to think. Now. Before he became too overwhelmed by grief to do so clearly. Grief was dangerous. Grief could kill.

Where could Larence be?

He had once been taken by the Greyjoys because of his status as the next heir of Lord Hornwood. Malwyn knew he had been tortured, almost starved to death. But he never gave up. He fought and fought, until he found his way out of it.

Then he had come back to Hornwood, like a hero, on his own. Some thought him dead before he came back. Malwyn, after torturous months when he wanted to go save him, had given up then, listening to the others’ advices. But, as he saw his friend’s silhouette appearing at the entrance, everything came back to him. The times when Larence gave him hope, encouraged him. The time when they learned to fight together.

First came joy. Then came guilt.

Larence had laughed at him then. A rough laugh, unlike the one he had had once. But who knew what happened to him during that time of captivity. He had said he had escaped them and survived, and Malwyn instantly believed him, wanting to put the past behind him, and all thoughts about what could have been if he had tried to save his friend despite what had been told to him.

This time, it had been his friends who urged him to take that mission. To find Larence once again.

But this time, he was seriously doubting it all.

They had followed his traces. From here, they could see the Wall, and the scars on it, only fragments of what had been the Great War, the war for the dawn. But then, no traces. Nothing. A few footsteps, then nothing. Not even a drop of blood, or the hint of a fingertip.

Malwyn sighed and looked ahead, on the great weirwood tree, and its leaves that seemed to be about to fall by each caprice of the wind. The shape of it was a glory by itself, but it was the color that attracted his attention. Red like blood on the snow. Red like the hair of one woman, with ice in her eyes. Or the sky, maybe.
He shook his head. This was not his thoughts, it was someone else’s. Why was he still parasite with it? What could that aspect bring to him?

Oh yes. Larence loved his queen. That was for sure. His was a love built on dreams and chivalry. His was a love built on despair and hopes.

He had written letters to the queen to talk about his journey. But alas, if he had one answer to his first, the others stayed unanswered. He had wondered at the unfeminine writing of that answer, but then shrugged. Maybe it was just a lady’s fancy, to let a maester write letters to a simple bastard. Or maybe she couldn’t write. Who knew. Few could do so, after all. Even rich ones.

“Hey, bastard,” Reagan called.

“What?” Malwyn snapped.

“If you want to lead this mission, you better toughen up. Not look like a craven.”

“I’m not…”

“You bloody hell are, boy. You bloody hell are. They all feel it.”

“And what about you? What about your little act in front of Sansa Stark?”

“Tsk, boy. You never understood a god damn thing, do you? The girl is a queen. She has the power to make our lives miserable. She has the power to order our execution, to exile us. She doesn’t fight with us, she sends us. If you don’t fear a queen, you die. But you… You’re not Larence, young lad. Larence was always bloody certain of everything. You, you’ve always been full of uncertainty. No, don’t deny it, boy. I know you since you were a babe. You’ve got some sparks of foolish courage, but in the end, you’re always overthinking this. And if you’re uncertain yourself, you die. And us with you.”

Anger filled Malwyn at that. He glared.

“Then why are you still with us? What’s keeping you? The queen?”

He did not answer, but Malwyn saw something in his eyes. Pain. Grief.

What did that mean?

“You better let it go, lad. This quest is not for you.”

“You once told me not to go.”

“I told you the truth, lad.” He said. “You’re not fit to be a hero.”

“And you are?”

The elder man laughed.

“No. But I once knew someone who would have been.”

He stayed silent a long time. Wind was blowing on the leaves, making some fall on the surface of the water. Reagan was about to leave, when suddenly he turned back one more time, with a pained look.

“You have his eyes, you know?” He said. “Your father’s eyes. Don’t taint them with doubts,
you’re insulting his memory.”

The young man gaped, baffled. But before he could even answer, ask even, the moment was gone. Reagan was gone.

This was certainly the kindest thing Reagan had ever said to him. And he never talked about his father either.

Why now?

He groaned. Was he destined to ever wonder about the true meaning of what people said?

Larence’s sword was still in his belt, near his own. He had tried to clean it, but it seemed that blood had already tainted the steel.

His eyes went to the sky, searching. Counting the stars, giving them names until it hurt. Imagining the shapes of it, and their links to the moon.

Until a clear and familiar shape detached itself from it. A terrific and terrifying shape, yet one he had dreamed of a lot of times, not always in a bad way.

He blinked. The vision was gone as surely as it had come. Maybe it was just an effect of fatigue. Maybe it was just memories haunting him once again.

The last dragon was gone, leaving with his dead queen in its claws. It couldn’t be.

But still, his heart beat quickly in the night, and he came back to his friends, who were already sleeping. He looked at each face and asked himself if he was truly fit for leading that mission. He cared not for that knighthood the little queen had promised. He cared for his friends. He had listened to them, to Jan specifically.

He sighed. Reagan was right. He was clearly overthinking this.

Tomorrow, they would reach another village, at a few distances from Eastwatch-by-the sea. Icestone, they had called it. Its inhabitants were mostly fishermen, that had returned after the War for the Dawn, and seen their houses being recovered in a thick layer of ice. This ice had not melted yet despite their efforts, so the name stuck to it. They didn’t want to move. Not again. So they learned to deal with it. Malwyn closed his eyes.

When the sun came out, they continued their journey. They did not dare to speak, not yet. But glances were exchanged, nods. They knew each other too well to be truly angry.

They came to a tavern, where they ate silently the meat stew the owner had cooked, and then began their investigations, each on their own.

And when they reunited once again for dinner, Denys was the one with a hint of an answer.

He had talked with one of the fishermen in the tavern, who said a man had stolen his boat. It was, he said, a tall, lanky man covered in bruises and blood, with brown hair that stuck to his skull, and when he looked at him with his crazy grey eyes, the fisherman knew it. He had met with a maleficent spirit of the sea.

But what was interesting was that in his haste, he let go of a helmet, on which the black moose of the Hornwoods had been carved.
Hope began to blossom in their hearts. Larence was alive, and they were about to go investigate this when a strong voice called them.

They turned back, and Malwyn groaned.

Ser Harrold Hardyng, with a group of armed men with his colors, smirking at them, glowing in a newly-made silver armor.

“Malwyn Snow,” he proclaimed solemnly. “In the name of Queen Sansa of House Stark, protectress and Keeper of the North, you are urged to return back to Winterfell, in order to be interrogated.”

“Interrogated? Me and my companions are on a mission.” He said, bewildered. “It was she who ordered us to go.”

“And now she demands you come back to her.”

“I’d sooner believe she wanted to get rid of you,” he mumbled through his teeth.

Fury sparkled in Harrold’s eyes.

“What did you say?”

Malwyn glared at him and stood his ground. They couldn’t leave now. Not this close to one hint of the mystery that had befallen their friend and lord.

“We’re here at the request of Queen Sansa Stark,” He repeated clearly and stubbornly. ”who asked us not to return until we found out what happened to our lord, Larence of House Hornwood…”

“Your damn bastard lord is dead!” Harrold interrupted. “Get over it! The queen already did.”

“The queen can do as she pleases. But we’re not letting him go now!”

Harrold took the dagger from his belt and pointed it swiftly on Malwyn’s cheek. He blinked from the sharping pain of it, but then his glare hardened on the knight in front of him. It would bleed certainly.

“Take care, bastard,” He hissed. “Others than you lost their lives for less than that.”

Malwyn only smirked. For his own dagger was now pointing at Harrold’s crotch, and the elder knight began to feel it, all color leaving little by little his face.

But then, the horns were heard, following by the cries of panic of the villagers, running away hazardously on the streets while Malwyn and Harrold could only stare at then, bewildered. The men were already on fighting stance.

And then they saw them. Men, clad in furs, shooting at them with theirs weapons in their hands. Some had already caught villagers who hadn’t been fast enough to escape them. Some were already raping and sacking, throwing aflame torches on the houses.

Malwyn let out the sword that was on his belt and prepared himself for the inevitable clash.

Most were dispersed, wild. The murders were sloppy and cruel, and they seemed to revere in it. Yet some seemed more ill-at-ease with their weapons, couldn’t help but notice Malwyn. As if it was the first time they were carrying it. And some of them were in groups, in what seemed a defensive stance.
But the young man had no time to ponder it. Leading them, there was a red-haired man, with a
great beard, shooting with his rough and loud voice. Malwyn saw red, and let anger blind him
through the slaughter. His friends and the others were following him, fighting and killing their way
too. Blade against blade, clinking until it cut through the clothes to meet the skin. He heard Eddy
yelped in pain, but then Denys put his sword through his attacker’s back.

The horns were still being blown, their sound in their ears screaming danger, screaming to kill.

Malwyn was fighting shoulder to shoulder to Jan, each parrying the blows that were thrown at
them. But then, they lost themselves in the chaos, and suddenly the young man was all alone in the
crowd, with screams in his ears, screams in his mind. Screams that looked like the ones his mother
did when they took her.

At this point, all reason left him. He shouted in fury and lost himself in the fights. He couldn’t
hear. He couldn’t feel. He could only react, the sword in his hand swinging, cutting, killing.

And then suddenly, here he was. The fights had somehow calmed down, or maybe it was only his
fixation on that man now, the man that was in front of him.

The red-haired wildling glared at him and screamed in anger. But Malwyn was faster than him. He
hit and hit, until it broke, and then kicked. And then, with a final shout, he found a break in his
enemy’s defense, and put his weapon through it.

The man fell without a sound, his brown eyes staring at him until the life went out of it.

Then he looked at what he had done.

It was not the one he wanted to kill. Yet, it was a close one, it seemed. His breath was ragged, wild,
and his eyes looked down, to the blade that had become a part of his arm for this fight. Then he
realized.

It was Larence’s sword he had in hand. Not his. He blinked.

And that was nearly his downfall. For, as his attention slipped away, someone screamed at him in
rage, his dagger in his hand, ready to attack. And too close to stop in time.

Malwyn closed his eyes, preparing himself for the blow he felt defenseless to stop. But which
never came.

He opened them, bewildered, his blood that was boiling only minutes before freezing now in his
veins. He wanted to throw up.

The other man was laying down at his side now. And it was Harrold Hardyng that was carrying
the blade that saved him.

Malwyn fell on his knees, the enormity of what happened suddenly coming to him.

The fights were over. And smoke had replaced the fire.

“Wildlings,” he mumbled with a shaking voice. “It truly was wildlings…”

Or was it? Said the treasonous voice in his head.

How could he doubt it now? How could he shake that feeling of danger, the same he had when his
mother was killed?
His heart had not stopped beating. He felt a hand on his shoulder.

“Come, boy,” Harrold declared with a calm voice. “Your queen awaits you.”

“No.” He managed to say. “I can’t.”

Malwyn raised his eyes towards the man. His hand was shaking.

“You may kill me now if you want. I have a debt towards you now. You’ve saved my life, and for that I’m grateful. I’ll do whatever you ask of me. But not now. I can’t let it go now.”

“You fool!” That was Reagan, trying to go to him, his fist closed and his face red with anger. “That’s not only…”

But Darren stopped him and looked at him in the eyes. Then he turned toward Malwyn and nodded.

“So can’t I.”

“And I.” Jan added.

“And I.” That was Eddy.

“… Aye.” Was heard reluctantly. Rickard.

The knight gazed at him a long time, as if calculating something. Then he looked at his companions and sighted. He nodded towards one of his soldiers, shrugged and smirked.

“You bloody fool!” Reagan snapped. “I can’t believe it. I have enough of it! I’m going home!”

“And you’re welcome to it!” Harrold said jovially. “We have no need for old men like you.”

He reached out towards Malwyn.

Hesitantly, the young man reciprocated. The hands were shaken briefly, but firmly.

“You’ll… help us?” Malwyn was bewildered by this turn of events.

Harry’s smile was amused now.

“You don’t seem so sure of your little adventure now, bastard,” he answered with mischief in his eyes, before turning his back on him, leading the way. “Let’s go where you bloody want to go. Then you’ll see I’ve been right all along.”

A true mummer’s show, Malwyn thought.

He shook his head. No. The man had proved himself that he could protect people, even with disagreements opposing them. And now, he was offering to help them. Alliances should not be tainted by suspicion.

At least, until proven otherwise… he couldn’t help but add nonetheless.
Hey! I hope you will like this new chapter. Next one will be Daenerys.

I'll try to update every Friday from now on. But do not hesitate to remind me if I'm late 😊

Song mainly used: “Devil in Me”, Halsey

Question:

- Who does Arya want to see now? Any guess?

Good reading!

PS: Yes, to those who wondered, I changed my pseudonym. The other one was a bit outdated, especially when essentially it came from a bet and belongs to a fandom that I haven't been a part of since a long time :)

Sun just came out, rising from the bushes where she had been resting. She felt its beams on her fur, like a balm to her bruises. She yawned, for her travel had been a long one, and her paws were still painful from the snow and the rocks. She was no pup now, but still, even the thickest horn on them couldn't protect her enough.

Where was her pack? She had lost them once she went on the other side. They had howled at her to come back, but she heard the lonely wolf’s cry and suddenly, nothing else was important. She was not just a wolf. She was a girl. She was a sister. She was human.

Where was her brother?

She had followed his traces beyond the big wall of ice, had sniffed his scent east, until she came to the river. There had been a fresh hole in the snow, she remembered. She smelled it. Blood and sulfur. And the scent of a man, unknown to her. A man that smelled like burned flesh. But no body.

Nothing but one tuft of white hair with fresh blood on it. She must have missed them, but not that long.

She had then proceeded to follow her brother’s track until it ran out, until she went back to the other side of the wall. Men ran away from her, and tried to attack her. But she fought back. The taste of their blood was still on her tongue, but somehow, it repulsed her now. She wondered why.

She went west, following the falling sun, hoping to find something. Someone. A hint. She never rested, until that day where she slept, exhausted and hungry.

Now, here she was, laying on the grass, hidden in the bushes, on a hill with the sun and the wind
above her.

She shook herself, trying to get rid of the morning’s drops of water. Her fangs still carried the marks of her last prey. She tried to lick it, eager for the taste of it. Then she stilled.

She heard his howl, but it seemed it came from the sky. She looked up.

A dragon was hiding the sun. But it was undeniable. Her brother was in the sky with it.

She howled at him, begging him to come back. To leave that fearful creature. He only howled in return.

And this howl meant farewell.

She screamed, letting grief overcoming her.

…

Arya opened her eyes. Her breathing was ragged, broken, and she took long deep breaths of air. Strong arms embraced her closer, as if feeling her trouble. She closed her eyes, trying to calm down the beating of her heart. His smell was all on her now, all around them. That smell of leather and embers she came to get used to, and who reassured her more than she would want.

Once again, she was in a bed, with him. Once again, she did not want to leave. Her body responded to his presence, and his scent drew her in. She closed her eyes, feeling it surrounding her like a warm blanket.

But if she stayed… What then? What would that make her? What would that make them?

She shook her head and swiftly detangled herself from him. She put her clothes on, that were dispersed all in the room, once again a proof of their relationship. Once again a proof she couldn’t resist him.

They even smelt of him now. She sniffed it, her heart squeezing up from the memories of last night.

This is the last time, she tried to tell herself. Today, it will stop. Today, I’m on my own.

She quietly closed the door behind herself, taking care not to wake him, taking care not to look at him. She could feel every move in that room anyway.

Just like the other times, she tried to ignore the fact that her heart was still beating, screaming at her to come back. Just like the other times, she was cold.

The cold is not what I fear, she told herself. I’ve known winter. I’ve known death. I am in the North now. And the North is my home.

She went down the stairs, feeling like a thief with the swiftness of her steps. No, she wouldn’t look back.

People looked at her when she came to the common room of the inn, and she tried to ignore them. But it was just another reminder of who she was, and of what had been done.

She left and did not look back.

It was market day in that little village where she stopped. In two or three days she would be in
Winterfell. She would see her sister, and the place where her family laid.

But not Jon, now. Jon couldn’t come back. Not now, not ever.

She went down the alleys, trying to ignore the pain in her chest, like salted water on an aflame scar. Instead, she focused on the people, who did not even remark her in the crowd. It was a nice change, for now she could imagine.

If she was still a little girl, she would talk to them. She would be their friends.

And they would use her.

She shook her head and continued.

She bought an orange and discussed a bit with the old woman at her stand. It made her remember of Old Nan and her stories. And of Bran listening to them, with eyes widened, fascinated, and mouth agape. How he loved them, these scary stories. It would always keep him awake at bed.

Now he was the keeper of these stories. And he certainly had more of them now.

She was about to continue her way when she heard the discussion of two merchants that made her stop on her tracks.

“… Her Majesty lil’ Sansa Stark said so.”

She went closer, taking care not to be noticed, and observed them.

They wore rich, colorful, foreign clothes that were not adapted for the North. The first one was so big his belt seemed always about to burst. He was talking with a loud, greasy voice, that tended to skip some vowels. But his eyes were shining with a cruel intelligence that made Arya think of a cat chasing its prey. The other was the total opposite, as he was thin and fragile. But his voice was controlled, ironic. Seemingly someone who wanted to appear more cultivated than he was, from the accent that sometimes escaped from his mouth.

Cat and Mouse it would be.

On any other day, she would have laughed at that caricature. But now, she couldn’t.

These men came from Essos, that for sure. But she was also convinced to have seen one of them before.

So she listened. Maybe then she would learn things that could help her in her search, she rationalized.

“I’d say, it’s about time it comes, since they had talked to us so much about it.” Mouse said.

“Yah, ‘t’must be the feast of the century.”

“Do you know who’s invited?

“All dam’ pageantry of the North,” Cat said, laughing. “An’ lot of d’ncers and sing’rs as well.”

“Oh yeah, like who? I’m fond of pretty songs.”

“I h’ard there’s this bast’rd. Nam’d Aerand Sand. Or Flowers, ‘don’t know.”
Cat laughed, as if he knew something more than his partner.

“Flowers, I’d say.” Mouse answered. “Heard he takes bath in roses, like a prude maiden.”

“Wouln’t surpr’se meh much.” Cat said. “All bast’rs’re the sam’. Heard he’d been paid mor’ than a thous’nd to play for th’t feast the little queen is throwin’.”

“He must have a good singing voice,” The other replied. “Or maybe his talents are more of the private kind.”

At the implication, she saw red. Her blood rushed in fury in her veins. The audacity of these men…

“Ye mean in the bedr’om?” He snickered, and balanced himself to make his point clear.

“Tsk. Ain’t no natural,” he continued. “A woman without a man.”

“Oh, but mebbe it ain’t so!” “Mebbe she IS…”

He did not even had the time to finish his sentence. Arya was on them now, and her dagger was out of its sheath. She glared at them.

“That’s my sister you’re talking about, you pigs.”

Their laughter died in an instant. They looked at her with big, afraid eyes.

“Continue like that,” She said fiercely. “And I shall cut your tongues.”

“That’s not very diplomatic, isn’t it, your Highness?” interrupted a teasing, pleasing voice.

Gendry had found her again.

She huffed and turned back.

“These men insulted my sister,” she said, as if to justify herself.

“Men insult women every day,” He remarked. “And women do to.”

“Well, it shouldn’t be,” She groaned in reply.

She looked back. The men had already left. She shrugged and put the dagger back in the sheath. Then she continued her way, trying to ignore that nagging presence following her, a smug smirk on his pretty face.

“You know,” He said after a moment of delicious silence. “That’s the seventh time this week you leave my bed, you little Alys Westhill.”

She sighed, irritated.

“And that’s the seventh time this week you seek me out,” she remarked matter-of-factly. “Don’t you have enough?”

He only chuckled at this.

“Never,” he replied with that cheeky grin of his. “By the way… You bite even in your sleep, my lady.”

She glared at him.
“I’m still not a lady.”

“No,” He said with a fond smile. “You’re a princess, actually… Did you steal any dragon eggs on your way, your Highness?”

She rolled her eyes, and turned back, continuing her way.

“Tsk”

But he still continued to follow her, and she could guess from the eagerness of his step that he was enjoying it.

Damn bastard.

“Why deny it?”

“Shut up.”

He laughed.

“You lost your bite, my…”

Having had enough, she turned towards him suddenly and placated him against a wall. Her dagger was on his throat to prove her point.

“If you finish that sentence, I swear, I will cut you…” She snarled.

“… Do.”

His blue eyes were shining with desire. She could feel the heat coming from him, inviting her to join. She considered it, looking at his slightly parted lips, that had been so tender and soft the night before…She shuddered by the memory of it on her skin.

Then she turned back.

He laughed. But still followed back.

It exasperated her, that tenacity of his. Especially when he made it so difficult to resist him.

“If you’re that eager to follow me, why aren’t you offering me dinner?”

He smirked.

“You are so demanding.”

But still, he took her to the inn and paid for the meal.

She sighed. She was back to it, after all.

The people in it looked at him in wonder, that young lord that did not even try to hide it. But then, their eyes went to her, and they widened considerably. Some whispered, others even retreated back, closer to the entrance.

She looked at them, thoughtful as she installed herself.

“People, now. They see me as a monster.”
“You seem quite sentimental, for a person who told me again and again that she didn’t care what people would think,” Gendry remarked nonchalantly, settling on his chair. “They see you as a hero. The one who killed the Night King.”

“Sometimes I wonder if there’s a true difference between the two.”

He looked at her a long time, and lowered his eyes to his ale. He opened, then closed his mouth.

Then he looked away.

“Sometimes I wonder…”

He sighed.

“What?” She asked, curious, and a bit exasperated that he interrupted himself that way.

As if he couldn’t trust her enough to listen about what he would say. As if she wouldn’t support him.

Well, it depended on the thing he wanted to say, she wondered in afterthought.

He looked at her in the eyes and she shivered at the intensity of it.

“What if we had been wrong from the start?”

She blinked.

“What do you mean?”

“What if everything was not what it seemed?” He continued. “What if we made her the monster we thought she was?”

“Her? The mad queen? What in seven hells is she doing in this conversation?”

“I’m just thinking, that’s all. You’re asking yourself if people see you as a monster, and what that makes you… But I wonder. Could Daenerys Targaryen have felt the same way too, when she came?”

Her eyes widened. Then she huffed, folding her arms.

He did not have any right to question her. Not now, when he dared to follow her around, begging her to come back.

But isn’t it what you want? A treasonous thought came to her.

She shook her head. No. That wasn’t the problem.

“You say only that because she made you a lord.”

He shook his head, chuckling.

“I’ve never known what being a lord meant. I still don’t know why she did it.”

“To use you, certainly.”

At least, that’s what Sansa had thought.
But since when are you taking everything Sansa say for granted? Continued the voice in her head. You’re still Arya Horseface, after all. You still want to be like her, like that perfect little lady, pleasing everyone. You still want to be loved by all.

She glared, angry at herself for questioning herself now. And for thinking such absurdities.

Why now??

Was it because of him? Was it because he made her feel things she had thought lost on her forevermore?

This needed to stop now. She couldn’t afford to be vulnerable. Not now. Not ever. And certainly not to him.

“Maybe” He admitted after a time. “But don’t everyone use other people at one point of their life for something?”

She raised her eyes to him, having nearly forgotten the conversation, conflicted as she was. But then, she found strength to answer.

“Not everyone.”

He stared at her. His eyes were hard, and the intensity of it was strong, as if it was grasping her possessively back to him.

She needed to go, now.

“You did, Arya.”

Her eyes widened. She couldn’t believe the reality of what he’d said.

“What?”

How could…?

How dared…?

“You’ve used me,” He looked away, his left hand thrown slightly in a gesture of nonchalance. “You’ve used me and took what you wanted from me. Of course, at the time, I let you, because I wanted you, and it felt right.” His eyes were right back on her now. “But then you left me in the dark for some adventures at sea.”

She looked at him, agape, her eyes seeking the lie in his face. But his expression was closed.

Was it really what he believed?

“Is that how you see it?” She asked him, almost disbelievingly. “Don’t you think I didn’t have any other reason at all?”

Anger gripped her. She wanted to hit him. To slap that pretty face of his.

And his eyes seemed to be daring her to do so.

“Not that you told me, at least.” He continued, trying once again to affect an air of indifference. “You only told me you didn’t want to marry me. That you didn’t want to be a lady…”
“I still don’t want to.”

“But what do you think a lady is, Arya? What should a lady do?” He raised his voice, throwing his hands towards the sky in irritation. “Do you think I care about it? Ladies only deigned to look at me once I got that title, when before all of that, they just would ignore me, touch me as if I was propriety, or use me as some kind of toy.”

She felt frozen. Then suddenly hot.

People were watching them now, with that outburst.

He stopped one moment, lowered his head in his hands, massaging his temples. Then he looked at her, with tiredness and disillusion in his eyes.

“Is that what I was to you?” He asked softly, weary. “A toy?”

She turned back. She couldn’t face his gaze now. It was too hard for her. And it made her remember things she wanted to forget.

“You don’t understand.”

“Then explain it to me.”

His voice was insistent. But now, it was caressing, pressing her softly to give in to him…

“Explain to me, Arya,” He said. “Open yourself to me. Please…”

She could see his hand coming towards hers.

He was close, too close for sanity.

“Please…”

She couldn’t resist him. Deep down, she knew it. And she hated it.

“I WAS AFRAID!” She snapped in defense. “Is that what you want to hear?”

He raised one eyebrow. His hand stilled, and it somehow saddened her. She had begun to expect the warmth of it on her own.

“Afraid? It’s alright to be afraid. We all are, you never were alone in this,” He answered. “You don’t have to be strong all the time…”

He sounded disappointed. But why would he be? She hadn’t promised anything to him, had she?

His mouth opened once again, closed. His eyes were shining with conflicted emotions. Pain. Compassion. Anger. Sadness. Love? No, it couldn’t be. “I once knew a girl that was fierce, a girl that didn’t care who people were, if they were deserving. A girl who told me once she could be my family,” He continued, his hand caressing her, his thumb slowly drawing circles on her. “What made her change?”

She gave in, weary to contain herself any longer.

She wanted to fight it. But now, she felt powerless to stop it.

She sighed.
“That girl tried to go home,” She said. “Tried to do what is right, tried to find her family. But she lost herself in the way.”

She felt the tears threatening to come out of her eyes. She almost chuckled by the irony of it.

“You know, I used to like these tales about dragons,” She said. “Full of adventures. Of powerful women riding them, conquering countries. I wanted to be like them. But then…”

“What then?”

“I don’t know. Wars happened. Deaths happened. And so quickly, I couldn’t…” She stopped a bit, feeling the fear she had felt then, but tried to conceal it. Until that time. “I wanted to go back. And when I saw Sansa, I had hoped… It wasn’t easy, at first, but we were together. And Jon would come back and everything would be alright. But then… But then I felt it. I felt fear, her fear, and it echoed with something in me. I don’t know how. I had to protect her. I had to protect myself. And when I’ve seen how she affected people… All the fire, the blood. I’ve seen a mother trying to save her daughter, and I couldn’t even help them. I couldn’t save her, like I couldn’t save my… I could only run and try to survive.”

It had been easy to be Arya the Faceless. That person did not have to feel, did not have to think. It was a mask she could use to hide when bad times were coming.

Why had she just poured her heart’s worries to him? But why was it coming off now?

Why was she tempted to continue? Why couldn’t this stop?

She had opened the valves, and she didn’t quite know how to close them. Especially when she kept them close for so long, and that the images were coming back to her so clearly.

She shook her head.

“I wanted to leave it all. All of this.” “I wanted people to see me as Arya. Only Arya. Not just like that person who killed a monster.”

I wanted to have a family, was she tempted to say. To live a normal life, without looking to ghosts of the past…

But did she? Could she?

No…

She felt his hand on her own, soothing and caressing.

“But I saw you.”

She raised her eyes to his. She let her fingers intertwine with his.

“Did you?”

He looked away, irritated. His hand came back to his side.

“You didn’t even let me time to show you.”

She blinked. Her eyes looked at his, trying to find a lie in it. But no, she couldn’t find it.

She found herself wanting to believe…
Then the bells rang out, loud and clear. She felt her heart pounding in her chest, threatening to burst it. Images came to her, of fire running wild on cities. Of people running, screaming, pleading. She could smell their agony.

She jumped from her seat and left the inn.

Gendry was following her.

There was chaos in the streets. People screaming and running, tables being turned back in hurry. And fire torches, thrown at the roofs. So much fire... So much panic... She was in King’s Landing all over again. And once again, she felt it. Fear.

But this time, men in furs attacked them. She blinked, shook her head. She needed to calm down and focus.

She joined the fight. And with the sound of it, she could hear that Gendry had followed her too, and was already beating opponents with his hammer.

She would not fight side by side with him, no. She was a lone fighter. She shook that idea off her head and continued, jumping, kicking, cutting, sliding, slashing. She did not feel anything then. She could only hear the sound of the slicing of their flesh, and their screams as she did it. She revered in it. She was strong, fierce. She did not need anyone.

That’s when Gendry saved her from her attack from behind. Her eyes widened, their looks met. But she continued, nodding at him. They were back to back now. Fighting together in this mess.

At first it seemed easy. The opponents, though numerous, seemed quite unexperienced. But then, she saw the leader, yelling at them.

If she killed him, it would stop. If she killed him, it would be over.

She left Gendry, who screamed at her to come back. But she was already too far gone.

And when she managed to get in front of him, he was already prepared to fight back. She narrowly escaped the hissing tip of his blade, her dagger aiming at his belly. But he kicked her. She fell back, but raised once more, groaning like a wolf. She was showing her fangs now, as he screamed at her with rage.

That thought disturbed her somehow, but it was not enough to break her stance. Their blades clicked. She parried, blocked, hit, and so did he.

This dance, she only knew too well, she realized.

On the other side, she could see the battlefield was clearing now. The guards had arrived to help, and some opponents were already fleeing.

But she had no time to think about it more, for the man was coming back for more.

She pushed back his sword with her own and forced him to retreat.

There, she had found it. The weakness in his stance.

With one last battle cry, she ended it.

She took long breathes, trying to calm the beating of her heart.
It was finished, and she was almost tempted to laugh. She smiled at Gendry, safe by her side. He was looking at her softly, but intensely and this time, she was not tempted to look away. She was feeling it too. It was he who broke the gaze first, and she looked down, trying to focus on any other thing.

Then, she saw it. The weapons of her dead opponents. She took one in her hand, minutely examining it.

“No, it can’t be…” she gasped.

“What?” Gendry asked, coming closer to her.

She looked at him, agape, her eyes questioning. Her dagger was still in her hand, glistening with the blood that had been spilled.

“These can’t be Wildlings…” She began.

Blood rushed through her veins, cold as ice. There was something terribly wrong that was coming. She could just feel it.

“These are no Northern weapons…” She said, louder.

“So what?”

“Did you forget who you were before?” She turned towards Gendry, with a sarcastic smile. “These are new weapons, fresh from the forges. Cheap ones, but still recognizable.”

She raised her head and looked at all the bodies slowly, wanting to remember each of them. Her eyes were determinate.

There was one man she needed to see. And that man was several hundred miles from here.
Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen. What a terrible name. Such was the name of a conqueror. Such was a name of a queen. Or of a tyrant, maybe.

But not today, no. Today, she was only a girl. And a mother too, she added with a smile.

She closed her eyes, savoring the feeling of the scales caressing her skin, and the wind blowing on her hair. She felt free, without worry. Without the weight of that name. She leant in more, almost one with her son. Two bodies, one soul. That’s what it felt like.

She screamed in ecstasy, relishing on the feeling. She heard a howl responding to her and smiled. She closed her eyes, remembering her strange adventure.

She remembered the way Ghost had looked at her. How he had come to her, like a promise that should be kept. She felt his plead. She had wanted to ignore it at first, but there was no way. He wouldn’t let her.

As she had tried to leave the North behind on Drogon’s back, the dire wolf had run towards them and jumped. The first trial had been a failure, but the second, he managed to catch Drogon’s tail. Her son had growled, wanting to get rid of the intruder. He had slowed down and shaken his tail. Ghost had slipped with a desperate howl. But then he had risen again and jumped once again. Daenerys had then asked her son to stop.

“You can’t hang on to it,” She had tried to tell the dire wolf. “Leave. Leave me. Find your master. Go to him. Your place is not with me.”

Save him. Save him from me… She wanted to say. If I find him again…

Tears had come to her eyes.

But the dire wolf wouldn’t. It seemed even more encouraged by these words. His paws were attempting to find a breach on the scales to hang on to. And Drogon was not liking it.

“You are determinate.” She had said then. “But don’t be angry if the scales hurt you.”

She had jumped off the dragon and helped him out, tying him by the paws with the ropes she had already used, and which were linked with her own. She had placed him behind her, on the area that was less slippery, flatter.

“It will be uncomfortable,” she had said. “But at least you’ll have… less chances to fall, let’s say. Don’t move”

He had looked at her then with wide eyes, and she had almost shivered by the feelings in it. He had licked her cheek, and she had shaken her head, amused.

She had then commanded Drogon to fly. After a few hours, they had stopped to rest a bit. She had once again asked him to leave, but he had only shaken himself, as if he did not hear her. She had shivered, and her gaze had been directed with worry at her second intruder, who did not seem to wake up despite the care she had put to him.
That man who had gaped at her like a fool, and acted like a fool as well. That man who thought he could get closer to a dragon. His face was a blurry mess now, as it had been touched by Drogon’s breath. She had had to command her son not to burn him. But he was alive. He still needed to be taken care of. He would not be another one in her conscience, she had decided.

Slowly, silently, the dire wolf had enveloped her in his warmth, and she had found herself leaning back. And it made her feel like she had nothing to worry.

They had stopped several times in the way. And each time, she couldn’t help but rely more and more on that presence of another time, that did not want to leave her. And then, nearly in the end of their journey, she had almost fallen asleep on Drogon. Almost fallen to her death once again. But he had put her back in, his fangs digging at her furs.

She shook her head. He would be by her side. At least, until she found his master…. And now, here she was. She had returned.

“Thank you, my son,” She whispered softly as he landed. “You may go when I detached everyone. Enjoy yourself”

Drogon looked at her closely, then nodded. She felt his worry, but the pull to freedom was also strong. She reassured him and watched him fly.

Her companions already were here to greet her. She cut the ropes. Ghost jumped off the dragon and shook himself.

“What’s that beast doing here?” Yara scowled.

Daenerys smiled.

“He’s a friend.”

“He’s a mongrel.”

Daenerys was tempted to laugh. Ghost was growling, but she caressed the soft fur on his head, and he seemed to calm down.

Then the Kraken’s daughter turned to her.

“It was careless of you,” Yara reproached. “You were seen.”

“Of course she was.” Kinvara said, a smile on her face. “That was the point.”

They greeted each other, taking each other’s hands on their own.

“You are Daenerys Stormborn, fire made flesh.” Kinvara declared. “Fire cannot be hidden for so long. Nor contained.”

She smiled. But suddenly, the high priestess’ eyes jumped back to Drogon, where a body still layed. She glared at him.

“You’ve brought another burden on your way, your Grace,” She said. “You should burn him. He won’t serve you that much.”

Daenerys shook her head.
“Too many had died because of dragon’s fire. It needs to stop.”

“Too many will die nonetheless.” The priestess replied stoically. “And death by fire is the purest of all.”

“Not by my doing.” She said. “Not anymore. And this one…”

She felt her heart ache by seeing his face disfigured by the dragon’s breath that burned him.

It’s my fault, she said. Just like the rest of them. Just like Hazzea, whose name I had almost forgotten. And just like for the rest of them, I will carry the burden of that sin until the end.

“This one will live.” She continued with a strong voice. “This is my command.”

“As you wish, your Grace.”

She turned back to Drogon, and managed to cut the last bit of rope. She sighed in relief. He was awakening. Yara helped her put the man on the floor. Then, noticing something, she smirked. The man opened his eyes.

“Well, well, look who it is.” She said with a mocking voice. “Larence Hornwood, fresh from the snow. You’re on a bad shape. I almost didn’t recognize you. But that mark I left you on the shoulder is still there, as I see. “

The man looked at her, frightened. His mouth opened, as if he wanted to scream.

Daenerys widened her eyes. So this was what he was, she realized.

“You’ve been a very bad guy, uh?” The kraken’s daughter continued to mock him, a smug smile on her face.

He only crawled back. She turned towards Daenerys.

“You know people may come for him.”

Let them come, she wanted to say.

She was the blood of the dragon. And the dragon did ask. And did not fear.

“So be it,” She said, nodding. “Let it be known also that he has been welcomed and well-treated.” She smirked, then continued. “At least in a much… warmer way than the North is capable to provide.”

Before leaving, she turned toward them lightly and nodded at Drogon to leave.

“Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to refresh myself,” She said. “The travel back had been long and torturous. Tomorrow, we will reunite.”

Kinvara bowed in reply, and Yara smirked.

When she arrived in her rooms, that’s when she turned back towards the intruder.

“You’re never going to leave me alone, are you?” She whispered, amused.

The dire wolf opened his mouth, and it looked like a smirk.
“Very well,” she said as she took off her clothes.

The bath was ready for her, hot as it should be. She entered it, letting a sigh of content escape her lips.

The dire wolf was looking at her intensely. She noticed his eyes were darker, and somehow, it made her remember…

She shook her head. Now, she shouldn’t think that.

She stared back and raised one eyebrow.

“What are you looking at me like that?”

But nothing answered her question. Of course.

She sighed. But somehow, her heart was still beating, beneath the scar that tickled her each time she dared to think of him.

She took a long breath and plunged her head in the water. That’s when she remembered it all. All the love, all the hopes… And all the fears.

Fear, she had seen in several eyes since she took a step towards the North. Fear was in Tyrion’s eyes as he went to see her after Missandei’s death.

Be it, it said. Be the monster people think you are. Let them rejoice, they had been right. But let them also choke in their rightness.

She had tried to ignore it. To overcome her grief. But it was fear she saw in her lover’s eyes. Which fear, she took no time to ponder. But she still saw it nonetheless.

And when she landed with Drogon, having destroyed the iron fleet, the same who killed her dear child, and opening a way for her men to come in… When she heard the bells ringing at her ears… That’s when she noticed it. That’s when she saw red. Red like blood. Red like the doors freshly painted glistening in the sun.

But this is no home, she realized, choking. This is not what I’ve been waiting for. That’s only mockery. Mockery of her dreams, of her goals.

She could feel the fury and the grief coming from Drogon, mingling with her own feelings, adding to it strength and fire. She remembered Rhaego, Drogo, Ser Barristan, Jorah, and her dearest Viserion, their faces coming at her as she looked ahead, seeing the woman staring from her window. In her mind, she saw her smirking with a glass of wine. In her mind she still saw the blood of Missandei in her hands. And Missandei, her confident and dearest friend, screaming at her to burn them. Her only friend, who died in chains, when she had promised her she would never know it anymore.

She had failed her. But she could fulfill her last wish.

You don’t want to wake the dragon, do you? She remembered hearing her brother’s voice in her ear.

The question was still ringing in her head at the same time as the bells, painful and restless.

Be it, they seemed to say. Be the monster everyone think you are. Do it. Destroy that world that
wants to destroy you, that wants to destroy your dreams.

That’s when she shut down all emotions and closed her eyes. That’s when she let the dragon free.

When she opened her eyes that time, it was too late. It had been done. She tried to rationalize it. Aegon the Conqueror burned cities to assure his reign. People needed to fear before loving. This needed to be an example.

But the screams of the innocents came back ringing at her ears, deafening. No. That wasn’t her. That was Cersei. Cersei did that.

She almost believed it.

She closed her eyes and let the tears go free.

To touch the light, you must pass beneath the shadow. That’s what Quaithe had told her once.

But, in the end, there was no light. Only darkness. Men were all the same. Greedy. Revengeful. Prejudiced. They all fought each other until the world bled.

She had once thought she could escape it. She could build a new world. But it was never enough. What she wanted was never enough. She had to prove over and over her value, and be lessened by self-proclaimed “better men”.

No, it would never be enough. They did not deserve a benevolent queen. They needed a villain.

So a villain she would be, she decided. She would take everything from them. If only it was what it took to make them think, to make them realize.

Feeling the life begging her to come out and breathe, she raised up from the water, taking a long and shaky breath of air.

Ghost was looking at her curiously, his paws on the edge of the tub, and his tail shaking furiously. It was almost as if he was worried.

She shook her head, rubbed her skin until it was red and went out of the bath, pressing the water out of her hair. Then she enveloped herself in a robe, crossing her arms over her breasts.

Be the monster everyone think you are, she thought. That’s what they truly want. That’s what makes them sleep at night when they trample on each other, trying to take dominance over them.

At least it offered them a common goal.

Funny how hatred and prejudice could unite people as much as they could separate them.

She never would have thought the dagger would come from the one she loved, though. She never would have thought it would cost her everything, even the one thing she thought she could never have.

She shook her head. She still had it, as a remember of that lesson. Don’t trust. Don’t love.

And above all, don’t lose yourself.

There was no need to contain her feelings now. There was only the urge to live. And the urge to die.
There, on her desk, there was the weapon that sealed her fate, carefully put in a box carved in
dragonglass. She had ordered it specially for that reminder. She caressed one moment the
inscriptions of the last words she heard.

“Now and always.” A promise of eternity and love. How deceitful.

Never again would she feel desire, she had realized. Desire was lost after everything she went
through. Hatred was what had kept her alive, she decided. Hatred and thirst for revenge.

She opened the box and took the dagger in her hands.

A life for a life, that was the price. She knew that much now.

She pressed the steel lightly on her chest, just where her scar lay and closed her eyes. A tear
escaped her, but she let it be.

Soon, she told herself, putting back the blade that went through her heart. Soon.

For her, for him. For both. Only time would say. She was prepared for both.

Ghost was at her side, and his snout nudged her softly. She patted his head, smiling softly.

This was not a world of mercy, she had learned. But it was not for mercy that she had been killed.
She had seen it. The world that this new king was trying to build was a world of reason. A world
that could not be contested because there always seemed to be a logic to justify it.

A cold, hard world. A world without feeling. Such world shouldn’t be, she thought. Feelings
opened doors. But reason, cruel as it was, closed them. Feelings had no place in it. Nor was mercy.

A light tap on her door, with the sound of silk rubbing against skin. Kinvara. She raised her head,
acknowledging her, then turned back.

“My queen.”

She sighed, looking at her. The High priestess was slowly making her way to her.

“It never ends,” She said.

“Never.”

“Then a better, universal world is a lost one. Everyone wants to build their better worlds. But each
world collide and crash, until none of them is left.”

“There’s only one world worth living,” The Flame of Truth replied. “The world the Lord of Light
gives us. And you are his queen. That’s what you live for.”

Daenerys said nothing. There was no need to lie. She looked away.

“I sense some trouble in you.” The priestess began. “You may fool the others, but you don’t fool
me. “You’re not ready, your Grace.”

“Is anyone truly ready?” Daenerys replied, tired.

The one who gave her life again only smiled. The dragon’s daughter turned toward the priestess,
looking at her in the eyes.
“And you, what do you live for?”

Kinvara smiled softly.

“I live to serve, your Grace.”

Daenerys rolled her eyes, but her lips betrayed a smile too.

“Your heart, does it beat to serve too?”

The priestess chuckled.

“In a different kind of way, your Grace”

Then her gaze turned to the dagger in the box, and Daenerys’ fingers still caressing it. It seemed she didn’t notice it at all.

“That blade carries such a burden,” She remarked calmly. “You should get rid of it, your Grace.”

“No,” Daenerys answered. “I need to remember it all.”

“Your heart is still tender, my queen”

The dragon’s daughter said nothing. She nodded, then changed subjects.

“Are your priests ready?”

“They are, your Grace.”

She tapped her fingers lightly on the rail.

“Aegon is weak, irrational and petty,” She said. “And by the time he sits in the throne, he will be exactly what the people need to rise up.”

They observed quietly the sky. No comet for this night, no sign of destiny. Only the darkness, slowly swallowing the moon.

“Then we let it be.”

“Then we let it be,” she repeated. “For now.”

Drogon was flying freely now, enjoying himself in the darkness. She wished she could be with him, and feel the wind in her hair.

“You should go to him, your Grace. He is waiting for you.”

Daenerys sighed.

“I know.”

She turned towards the dire wolf.

“Ghost,” she said. “Please stay here.”

Then she left, leaving him with the priestess. She did not care to change. Her robe was enough, even if it clinged to her skin. The fool wouldn’t dare. Not while Drogon was here.
When she went to Aegon’s door, she hesitated. Then she opened the door, putting a mask of indifference on her face.

He was here, looking at the sky, an aura of aggressivity surrounding him.

“Aegon,” she called him softly.

He looked at her as if she was the sun raising.

“Daenerys!”

He embraced her like a long-lost lover, but she did not do it back. She couldn’t. He did not seem to care for it though, for a few minutes after, he was already pacing furiously.

“Did you know of it?”

She only nodded, keeping her face expressionless.

That was just another of his tantrums. It may explode, she thought, but it was easily contained.

“Must I really come to that?” He declared, his face red with indignation. “Marrying… her? Of all people?”

“You must,” She replied calmly. “She has an army and strong links to the other kingdoms. With that, your rules will be secure.”

“Aegon Targaryen married his two sisters, not…”

“Another time, nephew,” She said. “And Aegon Targaryen had three dragons.”

And so did I, she thought. Once. Three sons, powerful, fearless, loyal. Now only one.

“You are my aunt. We are Targaryen. Why don’t we…”

“Enough, nephew,” She cut him. “My name isn’t loved here. I wouldn’t want to taint your reign with what I’ve done.”

“Your name is feared,” he insisted. “That’s what should be. WE are meant to be.”

She looked at him intensely.

“Fear killed me,” She said. “Men that are afraid aren’t loyal.”

“What if I rode Drogon?”

“Drogon doesn’t accept you.”

“What if you forced him to…”

“YOU CANNOT…” She snapped. “… force a dragon.”

On the other side, she could see a white snout stick out from the door frame.

Damn that dire wolf.

“It’s your heart, isn’t it?” Aegon reproached, not having noticed. “You say you don’t want to taint my reign, but maybe it’s something else. Maybe you’re still…”
“Don’t presume to know anything about my heart,” She stated coldly.

Curse that man, she thought. Short-sighted and egocentric.

She needed him though.

She touched his cheek lightly, and he leant to it.

“You are Aegon Targaryen. Rightful heir to the Iron Throne. Rightful heir to the Seven Kingdoms.” She said with a clear and caressing voice. “You need to show them what it means. You need to avenge your family.”

She wanted to laugh at the irony.

The true Aegon Targaryen, son of Elia Martell and Rhaegar, her gallant brother, was dead. She had no doubts about that. But this one had been so well-trained that he didn’t even recognize stories and reality.

He drank every word of her like a thirsty man deprived of water in a desert.

She smiled, almost loving the feeling of her power on him.

Then she left him, closing the door behind him. Once it was done, she turned towards the furry intruder, who was growling at her.

“You really are a strange guardian,” She said with a smile.

He seemed to glare at her, his fangs out for her to see. Then he turned back, and went away.

She chuckled as she saw him heading back to her room. And when she entered it, he was already laying on her bed, waiting for her.

She shook her head, amused. The dragon’s daughter and the wolf.

This day was decidedly a day for small ironies.

She still went to bed though. The night was cold and unforgiving. And she needed all the warmth possible to continue.

Once again, she dreamed of fire. But this time, she couldn’t touch it. It seemed to want to avoid her touch, like a stranger. There was not this calling she once had.

Had the fire in her left her entirely? She wondered, blinking away the tears. She ran towards it and jumped in it, eager for its warmth.

But when fire finally embraced her, it was cold. Cold as snow.

She opened her eyes, breathless. Her hands were gripping Ghost’s fur, who had put his snout in her hair and was whining softly to her. She closed her eyes, embracing him farther, then raised up towards her balcony.

A new day was beginning. And now the rays of sunshine were slowly breaking through the dawn.

She looked back to the wolf, who had joined her.

In this light, his eyes seemed almost grey. Like the other time. She blinked.
No, she thought. His eyes are red. Like now. I must be going crazy. That’s my heart, my treacherous heart, that’s in fault.

She put on her clothes silently.

Once, Missandei would have been here and helped her braid her hair. But now, there was only her ghost following her.

How she missed her friend.

She heard once again a tap on her door. Yara, coming to lead her to the council room.

“Shall we go, your Grace?” She said, a smirk on her face. “The others are waiting…”

She smiled back and went with her.

“I heard some strange sayings when I travelled,” Daenerys stated on the way towards Yara. “What did you do, my friend?”

“Me? Nothing,” Yara said nonchalantly, a smirk adorning her features. “I can’t say anything about my friend, though.”

“Are you sure about that man?”

“One can never be too sure, with a man.” She shrugged. “But that one is a fool. Soon, someone will find out. And when it’s done, that little wolf queen would have no choice.”

Daenerys sighed.

“Good.”

The Kraken’s daughter stared closely at her, thoughtfully.

“Are you certain about this?” She asked. “That it will work?”

She nodded, an ironic smile on her face.

“Sansa Stark will make mistakes,” She declared, confident. “We all do. And when she does, it will be her downfall.”

Yara smirked.

“What would you do to her then?”

Daenerys looked ahead. Her eyes were determinate.

“I don’t want her to die. I want her to live with the consequences of all the choices she made, and all the choices she will make.”

“And… him?”

Jon, she wanted to say. Say his name. I want to hear it. I want to hear it was real, and that it wasn’t a dream.

She closed her eyes, as if pondering the question. His face came in mind, staring at her with loving eyes. Once she would have done anything for him to keep looking at her like that.
“Jon Snow will get what he deserves in time.”

Her voice was cold, and so was her heart. Her heart that had been pierced by his dagger as he slowly kissed her hopes away.

She opened the door and entered, letting the others take their places around the table.

She smiled at the image in front of her, so familiar.

“Shall we begin?”

Aegon was not here yet. Certainly oversleeping, as always, in the arms of some whore. It wouldn’t be the first time.

“It happened today, your Grace,” Kinvara said, holding a letter towards her.

She saw Yara widening her eyes. It was destined for her, after all, as the keeper of the Iron Islands. Daenerys looked at her briefly, and her friend smiled. There was recognition in her eyes.

She took it carefully and opened it.

It was an order to step back. To surrender. If not, an army was already on the way.

No mention of her. The magic still worked. For now.

She closed the letter and gave it to Yara.

They were on agreement.

No need to run away.

Kinvara smiled. “It is time, my queen.”

Daenerys Targaryen stared a long time at the red priestess and nodded.

“Send the ravens,” She ordered the hooded silhouette on the corner.

She saw him nod and leaved. Then she smirked.

“The enemy is on the way.” She said. “Us women need to welcome him as it should.”

Chapter End Notes

Author's notes: I hope you liked it.

I guess I was a bit too eager, for that one :)

Song mainly used: “Angel by the Wing”, Sia

Next chapter will come as promised on friday, though. This time, it will be Larence's POV.

Any question? Remark? Let me know!
Hello!
I hope you will like this chapter. This one was difficult to write, and I had to rewrote it a few times. Next one will be Tyrion’s.
And remember… What is dead may never die. And everything may not be exactly as they appear to be on the first glance. Nothing is really easy
Song mainly used: “The Devil Within”, Digital Daggers
Until next Friday!

Grey should have been a nice change for him. Grey like the stones, like the rain. Grey like the color of his queen’s blazon. It felt so much like a prophecy, and yet these walls also brought back pain from the past. Memories of drowning and people laughing at him, of hot iron pressed on his shoulder as a mark of infamy. This mark he had kept to remember. To remember the way it was, and what it meant for him and the persons he cared about.

No, don’t look for it, he told himself nervously. Don’t look back. You’ve been reborn now. Reborn with fire and ash. You’re not the same that you were before. Don’t look back.

Oh yes, do, replied the voices in his head. Look at what you’ve done. Look what brought you here.

At least, one of them wasn’t there reprimanding him. He felt a bit relieved at that fact.

Bread and salt had been given to him. He had eaten the first hungrily and threw the last out of the window. If they had noticed, they did not comment on it.

They had then bathed him at first, when he was too weak to protest, dumb by pain and fever. It was for his own good, they said. Yet when he recovered, he made a point to ignore them. He could not stand water anymore, hot as it must be.

He had to find a way out. He couldn’t stay that way anymore, knowing what he knew now. Everything was different now. He was agitated, so restless they had to put chains on him. He felt trapped, like an animal.

Once he could have turned back the tables so easily. But now, the Dragon Queen’s presence changed everything…

You need to get up, my love, his own queen said. You’re in the dragon’s den now.

She was still here with him, a gracious shadow comforting him in grief when he needed her. Sending away the voices that harassed him. Sometimes, she sang sweet songs, only for him to hear. Sometimes he swore he could feel her warm embrace…

He would not disappoint her. He would be worthy of her until the end.

Oh, are you now? Sneered the other voices in his end.

He shook his head, then looked at the window.
He could end all of this. Right now. If he went away, surely these voices would die with him. But would that be worthy of her? When right now she needed him to help her? To save her?

So lost he was in his thoughts that he did not hear a light tap on the door, followed by a soldier entering the room. Larence had had no time and envy to sympathize with his gaolers. This one was common, vulgar, as the others. Average height, average built. A big, flattened nose and two piercing little black eyes. His mouth was thin and firmly closed.

At his side entered the Dragon Queen. She was wearing a long black tunic, the silk of it adorned with a red three headed dragon on the chest. The lower part of it was cut in two, certainly to allow her to move more freely. Only thin breeches were covering her legs, which would be more fitting to a man.

His queen would never do that, he thought. His queen was humble on her clothing, her body carefully hidden in furs and wool, the shape of it only hinted when she moved and the cloth was closer to her skin. Only then, he could find himself to imagine…

That’s where he finally let his gaze wonder up and he stayed still, cursing.

It was certainly the first time he saw her that close.

Gods were cruel, truly, he thought. He wondered how they would have seen fit to give her such features.

You think she’s prettier than me? His love teased him, giggling as she turned on herself to show her gracile silhouette.

He smiled distractedly at his charming ghost. No, you’re the prettiest of them all, he wanted to tell her. You are a diamond, and I’m the beggar looking at you from the afar. At least for now. At least for now…

The voice of the intruder came disturbing his fantasy.

“Larence of House Hornwood,” The Silver Whore said calmly. “I trust you are well enough, now. Must I call you my lord? Or ser? I seem to remember you had been knighted.”

He blinked. But did not reply. His gaze went beyond the window, where he could see now the dragon flying.

“He’s beautiful, isn’t it?” He heard her. “My son.”

He continued to ignore her, hoping she would disappear. Just like the rest of them.

“The Queen has told you…”

“No need, Alryk,” she said. “Sit down, my lord.”

Then, in an act of ultimate defiance, he looked at her in the eyes, his chest puffed out, and a violent scowl adorning his features. It hurt.

See what you have done, he wanted to say. See what you have done to me!!

She dared to look back. She did not seem to cower from all the hatred and curses he was sending her. She did not even blink. And that disturbed him more than anything.

“Very well. I see you do not want it. So I’m going to be direct, ser,” she said, her eyes hard as steel.
“I know everything. Lady Greyjoy told me all that was needed. About the boy who promised everything. About the boy who traded…”

A sudden anger took over him, his eyes burning and blood rushing through his veins, towards his face.

He wanted to kill her. To strangle that little neck of her, and watch the life going out of her eyes. To hit her head against the wall, reducing her face in a mess of flesh, bones and blood. But she was too far of his reach, and the guard with her was already eyeing him warily.

Damn these chains. He tried to pull them apart, to break them. But it failed, and the strength of it twisted his wrists.

“I. DID. NOT. DO. THAT,” He hissed, yelling with pain at the last part.

She did not even blink. Did not even step backwards.

Look what you’ve done to me!! He wanted to scream. This is your fault! All of this! The wars, the mess, the voices in my head…

This was lies. All of it, coming from her treasonous mouth. All of it because of her…

“Oh,” she only said, raising one eyebrow. “Then I believe I’ve been misinformed. Stop doing this to yourself. You’re only going to make it harder than necessary.”

Dragon whore, he wanted to scream at her. Fool, mad, degenerate, like the rest of her family.

“What happened was cruel, despicable. But it was also what made you live. And you continued to do so, even after returning home. Even after the War for the Dawn. I can understand that…”

“YOU… DON’T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING!”

“I understand that you’re a survivor. I understand that we all do difficult choices when it comes to saving ourselves, and the people we love. I understand what it means, to live with these choices. And to be judged, again and again for things we had no control of. History. Family. When everyone’s eyes are on you, waiting for you to make a mistake.”

“You killed thousand of people. Of innocent people.”

“You were also on the battlefield, I remember now. You were not blameless either in that battlefield. Nor were your men.”

No, not me. That wasn’t me. He wanted to scream.

Don’t listen to her, his love’s voice whispered to his ears. I know you. You haven’t done anything wrong. It is all her, her faults alone. You are my knight. My lord.

Fight for me, she said. Fight until the end.

“And you did not stop there,” The dragon queen said. “Did you?”

She took a step forward.

“Tell me,” she continued. “What would your queen say if she knew?”

One more. Three more, and she will be in his reach.
“What would Sansa Stark do to traitors?”

Two more. Please, please, please….

“What did she do to Petyr Baelish?” She relented. “After all… You were the one to actually tell us about his death.”

That was before, he wanted to say. That was when…

When what, exactly?

He felt doubt in his heart suddenly. These words gripped at him, torturing him. He remembered the blood, the slashed throat and the pleas, and the deep pleasure he took in watching it. He shook his head, trying to get rid of it all.

O my knight, His love said, with disappointment. Are you leaving me that way?

He blinked, then looked at the woman in front of him. That’s when he understood finally. He lowered his head.

“You’re right,” He said with a strangled voice.

He bent the knee.

“I am Larence Snow, of House Hornwood. I fought with you in the North. I fought with you at King’s Landing. Let me fight with you now.”

He did not take time to look. Looking would be his downfall. And hers.

“We’ll see about that,” The Silver Queen said softly. “Alryk, put these chains away. I don’t want to see them. The closed door is enough.”

She turned away to leave, while Alryk was doing as ordered.

Perplexed, he let him do that and watched them leave, until the door was closed.

“Sleep well, my lord.”

You’ve done well, my love, she said. You’ve done so well.

Make her trust you, the voices in his head nodded at her. Then you’ll have more power. Then, it would be even sweeter to see the look on her face as you stab her in in the heart…

Do that for me, pleaded his love’s shadow in the corner. Do that for me, and I’ll be yours, always…

He stayed kneeled that way a long time and closed his eyes, a smile on his face. He could almost feel her hand on his shoulder, light as a feather and soft as silk.

He remembered his hopes and dreams, for once. He remembered his plays as a boy, and the eyes of old Ianna looking after him. And he remembered his reflection in the eyes of the other.

… With ideas too big for his head, said one of the voices, mocking.

He shook his head.
No, that wasn’t him anymore.

His lips stretched in a smile of irony. No one was going to save him. It did not happen the last time, and it won’t certainly happen now.

He had no friend. But he had one love. And that was the strength that kept him going on.

If he wanted to escape, he had to do it on his own. By his own means.

And already, he knew a way out.

Baela, was her name. A servant girl, barely fourteen. Squinting light brown eyes barely seeing anything, with light blue eyes. Common, simple. Since a few days she had been affected to his care, but also that of a stranger. She wouldn’t tell who it was, but he could see the way she looked talking about that person. He just had had to look at her with a smile and tell her stories, and she drank from it like it was some milk. She was already enamored with him, fool as she was, and thinking he would be a knight for her.

He only belonged to one.

She would be here soon, he whispered joyously. When the moon came out. That’s what she said. That was what she was always doing.

He prepared carefully in his head what he was about to tell, this time. He had always loved stories. But the trouble with stories was that it needed to always be checked time after time, so no one would doubt it.

He heard the sound of a body slipping on the floor.

Could it be?

His heart began to pound in his chest. This couldn’t be Baela. It was too early… But what if it was someone else?

No, he shouldn’t hope.

He waited, expecting to hear the door opening and someone coming of it. Instead, he only heard a growl. He shook. What was happening now?

Then he saw it. The key to his door. Seemingly having been slid under it.

He hesitated. Maybe it was a trap.

But no matter what, he decided, he had to try.

He opened it and looked at his surroundings.

Alryk, the guard at his door, was laying on the floor, as if asleep. He went closer to him and put his hand on his mouth and nose. Nothing. Maybe luck was on his side, now.

He grinned. And then pressed. The dire wolf growled.

“Don’t”

His eyes widened. He stopped.
Oh, so that’s where that voice was coming from now, he realized, aghast.

“What kind of beast are you?” He began, before realizing there was another question, more important, to be asked. “On which side are you?”

It only barked at him, and it looked like some big sneer.

He was being looked down by a giant beast, and he really did not like it. At all.

Then it left quietly, and he knew he had to follow him. If he failed, he would be lost.

Surprisingly, no one was here. Except the guards, sleeping on the corridors.

He began to wonder. What had happened?

Was it an action of the dire wolf?

He followed him more determinately now. Fate was on his side, after all. Corridors after corridors. Bridge after bridge. Until it led him finally out there, and he saw it. A boat, laying there as if it was waiting for him.

He blinked, then looked at his savior, leaving him without a word, quietly.

The boat was for him… It was almost too good to be true.

Could he run away like that? Like a coward?

No, my love… His queen said tenderly at his side. You shall bring me her head…

He smiled. Then he followed the track of the wolf, assuring himself that the wind was on his side. In the way, he tried to find thing to cover his scent. Herbs, mud… anything.

And he continued, following it back to the castle, while keeping his distance. Finally, he saw them. The Greyjoy bitch and the Dragon Whore.

Sneaky mongrel, he thought. He had just led him where he wanted to go.

“I know you don’t like it, your Grace,” The Greyjoy bitch told her. “but it’s the only way.”

She shook her head.

Spare me your act of caring, your evil Majesty. He bit his lip until it bled, his eyes burning from glaring at her. It fools no one but you.

“The only way is to threaten innocent lives?”

“Well, you know men,” The Kraken’s daughter shrugged, a smirk on her face. “You ask them to make a bit of a mess, and they always overdo it. And I seem to remember you’re not unused on threatening people’s lives. Not that I reproach anything, really. I found it quite thrilling.”

The Dragon Queen sighed.

“You’re right. I’m sorry for lashing at you. Perhaps it was foolish of me to think that what we want happens without the innocent suffering from it. After all, my very existence is proof of it.”

“Don’t be too hard on yourself,” Yara replied. “If you want change, it can’t happen without some
major events provoking it. Mistakes must be made. And people need to learn from it. “

“You’re surprisingly wise these days.”

“I learn from the best.”

“Oh.” She replied, smirking. “Then I won’t keep you.”

She was turning back to her chambers when Yara Greyjoy finally added something, extending a letter to her.

“By the way,” She said. “We’ve just received it. Lady Arya is on the road to the Wall.”

One of her eyebrows raised.

“So, she finally returned after all. Does she suspect anything?”

“It seems she’s not quite convinced by that little play my own friend and his dogs set in the North.”

“And her sister?”

“Still preparing her bloody feast, from what I’ve heard,” She sneered. “A wolf surrounded by hungry hounds. How poetic. I wonder who will kill the other first.”

“We’ll see, my friend,” The dragon queen declared. “But in the end, it will be all the same. Nothing will be left.”

He sighed.

That did not sound good. Not at all.

At last, she entered her rooms and Yara went on her own way. She stopped a bit, near his hiding place. Then she left, shrugging. He breathed better, unaware until that moment that he had been holding it for so long. He waited a few minutes before getting closer. That dragon queen certainly was a fool as much as she was careless. No one was guarding her room. He hid in the shadows, listening, waiting for his time to come.

He heard her chuckling, and a big and joyous bark responding to her.

“You know, you were never that affectionate to me, before.” She said, her voice teasing and soft. “I wonder what made you change.”

It’s a trick, he thought. Each predator played with its prey. Before devouring her.

He should kill her before she does any misdeed, he thought. Before his queen should suffer from it.

He waited and waited once more. Until he could hear light breathings. There, she was asleep. He entered the room, the light of the moon helping him to direct himself.

He was about to choke the life out of her with his bare hands when suddenly a big white furry shape jumped on him.

It. Once again. That damn wolf. He could feel his hot breath on him, and his paws trapping him beneath it.

Why was it stopping him now? Wasn’t it what it wanted?
“She is mine,” he heard as the wolf was growling.

“Good, eat her all you want.” He whispered wildly, almost hysterically and it stung to do so. “That’s what she deserves. A fitting end for that dragon bitch.”

It barked at him, eyes squinted in rage and fangs out threateningly.

“You are a fool.” It said in his head. “Leave.”

He looked away, and that’s when he saw this.

The King’s sword. And that view gave him courage. And hope.

The witch behind him moaned and turned in her bed.

“Ghost,” she whispered sleepily, her white hand reaching out, before actually falling down lazily at the end of the bed.

Her eyes were still closed, and it seemed she was still completely asleep.

The dire wolf went to her and put her small hand on his snout, carrying it back to her side, under the sheets.

That temptress… That foreign witch… She had already charmed the wolf, he realized.

He felt betrayed. But he knew he would succeed in his task. The Good always defeated the Evil, he thought. It was known.

“Leave,” it said once more. “And never return. It’s your last choice.”

Then it turned back, silent guardian of a terrible monster. His eyes were squinted in his direction, red as blood. The witch moaned again, certainly waking up. Now the wolf’s attention was on her now…

He stood up. His legs were shaking. Was he going to do that or not? He wondered one moment. What was the most important? His life, or hers?

With one last look, he went away, running.

Carrying the King’s sword with him.

He smirked, feeling excitement from this adventure. He always had a swift hand.

Baela certainly was on her way to him now. But she would find no one here.

Where was the exit? He thought as he tried to find his way back, looking for his trail.

That’s when he saw it. Light in a room. And a very recognizable hat on the handle of the door.

There he felt it. He had a sword. If he couldn’t kill the tyrant, he could still have his revenge.

He entered the room, and scanned his surroundings. His eyes widened. No one.

“I knew you would escape at one point,” Her voice said, sarcastic. “Don’t you think I wouldn’t have noticed you reeking in my own castle? You’re one cunning boy, aren’t you?”

The door closed loudly, and then he faced her. The one who tortured him, relentlessly. Who made
him… do things…

“I will say it all,” he said bravely. “I will tell everything. I will say the names.”

She only smirked, coming towards him.

“And who would believe you, damn fool? Do you think you can stop it?”

She sneered at him.

“Did I mention you’re unrecognizable now?” She mocked him. “It looks like your face is melting like a burning candle.”

He blinked. Something wasn’t right. There, he saw her. His queen.

Yes, you are clever my love, she smiled to him. Don’t you notice it?

“I’ve always knew you were one crazy lad. That was all in your eyes. You had the same glint when you killed little Glawen Glover in your cells, just because you thought it would set you free.”

Don’t believe her, my love, she pleaded, her smile still on her pretty face. How he loved that smile... I know it wasn’t you, she continued. It was her. All her…

Oh, if only she knew…

He closed his eyes one moment.

“I had to admit, I didn’t know you had it in you, bastard.”

He shook his head in denial.

“No. No…. That wasn’t me.”

“That was you; All the terrible things you did before. And after. Again. And again. And again.”

“STOP!”

“Admit it, you enjoyed it.”

She’s right, you know, said the voices. But his love made them stop.

There, he realized it.

The bitch was just bidding her time. He could see now. She certainly hadn’t noticed he was here until she saw him entering the room.

What a fool, he thought with a smirk. Luck was really on his side. Wandering without a weapon. Where exactly was she coming from? He wondered. And now, she was trying to get closer to it

He waited for her to act, and when she jumped, he reacted. His hand was on it first, and she glared at him, trying to head-butt him. He kicked her, then put the knife on her throat as she raised back to her knees.

“Remember our pact, bastard.” She hissed, looking at him right in the eyes. “I dare you…”

“I am Jon Snow now.” He said now conviction coming to him at last. “And Jon Snow doesn’t have to answer to you.”
She widened her eyes, surprised.

That’s when he slashed her throat and watched her bleed.

Victory, he thought. Revenge. She would not mock him anymore. Not him, not anyone.

He heard men shouting. It had stopped now. He had to run now.

His eyes were looking for an issue out when suddenly a voice startled him.

“How did you… I was…”

He stopped on his tracks and stared back.

Baela…

She was staring at him, horrified. His hands were bloody and numb. Men were screaming in the corridors. Their heads turned towards the noise.

He was prepared to kill her. But what she did completely surprised him.

She reached out for him, urgency in her eyes.

“Quick now, my love,” Baela said. “Let’s leave before they see you!”

He took her hand and followed her. But his dear shadow was following him behind.

Make hast, my knight… She whispered to him. I’m waiting for you…

“I’m coming my love,” he whispered, feeling the wind blowing on his face, and the taste of freedom filling him. It gave him hope. It gave him determination.

Baela beamed at him, but he did not see that.

He wouldn’t let them do that. He wouldn’t let them destroy his queen…

He had to warn her. At all cost.

.....

.....
Hey! I hope you will like it this shorter update. Next chapter will be Arianne. Do not hesitate to check out the prologue (quickly written this week) “What Shadows are made of”, which can be read as a standalone. Also, I added the songs I used mainly for the chapters, to set the moods. For this one, it is “Silhouette”, by Aquilo.
See you!

As far as he remembered, Tyrion had always loved books. Stories, documentaries about what had happened and what is to come. Thoughts of maesters about life and death, body and soul, men and women. Old and new worlds were written between these pages. It kept sharpening his mind like a blade and focus on any other thing than his physical disabilities.

With books he could be anyone. A knight in shining armor, running after some prude maiden. A maester, looking for the truth of knowledge. A lord, attending to his bannermen and organizing the next rejoicings. Or a king, perhaps. With books, he could be Lann the Clever reborn, saving his family of unfortunate events, and leading men to battle. He could be Aemon the Dragonknight. He could ride a dragon, fly high in the sky and hide himself behind the clouds.

And there weren’t only the stories. There were also the feeling of paper on skin, the smell of dust, tree and ink coming from the pages, and the hearing of the sheets cracking under the thumb…

God, he had been deprived of women for too long, he thought. Last time must have been at the feast, perhaps. The feast had been a good time, despite his apprehensions, and the uncertainties.

He was riffling through the pages of the very ancient of the History of Volantis when he heard a clear “thud” on his side, a loud groan of pain and the trembling of his table. He looked up, irritated by that intrusion. But the only things he met were various titles on volumes, familiar and quite adventurous by themselves.


The head of Samwell Tarly, Archmaester without the chains, appeared from behind it.

“O-oh. N-nothing… Err, at least, I don’t really know what it is about. King Bran asked me to look for these, and to note every passage about Old Valyria.”

“Surprising. I would have thought he would have access to informations without it.”

Jon Snow’s former friend nodded.

“I-I would have thought too, to be honest. But it seemed to be something important, and I didn’t presume to ask why.”

Sam took one of these books and opened it. His hands were trembling, and his eyes were moving fast over the words. Tyrion closed his book and crossed his arms.
“Always fidgety, as I see. Aren’t you in a good place, here?”

Sam looked up, startled, then appeared to calm himself.

“I am, my lord.”

“And I trust your wife Gilly is well.”

He smiled.

“She’s caring about little Jon. He just got two teeth in the front. Little Sam is always tickling him, though.”

“You must be proud of him.”

“Oh. As proud as any father could be!... I mean, as proud as it should be, as my father...”

“I understand, Sam,” Tyrion added with an ironic smile. “It is not given to anyone to have fathers enjoying more hunting their disabled children than caring for them. It’s a blessing, truly.”

“Helps you to improve your endurance.”

Tyrion’s eyes widened. “Oh, so you can make a joke, after all!” He laughed. “That one is quite a little rough, but there’s matters to improvements.”

He was about to continue when his squire came to him.

He blinked a few times, trying to remember his name.

“My lord Hand,” the young man said, dignified and disciplined. “The matters of the moment. The King ordered you to sign this.”

Tyrion sighed.

“Another letter of arrest?”

“Yes, my lord,” the young man, putting the scroll on his book.

Sometimes he thought his role was merely bureaucratic. Approving decisions (or not, sometimes), sending messages to the high lords of the realm. And preparing, always preparing.

Guess his rest time was over, the former dwarf of Casterly Rock (not former dwarf, mind. That part was still hopefully here) realized.

He looked up at the names.

Willem Darys. Orio Nars. Yldrillsar.

Who could these people be? He wondered. Why did the king seek them? His informers did not mention these men at all.

Another mystery to solve. Or not.

After all, the king had ways to know everything. So why bother?

At this thought, the face of Varys came to him, associated with another more painful.
He shook his head. He must have been tired. Yes, that was it.

He nodded at the squire, who left him, and put the paper behind.

This could wait he returned to his chamber.

In front of him, Sam was still in his books, noting things in his notebook.

Good idea, he thought lazily as opened up his book once again, eyes scanning the words hungrily.

“Still in your old books?”

Tyrion hit the table, exasperated.

“Bronn,” he said, trying to compose himself and appear less irritated than he already was.

“Shouldn’t you be in your own castle, managing your bannermen?”

“My wife succeeds well without me,” The former mercenary said, a nonchalant smile on his face.

“She likes keeping things in check. And she knows I don’t like managing all of that.”

“All hail the Master of Coins,” he said ironically.

“You know I’m better managing others’ money than mine.”

“Surprising”, Tyrion answered with an ironic smile. “And your wife, is she well?”

“Well enough, it would seem she’s bloody pregnant. By whom, I don’t really know. I just hope it is mine.”

Tyrion laughed. “The joy of matrimony.”

“The joy of matrimony.”

Bronn raised his glass at him, that he somehow found a way to bring at the library, took a sip, and then continued, with a voice somewhat subdued.

“If it’s a boy, I would like to call him Tyrion.”

Tyrion’s eyes widened at this. He almost cried by the emotion of it.

“It’s a bit early in the morning for being sentimental,” he said. “No. Call him Jaime. That would be honorable enough.”

Jaime. How hard it was to think of him.

“A child,” He sighed, trying to hide his sadness. “What a blessing.”

“More the beginning of the troubles.”

They laughed.

Sam raised up, taking his book, his eyes glinting as if he had found some great treasure. He left swiftly, his steps loud and clumsy on the old wood.

“Strange lad,” Bronn commented.

They looked at him a long time, until his silhouette disappeared from view.
Bronn continued.

“Little Lord Velaryon is sick. Once again this year.”

“Well, send Lord Monterys our wishes for a prompt recovery.”

“Do we? Truly?”

“The Velaryon is a particular family, with ties that had always been doubtful,” Tyrion remarked. “And yet… it is not a House to neglect. Especially when we know how power passes so easily in families.”

He took time to reflect on this. The Velaryons were everywhere they needed to be. Yet, they were discreet. It was difficult to know what their true allegiance was.

“Aurane is a clever lad,” he continued. “It’s a pity that this cleverness did not express itself in his marriage decisions. But you know me. I have a tender spot in my heart for easily broken things, and aging had made me even more sentimental to that kind of things.”

“What kind of thing? Fucking with bastards?”

He chuckled. “I like stories. Especially the ones in which everything can go wrong.”

“Hard to say which you like best, though. The cripple or the bastard?”

He did not answer right away, because that question reminded him of another situation. Of other persons.

“Or maybe the maid that is with them?”

He smirked.

“The future lady Velaryon is well enough,” He said. “But she’s too wayward to be taken for a true noblewoman.”

“It seems he keeps her well-hidden. Maybe he’s ashamed, after all.”

“I would surprise me. Aurane is never ashamed of anything.”

“Any new of that bastard of Storm’s End?”

“Unsurprisingly no. He left the managing of his lands to his advisors, for the time he is away.”

Bronn sneered. “Another wise decision. Did that boy say why?”

“He did not. But it would not surprise me if it had anything to do with the Stark girl.”

“The ginger one?” His friend remarked with a salacious smile. “True, she is a beauty.”

He shook his head.

“No, the one who killed the Night King. The little one.”

“Are you sure it’s not a man in disguise?”

“I never asked.”
His friend laughed loudly. 

Tyrion would have laughed with him once. But he had seen the girl. He knew what she was capable of. And Bronn wasn’t being fair. In another world he would have find her very much to his taste.

Silence came between them, as suddenly a thought came to Tyrion. Or a face, more exactly. He looked at his book, caressing its cover.

“You never asked me why I never married again.”

“I had better things to think about.”

His friend then looked at him worriedly. He patted his shoulder.

“You think too much, dwarf.”

“And you think too little, my friend.”

“That’s why we’re well-balanced together.”

After one last pat, he left, leaving him to his thoughts.

Now he was all alone. Jaime was dead. Cersei was dead. So were their children. Joffrey, that king of prats. Myrcella, his clever niece that he loved more specially. Tommen, the candid boy-king who liked cats and stories.

He killed his father, reducing his so-called dignity to a pile of shit. That father who had never wanted him. That father who looked down on him (not only literally, though that part always hurt quite a bit).

He had no longer his aunt Genna, dead along with her Frey husband during a feast. He never actually knew what had happened there. It had become a legend, a song even, about the danger of winters, and the revenge of the gods after the Red Wedding. That was all that was left of her. No one would know now of her humor and swift intelligence, nor the way she would pinch Jaime’s ears each time she saw him. That belonged to another past.

Where did whores go?

It was a riddle he could have asked Varys, once upon a time, and eventually getting an answer out of it. Or maybe he would only have answered with a riddle of his own, while harboring a smug smile on his face.

He shook his head. No, no time for that.

He looked at his open book and sighed. Well, now he couldn’t return to it, could he?

He put the scroll in his pocket, rose up and left. It was time he paid respects to the dead. SO the cellars, it was.

He took its path and climbed down the stairs, taking a torch with him. He took time to count the skulls on his way, remembering each name.

Balerion the Dread. The Mount of Aegon the Conqueror, first king of the Seven Kingdoms. The biggest, black, fearsome.
Vhagar, the dragon of the fearsome Visenya, his sister-wife. Ferocious, with scales the color of its flame.

Meraxes, owned by the joyous Rhaenys, dead before her time. Silver and golden.

Caraxes, ride of princes Aemon and Daemon Targaryen. Red and lean.

Arrax, another one of the dragons lost to the Dance.

And… one he did not really remember.

He stopped, surprised.

What was this one? He wondered.

This one was relatively new. Its bones were still white as if it had been boiled just yesterday.

He touched the bones, fascinated. The size and the shape of it was familiar. He blinked.

The dead could wait. He had enough of these shadows tormenting him, when he just wanted to pay his respects.

He went back and called his squire. The scroll was still in his pocket, safe.

“Where is the King?” He asked.

“Resting in the godswood, my lord.”

Of course. That damn godswood. He should have known it.

He called the guards and went for it, expectations building in his chest.

Once, there was only a heart tree. This one was still present of course, but a weirwood had been added near it. It was relatively new, and young yet, too young to be carved. The King had specially requested it before his coronation.

It was a promise of longevity and progress. Or so he had thought at that moment.

Then the members of the Faith noticed it, and it certainly was the beginning of troubles.

Little Sansa Stark still believed in the Seven, if he remembered well. The Old Gods were linked to her family, but it was not them she prayed when the time came to fear.

Education was hard to change, he knew that. And Sansa Stark had always been the one having more to do with the Tullys than her other siblings. Not only in appearance, with the brilliant auburn hair and the blue eyes. She had also that polite demeanor, and that easy judgement in her eyes when something wasn’t proper.

Once, she had been a girl, full of dreams that did not survive King’s Landing. A girl who had to learn, and to obey. Now, she was a strong, clever woman, if not a little bit snarky. He still remembered her tone when she told him she had thought him the cleverest man alive.

A fool, he had been. But it was what led him there, he rationalized.

Until then… He wondered how she was doing, as a queen. The North was a cold, hard place, and although she learned to survive King’s Landing, would it be sufficient, especially for the one who
still believed in the Old Golds? Here, trouble was already brooding among the members of the Faith.

It did not help that the King isolated himself more and more, and was found unconscious more than once by the domestics.

He needed to see, he had said. But still, these absences were quite disturbing for the people, he could see that.

“The Sleeping King”, they called him now. There were already pamphlets about it, distributed in the city. He had tried to eradicate them, but the more he did so, the more people noticed.

It did not help as well that they had not only the six kingdoms to keep in check. The King’s sister, a queen in her own right was demanding help from time to time (more often than not now).

But they couldn’t keep helping her that way, he thought. The harvest had not been good this year, and now, with these uncertainties with Dorne… Who knew if the trades could be kept?

At last, he arrived. He dismissed his guards and went closer to the heart tree, looking at the wheelchair that were set in front, and ignoring the stares coming from the Kingsguard.

“Your Grace,” Tyrion bowed. “I knew I would find you here.”

King Bran nodded to him absently.

“Your sister has asked a little help from the Reach these days.” He continued. “And from Dorne as well.”

“And Essos too, it seems,” The King answered. “I know. But it cannot continue. Something is coming. We can’t afford to give anything now.”

“But your sister…”

“… Has wished to have her own kingdom to rule. One year has passed. She should know better that the people and she can’t keep living with others’ rests. She had had this month. Now, no more.”

“I heard she was facing unrests…”

“Yes. Surprising she hadn’t figured it out.”

“Figure what?”

“It’s all a set-up.”

“A set…” Tyrion began, then stopped. “Well, she’ll figure soon enough, I hope. Sansa Stark is a clever g… woman.”

Bran nodded thoughtfully, and invited him to proceed. He continued, knowing the other subject was closed.

“Quentyn Martell sent a raven this morning. It seems that trade must be delayed for about one month. The harvest…”

“You mean his sister,” interrupted the king.
Tyrion’s eyes widened.

“His sister, you say?”

“Arianne Martell fled the Water Gardens. She’s gathering allies to contest the rule of her brother.”

“But… Would she dare go against your will?”

“Arianne Martell is unreasonable in many ways, and imprisoning her was just delaying the inevitable.” He said laconically. “She must be stopped.”

Tyrion fidgeted, uneasy. Then he looked up, trying to find the humor in it.

“It would seem that sisters these days are quite troublesome.”

Not a smile. Nothing. He continued.

“I’ve heard you’ve been sending men to retrieve some persons.”

“That is correct.”

“May I ask the motives of these decisions?”

The King looked at him, his blank eyes on his. He felt like he could read his soul.

Silence came with the wind on the branches.

“What do you think is the most peaceful thing to do?” He asked. “To wait for the revolt to come, for the criminals to reveal themselves?... Or to kill them in the egg?”

Tyrion blinked, disconcerted.

“I don’t think I understand what you mean, your Grace.”

He turned back, his look on the tree.

“No one does. And yet, it might be exactly what is necessary.”

He added, as if in afterthought.

“The Krakens are gone.”

“So the Banefort had achieved their missions then.”

“It wasn’t them.” The King declared. “Someone was there before. When the army arrived, the castle was already empty, except for corpses and blood.”

“Who?” Tyrion’s eyes widened. “Who did such thing?”

Bran’s pupils widened, covering almost all the blue of his irises.

“A new piece in the game.”

Tyrion tried to proceed the information. But it was still too much.

He wondered. Was there something he did not see?
He was the Hand. But how was the Hand supposed to act if it did not know where it was heading?

“You need not worry about Dorne,” Bran said, almost sleepily. “Soon, it will be over.”

He then smiled, for the first time in weeks, and closed his eyes.
Hey!
I hope you will like it!
The song used for this one is: “The Heat” from The Score.
Next one will be Kinvara.
A few clarifications before continuing: please take note that no narrator is truly reliable. And Bran’s powers aren’t really the most precise ones. So beware of the things that seem too idealized (especially when it comes to Sansa)!
Do not hesitate to comment or give kudos if you liked it 😊

Planky Town. City of trades and merchant princes. City of spices et fishes, of oranges and salt pork hanging on wood shelves. All of that smelted strongly in the streets in a mix that was troubling the stomach. Children were grilling meat on the soil and trying to sell the results to the bystanders with loud cries. Merchants were the loudest, boasting about the qualities of their fruits, the freshness of the fish, the delicate robe of the newest wine and the softness of the fabrics. Red, blue, green, yellow, purple… all the clothes were exposed to the sun triumphally like banners.

Eye, nose, mouth, skin. Everything was touched by the surrounding, and there was no escape from it. Arianne did not know if she wanted to eat or vomit. The heat of the day was weighting on her shoulders, on her head that she covered in the nomads’ way.

They had taken time on their way to find more fitting clothes, that wouldn’t betray their actual ranks. Gone were the thin dresses of silk and Myrish laces. Gone were the flowing fabrics and the numerous jewels on her ears, neck, wrists and ankles. Now she was in bright yellow linen, and it was much closer to the skin, unlike what she favored when it came to her duties.

They had asked her to dye her luscious hair to be more discreet. Daemon had already done his in an icy blue color that made his eyes even more piercing. Sarella had returned in her masculine costume she had taken as Alleras in Oldtown.

Arianne laughed at them when they asked her to disguise herself and chose a glorious crimson color.

Crimson like the blood that was about to be spilled. Crimson like a mockery of the house that thought they could defeat them so easily. A house now nearly extinct.

Crimson would be her battle name, she proclaimed.

Sarella’s expression had been one of perplexity. Ser Daemon had shaken his head in disapproval. Only Elia seemed to like it. She marveled at it and asked for a strand of hair to keep in souvenir once she’d sit on her throne.

She had laughed joyously at this and cut on two strands, including one for… another, she thought with a fond smile.

Now Elia was gone with Ilayna to Lemonwood, and she hoped to have news from Ser Deziel Dalt
soon. Dutiful, polite and gentle-looking Deziel, who wanted her once as her own. Andrey had been her favorite from the two brothers; but Deziel could do for the long time as a consort. He wouldn’t disturb her that much.

Her father was dead now. Surely he will come to her now? She thought as she wandered on the streets of Planky town, Ser Daemon Sand and Sarella at her side.

“Why Planky town?” The first was complaining loudly, taking on the stinky surroundings. “Why not Sunspear directly?”

The second was silent, glaring at her surroundings, a hand on her belt.

The princess sighed, and her eyes went to the sky, which was curiously grey that day.

“Have a little patience, sweet ser.”

He sneered bitterly, and she could feel the bite of his voice as if it was on her skin.

“I’m not your pathetic Arys Oakheart, princess.” He said. “You can’t lead me on as a puppet.”

“No, you’re not.” She replied patiently. “He would certainly have been a more pleasant company.”

They had travelled by night with camels from the Water Gardens to here, stopping in some nomad camps to rest and eat. The nomads were a welcoming people to those who did not try to make them bow. She had known them since she was a child, watching her father’s sessions.

The way had been long and torturous, and not only by the stink of the beasts. The sand had been slippery and far from once Sarella thought one of the camels would not survive.

But Arianne wouldn’t complain. She was a daughter of Dorne. Sand was in her veins, just as much as sun. She remembered bathing in it as a child, savoring the warmth of it on her skin. It was coarse and rough and irritating and it get everywhere. The servants did not like it. But she considered it as her first lover.

Actually, Ser Daemon was coarse and rough and irritating.

“You should cover yourself more, princess,” he told her as she was leaning on the oranges in one stand. “This is no Water Gardens.”

“I dress what I want, where I want, when I want” She uttered clearly. “I’m a princess of Dorne, after all.”

He shrugged.

“A princess is also a woman. Men look at women, and rape them if they’d like to, princess or not.”

Her eyes gave him a sideways glance, and her lips stretched in a forced smile. She shrugged nonchalantly, taking an orange in her hand and approaching it to her nose. The skin wasn’t really hard on her fingers, and juice was already slipping out from her fingers.

Or maybe she was pressing it too much.

She put it down and licked the juice off her fingers.

“Men can be raped too, can’t they?” She answered, before adding with a deadly voice. “And the first man who touches me is dead.”
He smirked, then put his fingers under her chin, to force her to look at him.

“There, I touched you. Am I dead?”

Her eyes went to his, intense and somehow hungry. She bit her lips, furious.

“You will,” She said with a hoarse voice. “One day.”

“Oh,” he answered, a smirk on his irritating lips. “I’m afraid.”

She pursed her lips.

“You should be.”

She wanted him to shut up. She wanted to erase that smug smile from his face. But instead another intervened.

“Shut up, both of you,” Sarella interrupted, exasperated. “These talks aren’t for the streets, but for the bedroom.”

Arianne huffed, then proceeded to leave, both disappointed and happy to distance herself from that snake. There was already too much heat in here. No need to add more.

Meanwhile, Sarella was still pesting, glaring in front of her as if the view of the market offended her.

“I should be in Oldtown now, making my own chains and showing these old men how they are wrong about what women can do. Instead, I’m here, bearing these petty talks.”

Arianne smiled reassuringly at her friend.

“And I’m thankful to you, Sarella. Without you, I would still be bored to death all alone with that…” She waved vaguely towards Daemon, trying to find the fitting words. “…insufferable man.”

The bastard knight smirked.

“You did not seem to find me insufferable when…”

There he was again, the princess of Dorne thought, rolling her eyes.

“SHUT UP! Or else it will not be because of the heat that you get burned!”

They shut up, stunned by Sarella’s outburst. Their eyes were wide, and red had come to their faces.

But they said nothing at the time. They did not dare to look once again, continuing their paths, though Arianne wanted to laugh by the ludicrousness of it. For a time she felt like a child, hiding her mischiefs in a corner and awaiting to be caught.

Who said she wasn’t supposed to feel that way if she wanted to be queen?

A child’s view. Maybe that’s what it took, actually.

“You might get a sun burn, by the way,” Daemon said this time, more softly.

“You’re a persistent one,” She sighed longingly. “I am the daughter of the sun. Sun can’t burn me.
It only kisses me."

He only chuckled at this.

“Did you ever see me with a sun burn?” She added defiantly.

“Not the last time I looked.”

“You’re being less and less bearable.”

“And you less and less prudent.”

“I know what I’m doing. Can’t you trust me?”

He stared at her a long time, his dark eyes fixed on hers intensely.

“I can. You know I can. I know you.”

She rolled her eyes. Men were like that, she thought. They were telling everything what she wanted to hear. But in the end, doubts were easily set on their minds.

Would he one day betray her like Jon Snow betrayed his queen? She wondered.

“Then don’t question me all the time,” she replied.

“It is an unreliable support, the one you are looking for.” He remarked, crossing his arms in that insufferable smug way. “The one of the merchants. Merchants buy. Merchants sell. But who knows who has the biggest thing to offer?”

She rolled her eyes.

“I’m not naïve. I know what I’m doing.”

‘Then I won’t stop you.”

Sarella touched the princess’ shoulder, stopping her on her tracks.

“Here, that’s him.”

Arianne looked at the man she was pointing at closely, then smiled.

“Perfect.”

Arianne left her companions, pursuing the man.

“Ar-… wait!” Daemon called after her.

But she didn’t. Blood rushed in her veins and she felt exhilarated.

She had to reach him before he entered his house.

“Alton Allarias,” She called in an imperious voice.

The merchant merely looked at her, occupied as he was at looking at his keys.

“Stay ‘way, w’man, ‘ave no time for…”
She looked at him. He hadn’t changed. As in her memories, he was so big his belt seemed always about to burst. He was wearing dornish clothes today, but she knew he preferred Essosi dresses. He was talking with a loud, greasy voice, that tended to skip some vowels, a farce she knew he used only when he wanted to rip people off. But his eyes were still shining with the cruel intelligence of a cat looking for a prey.

“No time for an old friend’s daughter?” She retorted.

He blinked. Then looked at her closely. He raised his head, and his voice became more mature. Softened, even.

“Little Arianne…” He greeted her in a low voice with a wide smile, opening his arms. “Last time we saw each other you were bathing naked with your cousins in the Water Gardens. Now I see you are a woman grown.”

She smiled, returning it.

“You can enter,” He said. “But not your pets.”

Sarella, offended, took a step forwards, but Ser Daemon stopped her.

Arianne nodded towards them and let herself be guided by the merchant.

She arrived first in a hall richly furnished, visibly carefully thought to impress every guest. She took time to glance at the moldings, carved to represent the meeting of Rhaenys Targaryen with the princess Meria Martell.

She smiled at her ancestor. Unbowed, unbent, unbroken until the end.

Alton led her to another room, smaller but more comfortable. A delicate woman was feeding her child on a comfortable chair. She was plain, with white skin and hair as yellow as corn beans.

Alton smiled.

“My wife, Ylla,” he presented. “And our son.”

She looked at the newborn. Red face, bawler and capricious, with some wisps of dark hair. It made her remember Quentyn somehow.

She had been about five when her little brother was born. Her lady mother had insisted for her taking him in her arms. At the time, she had been disgusted at the intruder, but then Lady Mellario told her she had to protect him. That one day he would be of use for him.

She blinked.

“What will be his name?” She asked, trying not to show her trouble.

Alton looked at the babe with fond eyes. It was the first time she saw him actually care.

A dangerous thing, she thought. Why would he trust me that easily?

Or maybe… Her eyes widened. But before she could ask, he was already answering her first question.

“Yldrillsar. Like my father before him. And his father before. May the Gods guide him.” He said with satisfaction.
She raised her head.

“And like your father before you, he will inherit his right to trade.”

He looked at her, then at his surrounded, suddenly more guarded.

“Let’s talk about it in a more secluded place,” He whispered.

She followed him through corridors and stairs, until finally, they came to a room with few furnitures, and one window. The highest, she gathered. No one may hear her scream in there. It was a room where everything could happen.

She turned towards her father’s former friend, staring at him hardly in the eyes.

“I am my father’s daughter. This is my right.”


“Godsgrace. I have the support of Oldtown. Sunspear, soon…”

“But not now,” he interrupted.

She stepped towards him, trying to force tears on her eyes.

“You’ve been a true friend of my father, until the end.”

“And he was my dearest friend until the end. But that friendship did not help him very much in the end, I believe.”

“But it can help me.” She insisted.

He said nothing and served her some wine. She waited he drank from his glass before trying. The liquid was sweet, with a heady note that made her smile. She went towards the window, looking at the hubbub of the city, at the carts being brought joyously on ships. She counted them silently, then smiled ironically.

“Two thousand boxes of oranges. One hundred of olives. And I wouldn’t dare to imagine how many of pomegranates. How… subtle.” She blinked innocently. “All that had been offered graciously a few weeks ago for preparing a little feast organized by that little northern queen, “ She added with a smirk. “That’s quite a lot.”

She felt him approaching her.

“Your brother ordered these commands to be assured.”

She shook her head, amused, and turned lightly her glass in her hand.

“My brother is a fool,” She said thoughtfully. “I always fought it was for a queen, not a king.”

She turned towards the merchant and stepped forward.

“And I was right, wasn’t I?”

Alton Allarias did not react. Not a move, not even a blink of an eye. Maybe a glimpse of a spark.
The man knew something and was tempted to gloat about it, she thought.

“Surely you must know why he’s suddenly so diligent with the Stark Queen’s demands, and so
neglectful of his own king?” She smirked.

“I don’t know.” He declared, smiling widely. “Whatever plan it is, I am only an honest merchant. I
don’t want to take part.”

“Oh, but you will,” she insisted. “One way or another. You know it.”

“And why would I be by your side?” He said. “Let me tell you something for the love I had for
your father, the Gods keep his soul. Love is not enough.”

“No, indeed.” She replied. “‘My brother now thinks he can get the North, does he? And if he gets
it, what stops him then?’ She took one sip of sweetwine and savored it. She could see by the quirk
of his eyebrow that he was impressed. She may have been a prisoner. But she wasn’t blind. Nor
deaf. “But you know, the problem with my brother is that he was always spoiled as a child. My
mother always fusssed about him, until finally my father sent him to Yronwood to toughen him. He
doesn’t know how to focus and tends to take everything for granted. He wants it all: power and a
little bit of romance, but he doesn’t know how to fight for it. I know he’s already courting Astapor
as well…”

She smiled widely, her eyes glinting dangerously. She took one breath of her and lay down her
card.

“But I have more than that.”

He leant in.

“And… what is that?”

She stared at him. She had him exactly as she wanted him. But still, why did she feel like she was
the one being chased?

“Information. Plans. And… support from friends who kept even Aegon the Conqueror from
sleeping at night…”

Alton’s eyes widened.

“You don’t mean…”

She smiled widely.

“I may seem a fickle woman. I may have made some mistakes as a girl. But I am my father’s
daughter and the true descendant of Nymor Martell. I am prepared now.”

He shook his head, as if trying to gather his thoughts, then raised it.

“And… why don’t you use it now?” He asked. “It could be easy. It could be swift. Almost
painless.”

She shook her head.

“It would be too easy,” She said. “Quentyn is my brother. I don’t want him to die. He took what
was supposed to be mine. I want him to suffer at the hands of the ones he thought he could trust.”
He looked at her a long period, as it was the first time he actually saw her. Then he chuckled.

“Alright, princess.” He sighed contently. “You’ll have the merchants by your side. But there’s another one you must deal with to actually get what you want.”

She raised one eyebrow.

“And… who is that?”

He smirked.


His eyes sparkled amusingly.

She leant in, forgetting the noises of the streets to focus on the man.

“And… what would you say to my brother?”

“Oh, the same thing we merchants say every time we want to get a better price. Winds. Harvest. He already delayed for this month. Would it be that unbelievable if the problem lasts… much longer?”

She nodded thoughtfully. She would need to trade strategically, she fought. One step wrong, and she could lose everything.

This was only the first step. But a decisive one.

They shook hands.

“And this… Illyrio Mopatis… When shall I meet him?”

He smiled at her.

“Soon.”
Planning murder was a tedious thing, thought the High Priestess as she saw wine being served in each golden cup, and men laughing at their new victory (if victory it was). Red, thick liquid easily spilled, celebrated, with a strong aroma that would leave a bitter taste afterwards.

Tedious, albeit tempting.

But bringing chaos was a much more amusing activity.

They were singing now, gloating to a glory they never had any right of. Fire had been set on the grand chimney to keep them warm and to give them light. To give them some feeling of security after such easy conquest and to protect them from the darkness that fell upon them.

They were already mocking the place, saying it was as “as easy to take as an old maiden”.

She laughed quietly, savoring the irony of the instant.

The fools. It was a treachery to make them see. To make them pledge.

Kinvara counted the minutes before the big show, the one where truths would be acknowledged. The one where truths would be created.

At least until the Light came out.

She had enough of these grey walls that surrounded her. These grey walls that oppressed her, especially when she was forced to hide in such a way, in the long, narrow, secret corridors where they had to look after the enemy through the holes. Where was the end of it, and its beginning, she didn’t know, and didn’t want to. But it was the Queen’s plan, and she dared not to question it. The Lord of Light was guiding her, and she followed His flame. There was no doubt to have about this point.

The Mother of Dragons appeared at her side, her face in a thoughtful expression. Rh’llor had led her here. Surely, now, she should be certain of her destiny.

Then why did she still feel doubts in her?

It must be these ghosts, she thought. These shadows that burdened her. She could see them in her eyes, see them all around her, enveloping her in a tight grip. She could see them in that new companion of hers. That wolf who had the mind of a man. That wolf who had her love now.

She should get rid of them, she thought with bitterness. All of them. It only led her astray, far from
her true destiny.

Just like she, the First Servant, had gotten rid of hers.

She could still see their faces, hear their screams as they burned. She could still see their eyes, pleading when once they had been merciless and greedy.

She had sung that night, high and clear. And she had heard His voice, telling her the way.

Now she was pure and clean. Reborn.

Ashes and salt had called back Daenerys Stormborn to where she was supposed to be. But her heart was still on the way, between the dead and the living. She imagined it a tiny little bird, caught between fire and ice. A tender heart, indeed. A heart that had been cut raw when it was at its weakest.

Her body was here, though. And so was her mind. Sharp and precise like a Valyrian blade.

Kinvara decided to set aside her thoughts and returned to her observations.

Yara’s body had been brought on another room, and she knew that at least one of these men would try to use it for his own pleasure.

Poor man. Poor despicable man. He did not know what was coming for him.

Wine was taking its hold on them, numbing their senses. Their eyes had become glazed. Soon would come the hallucinations. Some may die. Not all of them, unfortunately.

“When I was a girl, I had few knowledges about the world,” declared Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, R'hllor chosen queen. “what I knew was stories, that my brother told me between two narrow escapes from mercenaries. Stories of victories and glories. Stories of our House. But I don’t think he would have appreciated that I remembered this one.”

“Dorne’s victory,” Kinvara smiled. “The one that cost the lives of Rhaenys Targaryen and her dragon Meraxes.”

The Queen nodded, never looking away from her objective.

“Given time and opportunity, you can learn from your enemy. I have both now.”

Her heart was pounding in anticipation.

“They shall fear your wrath.”

“Yes, they shall,” Daenerys whispered softly. “But not today.”

Kinvara blinked, then shook her head.

“They came in numbers to kill, not to negotiate,” The High Priestess said with contempt. “Why would you want to let some live? They should burn, like the rest that went lost in that castle.”

“Because they are needed for the wars to come.”

“You won’t make them bend the knee.” She shook her head once again. “These men don’t listen to women.”
Daenerys turned her violet eyes towards her, and she felt herself shiver with a strange foreboding. It stung on her stomach, living her cold and in pain.

“They won’t bend the knee to me, remember.”

“Unfortunately.” The Flame of Truth sighed, trying to get rid of these feelings. “At least, not yet.”

They looked ahead, at the men who were still unaware of what was going to happen.

“And then?” Kinvara whispered.

Daenerys Stormborn smiled to her. A sad smile, but lightened by the resolution in her eyes. Then she returned to her observation.

“Then they won’t be the ones to choose.”

“That’s a good thing to hear,” another voice intervened.

Kinvara sighed in relief. So it had worked after all. Once again, she was surprised by the Lord of Light’s miracles, and she was the witness of destiny being fulfilled.

“Yara,” Daenerys acknowledged the Kraken’s daughter’s presence with a slight bow of the head.

“It is done, then.”

“As you can see…” Yara stretched herself. “And as they soon will see.”

“Had he screamed?” Kinvara asked eagerly.

“No,” Yara shook her head. “He didn’t have the time to.”

“A shame,” She said. “I would have loved to hear that.”

The Kraken’s daughter smirked and huffed.

“These men should have cut my head and buried me instead of parading my body as a trophy,” She commented, before looking closely at the High Priestess. “However, I know of other pleasures, priestess. Much, much more satisfying. Maybe I could show you.”

She winked at her, and suddenly, Kinvara felt it. The fire burning low, and anticipation gripping her insides.

“And what about that man?” She managed to mutter. “This… Larence.”

Her friend rolled her eyes, and there, when she raised her head, Kinvara could see the trace of her murder. The long, sloppy but deep wound on the middle of the neck that just started to heal.

It had not touched the voice’s organ, hopefully. They had been right on time to cauterize it and mend each piece of flesh together with needle and thread.

“Gone with the kitchen maid. Hopefully, he will prove to be another element of chaos for that little queen in the North, by wanting to intervene.”

“You were imprudent that night,” She chastised her. “You weren’t supposed to die.”

“You were here, weren’t you?” Yara retorted. “And it added even more drama. Now why would they doubt a boy who got rid of a ghost?”
She sneered, her laugh leaving loudly her mouth that she held upward, unafraid. Unashamed.

“By the way where is your dog, my Queen?” She continued. “Still roaming?”

“Dire wolf,” corrected Daenerys. “Ghost will come when it’s right for him to do so.”

“It’s a spoiled mongrel, not a he.”

They heard a growl.

Yara rolled her eyes.

“When you talk about the devil…”

The Queen laughed. A sweet, loving laugh. “Oh, he’s so much more than that,” she whispered.

“Drogon would have been more helpful.”

“Drogon would have burned them all,” Daenerys said laconically. “That’s not what I want.”

“That’s what I want,” Yara shrugged. “And that’s what you want too, isn’t it, priestess?”

“You know what I want.”

Yes, she knew what she wanted. Because she felt it too. It was an obvious thing, though another of these things that should be set aside for the greater good.

“It’s time,” The Queen said.

Yara rolled her eyes.

“That’s my turn”

“Do your worst,”

“As always, my Queen.”

She grabbed Yara Greyjoy’s wrist and pleaded one last time.

“Don’t die again, my friend,” She said. “I don’t know if I’d have enough strength to bring you back this time.”

“Keep your heart in check, priestess,” Yara winked at her. “I could almost think you care.”

She smiled, then let her go. Her heart was appeased.

“Are you sure he did not see anything?” The queen asked. “The Three-Eyed Raven.”

“Some persons see only what they want to see,” Kinvara replied. “Especially when it comes to victory. Brandon Stark is a man, don’t forget that. And his attention is… elsewhere.”

“He must find Jon,” The Queen acquiesced. “Is Aegon ready?”

The priestess nodded, looking sideways at the wolf who was sitting by their side, an undefinable look on his eyes.

Aegon was exactly where they wanted him to be. He had learnt his speech well, and she knew he
would declaim it and believe it as if it was his own.

“So we can begin.”

She nodded one last time, closed her eyes and concentrated. The long corridors, the torturous bridges linking each part of the castle… She saw the flames that lighted them and felt their warmth. Her mind collided with them, fought them. Until it became one. She opened her eyes. Then, she let out the breath she had been holding.

That’s when all the lights went out and darkness surrounded them all.

Still, she could see them all, cowering in terrors, confusion in their numbed minds. She was everywhere at the same time, looking after them closely, a shadow to their own shadows.

“Dam’!” screamed one. “Whaz’zat?”

“Gods’ be curs’d!”

“Leave the way! Let’s unite!”

“A treachery!”

“Where is Jim?”

One laughed. “Gods be cursed, you’re all scared like kittens. Jim, get out of there! ‘T’s not funny, anymore.”

Silence. Nothing but footsteps and faces, some eager with anticipation, others marked by fright.

“Jim?”

One, two minutes. They would soon see the truth.

“Jim! Where are you, old man?”

“Where’s the body?”

A scream.

They had finally noticed.

“No, Jim!” One of them screamed. “Men, at me!”

“Jim!”

“All this blood…”

Someone vomited. Kinvara could smell the stink of it, attacking savagely her nostrils.

“Seven hells…. ”

Cries. Hiccups. Nervous, clumsy moves towards the exit.

She hoped Aegon was truly in place.

“Disappeared!”
“Where is it?”

“Now is the time,” Kinvara smiled.

She could see it, as if she was there. Yara Greyjoy appearing on the other side of the room, her mortuary clothes that couldn’t hide the fresh amount of blood. Her face, white and deadly with the moonlight, and her eyes gleaming with a thirst for kill.

She shivered.

“A ghost!” They cried.

“Or a de’d c’ming b’ck to lif’!”

The Kraken’s Daughter came before them, stretching her arm before them.

They were stunned by fear. Some were trembling. Two pissed on themselves.

Kinvara blinked. The fire was lit once again. Wild, furious flames, eager for flesh. Eager for their screams of pain. She opened her arms, her mouth, and savored their cries as the fire attacked them.

The dire wolf growled, retreating back. She could feel his rage. He was prepared to attack.

“Stop,” The Queen ordered, her heart beating at each word. “This is enough. This is the moment.”

Kinvara closed her mouth and opened her eyes. In her mind, the flames turned red.

This was the signal.

“Begone ghost!” Shouted a mighty voice. “Leave my people be!”

They heard his voice as it rang loud and clear in the corridors. Kinvara saw it in the flame, the image of this young man dressed like a knight, with the noble colors of House Targaryen. The flames made his indigo eyes look brighter, his silver hair wilder. He raised his sword, and fire lightened it, courtesy of the Light of Wisdom.

The image of a hero. The image of a king.

Yara gave out her best cry, and made a great show of collapsing, slowly disappearing in the darkness.

A bewildered move of the crowd, followed by some confused whispers began, only broken by Aegon himself.

“I am Aegon Targaryen, son of Prince Rhaegar Targaryen and Princess Elia Martell,” He declared. “I am the true heir to the Iron Throne. The Prince that had been promised to you, born amidst salt and smoke. Bend the knee and join me. Together we will leave the world a much better place than the one we found. Or refuse and die.”

Silence followed these words, but soon, they heard the sound of armors being squeezed, and knees hitting the ground. That’s when the cheers began.

“The King!”

“Long lives the King!”
“Long live King Aegon!”
“Long live the Conqueror reborn!”
“The Prince that was Promised!”
“The King with the fire sword!”

Kinvara rolled her eyes.

Men. Offer them a king that had only a name and who put on a show, and they will sing his praises. Offer them a queen who brought justice to all, and they’ll all scream bloody murder.

One hand squeezed her own softly.

“I know your anger, for it is mine also,” whispered Daenerys. “They will pay. All of them. But let them be destroyed by the mean they chose.”

The Queen put on her hood and left, her eyes burning with determination.

The priestess followed her as she got closer to her nephew, and as she waited in the darkness for people to leave him alone. He was in the light now.

Once the last one of them decided to go back to sleep, she watched as Daenerys put her hand on his shoulders and leaned on his ear.

“You’re in the game now, nephew,” she heard her say softly as she took his shaking hand in hers in a comforting gesture. “Now you’ll have to lead their way.”

He looked at her in wonder and was about to raise it to kiss her palm. His eyes were gleaming in the dark, more intense than they had ever been until that day. It felt like destiny coming to life. Like a theater piece being played for the first time.

The slayer of lies and the mummer, she mused. One had certainly seen a stranger duo.

But the dire wolf growled and came between them. And when Daenerys saw it, she only smiled and regained her hand. She went away, a dark-hooded silhouette with the wolf trotting at her side. Two shadows leaving in the darkness. And an old song playing silently on the background of it.
Hey! Sorry for the delay. I had been too focused on Jon’s chapter (which would come very soon), and the main plotlines for the sequel. I’m impatient to share it with you! This chapter’s main theme is “Black Black Heart” by David Usher. At first, I hesitated with “History has its eyes on you” from the Hamilton musical, as I felt it represented more the perspective of some persons in the group. But then… there’s something that begins to be hard to ignore.

Something ugly this way comes. Indeed.

PS: By the last sentence, I bet you may guess the POV of the next chapter 😊

PS2: Next chapter will be coming tonight. Its theme would be "Control" by Halsey.

Footprints in the snow. Ash. Blood. Some pieces of burned clothes and a brooch made of dragonglass, that had been carved according to the moose head of House Hornwood. This was heavy on the hand, but shiny in a way that almost seemed menacing in the dawn.

That was all that was left of Larence of House Hornwood, formerly Larence Snow. That was all that was left of a friend, dearly loved, dearly missed. A friend that had been their leader, that had shown them again and again the way to greater things.

A friend who died away from his home. Who ran away, like a coward, never trying to reunite with his people. A man who killed a maester and let the village burn.

Or so it seemed.

Malwyn touched the earth, unbelieving, shaking, but the scent was here, strong and unbearable in his nostrils. His fingers dug in the earth and he felt its dryness irritating his skin. He felt short of breath, as his throat closed. His mind was dark, melting with the snow and burying itself in the soil. He bit his lips, drawing blood, and the taste of it invaded him. His fists closed, tainted with the darkish substance.

He screamed. He hit it. Once, twice… Until he couldn’t count anymore. Until he couldn’t think, until everything disappeared, swallowed by darkness and despair. Until he could not recognize the beatings of his heart from the blows his fists made. Tears came flowing from his eyes, blinding him.

And when he stopped, that’s when he saw his wrists. That’s when he saw the dagger in his belt. How it shined in the light, a pretty sight in the morning. How suddenly it looked like solution.

“Malwyn!”

Arms took him in, squeezing him. He clawed the soil, trying to escape their grip. His mouth let out a terrible whine and he fought back. He couldn’t recognize anyone.

They were all animals, all of them. Beasts, livestock beaten again and again for meat… No. Machines that could be destroyed beyond repair. Machines that could disappear.
He bit, hit, and kicked. But they wouldn’t let go.

They had voices, but their edges were dangerous. He didn’t want to hear it. Didn’t want to recognize them, and the emotions in them. The despair. The pity.

Damn their pity. Damn them.

“Let me go!” He shouted. “LET ME GO!! LET ME…”

But he did not finish. The darkness had vanquished him in a big clap, and the sound of It hurt his head badly. His eyes closed themselves. But that’s when he saw… That’s when he heard…

“My love…”

He could almost see the darkness of her hair, and the melancholy of her green eyes. He could almost remember that summer day when he heard her screams, and then the sound of her body hitting the floor.

“Mother,” he called, tears forming at his eyes. “Please. Please. I can’t…”

“Mal”,.” Another intervened, making him turn back. “What are you doing?”

Larence. His friend. No. NO. NO.

He could not bear staring at his eyes. Could not bear to see his narrow face, that would certainly be torn in a disappointed expression.

He knelt down, looked down. His voice was coming in pieces, and he felt his own body shake.

“Please, no. Forgive me. Forgive them. We lost ourselves. We lost you…. We BETRAYED you…”

He muttered. As if it could mean anything. As if it could solve anything.

He could see him shake his head, never once looking at him in the eyes.

He did not deserve it. Not now. Not ever.

“Malwyn….”

Sweet, dear voice. Loved. Cherished.

Gone.

Another fleeting flame that had been extinguished.

He raised his head.

‘I’ll find you,” he attempted to tell her with a thick voice. “I’ll find you.”

But she only turned back once at him, laughing, the fabric of her dress swinging just like the first time. Her eyes were sad though, and glinted in the dark.

“That’s not me you’ll find, Malwyn. That never was me you were supposed to find.”

He shook his head, desperate. He had to make her see. She was wrong.

But he knew he couldn’t. He had no voice now. His screams would be unheard, lost in the storm of
his emotions.

He had failed them. All of them. And now they were gone, leaving him in the darkness with the fleeting memory of them.

Memories that couldn't hide what had been done. What THEY had done…

They should never have come to King’s Landing, he thought with anguish as he cowered, falling back on himself. They should never have wanted more…

And when the bells rang one last time…

That’s when the beasts were released. That’s when humanity left them.

He opened his eyes, recovering his consciousness in a loud gasp.

His mouth was agape as he tried to recover his breath and to get rid of the uneasy visions that had invaded his mind. His vision was blurred and painful, and he barely maintained to keep his lids opened. His heart was beating so fast, it seemed it had settled on his brain and that his crane was threatening to break.

He felt people coming at his side, gently rubbing his shoulders and telling him soft words, to comfort him. Or was it only him they tried to soothe? He wondered, looking at each one of them, trying to remember their features, to organize them. To recognize them.


Grey. Darren.

Hazel. Eddy.

Blue. Icy. Familiar.

He blinked. The image had disappeared.

“Are you okay, boy?” Ser Harrold said with an imperious voice from what seemed to be far away.

He blinked again, his vision seeming to come back little by little.

They had settled a camp in the snow, in a place surrounded by old, nearly broken trees. Fire had been set. Men were gathered around it, whispering and laughing rambunctiously. None of them had dared to take their clothes off, but the belts were largely loosened as they drank from the same flask of what seemed like strong wine. Most of them did not seem to pay him that much attention.

What about the Wildlings? Malwyn wondered. Would they not find them with such a sight?

“Where am I?” He managed to say instead. “Where is… Larence. We need to find Larence…”

Some looked away. But Jan maintained his stare.

“You’ve done all you could, Malwyn,” He replied.

Malwyn considered these words, without really understand them at first. It all came as sounds, but sense didn’t come with them. Words, flying with the wind, but never really reaching him.

But when the image of the ashes came back to him, he fought it, struggling against his friends’
“But…” He tried to continue. “We can’t…”

He felt the grip of Jan becoming firmer on his shoulder. Had his hand always been that big? He wondered. His nails were dirty, but certainly not as dirty as him. Malwyn still felt the warmth of the earth on his fingers.

“We can,” He heard Jan say. “We were there. We were all there. We couldn’t have changed anything. YOU couldn’t have changed anything. He’s gone now.”

Malwyn turned brusquely to meet his eyes, fury boiling in his veins.

“What about the maester?” Malwyn relented. ”What about the attacks?”

Jan held his gaze sternly, shaking his head.

“Some things are better left unknown.”

Malwyn’s eyes widened. He had to make them see. Surely, they must have wondered the same, he told himself.

“There’s no body. Only clothes, blood and ashes. Maybe…”

“Let it go, boy.”

He glared at Reagan, who was leaning on a tree, his arms crossed. His look was that of a deep disapproval, and Malwyn felt the injustice of it keenly.

“But isn’t it strange?” He said again, surprising the others by raising suddenly.

He felt like a madman, and they were surely seeing him as if he was. Some had fallen from his outburst and were looking at him with wide eyes.

He couldn’t stop now.

“And who would burn him?” He continued, his arms moving dramatically to emphasize his point. “What happened? Don’t you ask yourself that question?”

His voice had raised more than it should, and he felt the ache of it on the back of his throat.

Jan raised his hands in an appeasing manner, as if he was trying to tame a beast. His eyes were wary and narrowed.

I am the beast, realized Malwyn.

“Wildlings. It must be some kind of ritual, I don’t know. They’re savage like that. No need to ask ourselves any longer. We have to prepare to get rid of them. That’s what we should do.”

Malwyn was at loss of words.

“Jan… you can’t possibly…”

His friend shook his head, and his eyes avoided his.

“It’s over, Malwyn. We’re all tired. It’s time to go home.”
“You’re the one who asked me to fulfill that mission! To do it for Larence’s memory!”

“And now we’ve done it, there’s nothing more we can do, except telling his story, the way he really was. Honorable. Wise. Kind.”

Eddy raised this time, determination in his gaze.

“We are the only ones left. We are the ones who decide.” He said sternly. “Isn’t it, ser?”

Ser Harrold looked at them with an amused smile and shrugged regally, his armor shining in the sunlight. “Such a noble lord. Only his greatest friends should write his story.”

But his words had a bitter tone of irony in it. And his men were looking at themselves with a satisfied expression, as if they knew something more.

Jan looked down at Malwyn, irritation distorting his face.

“Or you can go now, as you’ve always wanted,” he added with bitterness before turning back to the men of the Vale.

Malwyn’s emotions calmed down, stunned as he was by Jan’s remarks.

“Don’t be angry with Jan,” Darren said. “We all are tired. We all want it to stop.”

He said nothing, only raised himself, trying to escape the wave of shame that came numbing him. He shook his head. He had to gather some woods for himself, as he didn’t want to come closer to the others.

He did not feel well enough for that. With a quick look, he saw where his weapons were and took them, under the wary gaze of Darren, who made an attempt to raise. He made a sign towards him, giving up the dagger as a compromise. Darren nodded, relaxing.

He went farther in the woods, blood still running cold.

_That’s when I get ambushed_, he thought. _That’s when I die painfully, blood coming from my guts._

Surprisingly, it did not happen.

Cutting wood was just a thing to get rid of his frustrations, and he angrily hit and hit until it broke.

When he came back, he sorted the branches and stacked them carefully, taking care that they should be dried enough. Darren was here, a silent presence reminding him that he was being watched. He knew he had to accept that. Even Reagan was near, a silhouette getting closer not as discreetly as he surely thought. Trying to ignore them, he rubbed two stones against each other vigorously, until it sparked and cracked before his eyes. And when the little flame hit the wood, he blew softly, feeding it until it grew.

His work done, he watched it with fascination and put his hands near it, seeking the heat.

That’s when Ser Harrold Hardyng came sitting near him, laughing as if mocking his attempt at solitude.

“We found wildlings’ marks near the remnants,” he said. “Just like for the villages. I thought you would like to know. You know, once you calm down.”

“I am calm,” replied Malwyn, trying to bite back another remark.
“These damn bastards” he roared in laughter, before stopping when his eyes meet Malwyn’s. “Figure of speech. They really are savages.”

The young man tapped his fingers on his knees, his eyes gazing into the fire until it hurt.

“This may be the beginning of a war between the North and the Wildlings,” He reflected softly, looking through half closed eyelids at the face of the one who saved him.

“Surely,” Harrold replied with a big smile that made Malwyn frown. “But.. I think we should focus on a more… joyous note.”

Malwyn raised his eyebrows.

“It’s the wedding season, it seems,” Ser Harrold replied to his silent question with a smirk. “I think it will inspire the queen very well…”

“Are you in love with the queen?”

Harrold chuckled. In his eyes there was a dark, lusty glint that left no doubt about his true feelings.

“The songs will say it so, boy.” He replied nonchalantly. “Let me tell you something. I fell in love with a girl once, who did not want me. So I bedded her friend, and let me tell you that the taste was sweet. When I fell in love again, it was with the girl that carried my second bastard. Who’s to say I can’t fall in love with that little queen?”

He shook his head, that smile still on his face, making Malwyn uneasy.

“Love is a song that women and children like to sing to comfort themselves. But we know better than that. Are you a child or a man?”

“Can’t I be both?”

Harrold laughed.

“You’re a fool, then. Who was that girl? Did you bed her?”

Malwyn felt an urge to hit the man, but he restrained himself. He took a long, painful breath, the image of her coming to him, giving him courage, then replied softly.

“Her name was Reina.”

The man’s eyes widened in recognition

“Reina… You can’t tell me… Gods, you really ARE a fool!”

Malwyn straightened himself, irritation coming back once again despite the guilt that came with it.

“What do you know of her?”

He shrugged nonchalantly.

“I’ve seen her. And I’ve seen her husband.” He looked at Malwyn with a glint of amusement in his eyes. “She’s not waiting for you, boy. She’s like the others. She has found what she was looking for. For better or for worse, only the Gods may say.”

It stung, to hear such thing. It was a blow to his heart and his hopes, and a taint to his memories of
her. Coming from a man that he did not know if he should thank him or hit him.

Harry the Arse, some called him. Malwyn could see why.

But still, it was the man that saved his life. Surely, it had to mean something.

“I don’t want to know.”

“Of course you want to know,” He replied cheekily. “You want to know because you have hope. Because you’re still yearning for that wench.”

“Don’t call her that.” Malwyn retorted. “You know nothing about her. About her heart. And about mine.”

“True, you’ll find another girl.” Ser Harrold said simply, as if the matter was of no consequence.

Malwyn did not reply.

There would be no one like Reina, he thought. Reina had been the light of his life, she had put the darkness of his life behind him.

And when she left, the darkness came back.

He had to find her again.

“You and me though,” Harrold continued, his expression becoming much more serious. “We’re not that different, after all. We both have a purpose. We both are meant for greater things.” He took a moment of silence, then laughed. “Well, me more than you because you’re a bastard. But you can hope.”

The knight got closer to him, and his arm went to his shoulder.

“You know what will happen when we come back to Winterfell. I have means, I’m heir to the Vale, and soon, I will marry the queen of the North. I can help you show them what you’re worth. Show them you’re better than them. Show that little girl that left you what she’s been missing.”

Malwyn felt his breath on his cheek, hot and spiced with wine.

“Think about it, bastard,” He patted his shoulder one last time. “you may not get a better option. Your friend did not hesitate.”

“What do you mean?”

He looked at him with raised eyebrows, then laughed, hitting his hip with palm.

“Something that may not be in his story, it seemed.”

He went away like that, and Malwyn did not try to stop him. He was trying to disturb him in his own malicious way. There was nothing he could prove, nothing he could say. He did not know Larence. Larence would never have talked less than five minutes to such a man.

But this was not the most pressing issue, he thought as he shook off his doubts. His eyes went to the flames and focused on the ashes that were forming.

“What would the queen do?” He said aloud, trying to find the solution. “Would it truly be the beginning of a war between Northerners and Wildlings?”
Reagan sat beside him, not looking at him in the eyes.

“What kind of queen would she be if she doesn’t take actions to protect the people?”

“Then who will protect her?” Malwyn wondered. “Who would protect her if the armies come north and another danger arises?”

“You think too much, boy,” Darren laughed, but it seemed too forced.

Reagan looked at him closely, a frown distorting his face.

“You ask good questions, boy,” He said at last. “But I’m not sure you want to know the answers. And neither do the others.”

Malwyn let out a laugh without joy, unbelieving. Then he stopped, regaining his seriousness.

“What do you think about the ashes, Reagan?”

“I think you know damn well what it is, boy,” The older man sighed. “The other ones may be too afraid to connect the dots, but you know better. These are not ordinary ashes. These ashes mean doom.”

Malwyn did not reply. He closed his eyes, trying to get rid of the images of fire and ruins and massacres.

“I don’t like that Harrold.”

Malwyn sighed. Reagan. Always suspicious of strangers. He remembered his reactions when the Dothraki came, and the taunts he threw at them when they arrived, despite Larence’s warnings.

“He saved my life.”

“He’s sadist,” Reagan protested. “I saw the way he fights. He could have saved so many more. But he didn’t.”

“What do you mean? You can’t possibly think…”

“You’re a child if you think otherwise. Think of your witch of a mother, boy. Do you really think she would have been that blind?”

Malwyn’s eyes widened at the mention of his mother by Reagan, and he couldn’t help but notice the pained expression on his face. He shook his head, then looked at the men of the Vale, that had given a place to Jan and Eddy to drink and cheer with them.

“Don’t trust any of them, boy,” he said. “Not that young, shining knight. Not even that little queen. They will suck your life and your dreams until there’s nothing left but flesh and bones, but no mind. You’ll play their games as a pawn and they will throw their rests at you, like they would at a good old dog. You’ll be dead meat before they even stop their petty wars.”

“You’ve never been that way with me,” Malwyn retorted. “Worrying and advising like that. What made you change?”

“Worrying? Me? About you?” Reagan sneered. “You think yourself too important. No, that’s not about you. But I once knew a someone who was worth more than that. This is why I do that.” He shook his head. “There’s something wrong here. And I’ll be damned if I don’t find out what it is.”
“Who? What?”

But Reagan was already gone, his angry steps breaking on the snow.

Flabbergasted, the young bastard of Hornwood blinked, and his mouth opened in anticipation. He had so many questions, so many things…

He was about to follow him when a voice stopped him on his tracks.

“He made a promise, boy,” Darren said grimly from his place. “And these kinds of promises are deadly.”

Malwyn looked at Reagan’s retreating silhouette, at his head deeply buried between his shoulders.

This man had never been a mystery to him. Never truly one. He was here, a distant presence always seeming to find something to say about him. Always trying to break him down, to trample on him. Making sense to it seemed like wasted energy and headaches.

But he couldn’t help but wonder…

“A promise to whom?”

The older man looked at him with sorry eyes.

“That is not a secret I’m allowed to divulge,” Darren shook his head. “It is an oath sworn in front of a heart tree. The Gods curse those who betray such oath. Gods will take everything they hold dear until they drown in their tears.”
Hey!
I hope I did not make you wait too long. This one wasn’t... easy to write, and some of you will guess why, I believe.
This chapter’s theme is “Control” by Halsey
Next chapter will be Arya (Very, VERY important chapter)
I hope you will like it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The scene was familiar. A woman begging on her knees for her family, tears in her eyes and pleas in her mouth. A throne in front of her, and nobles and servants looking at her with pity and compassion. Some with spite. Others with disgust. Nevertheless, they all whispered furiously around, eyes ablaze, for the matter brought in question was a delicate one. One that could divide them and release some demons of the past.

They were all waiting for a reaction from their leader, to decide their fate. To decide HER fate.

For the one on the throne was not a man this time. It was a woman, hardened by trials and abuses. A woman who always showed she had their best interests at heart. A queen, that had the power to give justice and protection.

A woman with power. What a terrible thing for some.

“Please, your Majesty, I demand justice,” The woman pleaded tearfully, her body shaking from the strength of her emotions. “Justice for my daughter who did not ask for what befell her.”

Justice. Once, she thought it was a forgotten notion. And now that notion was hers to take, hers to decide.

*Oh, but justice is much more satisfying with a little blood on it, my lovely wife,* added a snarky voice in her head, that seemed a bit too much like how Ramsay Bolton had once been. *You know this. You want to do this. Like you did to me. Remember how you smiled, Sansa? Remember how you liked this?*

Sansa raised her eyes, trying not to show the trouble the case had brought. Trying not to let them have a glimpse of what she really felt for several days, when a sense of tragedy and fate came to her with the shape of disastrous news.

No. Justice was what she decided it was. That’s what Littlefinger would have said. That’s what she decided to remember.

She had to be cold, and strong. Not to show emotions. Emotions would kill her. Would suggest she was weak in that game they were all playing.

In front of all these men, it would be unbearable.

“Is she alive? Your daughter?” She said instead, tapping her fingers on the handles of her chair.
She still was in control. She intended to keep it. No wonder these ghosts of the past that came harassing her now, when she felt alone and terr…

No, she would not even think that word, she decided, shaking her head.

“She is, ma’am. I mean, my queen. But now her husband does not want her anymore, and she lost all will to live. I’m afraid for her well-being, and that of the child she carries.” The woman’s hands were bloody from the strength of the grip they applied to each other, nails hurting and cutting through skin. But the woman did not seem to feel pain by such injury. No. The object of her suffering was a true wrong-doing, one Sansa thought had been forbidden and forgotten long ago.

The right of the First Night. A right that had been observed when kingdoms fought each other for bits of lands and pride.

She should have known better. Men were like mad dogs when it came to this. They did not realize the barbarity of this until such act happened to them.

She remembered the wedding of Reina Snow, organized as a sign of unity and friendship between North and South. It was a symbol, Bran had said. She guessed it happened because nobler choices were unavailable. Alys Karstark’s fate was still very much in question and Alysane Mormont very much married, though she would deny it. Reina Snow had been the bastard daughter of Smalljon Umber, or so it had been said. They did not really dare to legitimize her, for lords were already looking at the lands available.

The girl would not have had a better match, she thought at the time. But when the vows were exchanged, and the feast began…

Sansa shook her head. This wedding should have happened in Winterfell, she thought. It would have been safer. It was a mistake she had to live with. A mistake she did not know at which extent but could only guess.

Mistreatment and abuse towards women were alike no matter the rank, she had realized at the time. Cruel, disgusting, and tainted with reasons some men liked to call justified rights.

She remembered her own…

“Rise, woman. Your queen has heard your plea.” She raised her hand, her eyes steadily fixed on the woman before her. “Hereby We, Sansa Stark, Queen and Protectress of the North, sentence that the right of the first Night is definitively abolished. Whoever decides to go against Our words is chargeable with high treason.”

The chatter stopped a moment, as if the decision had stunned the audience. The woman’s lips widened in a wide smile, and with this light, the tears on her face were bright like crystal. She raised, her hands on her heart, and shook some more, to the point it was believed she would faint.

But then the whispers began again, more angrily this time.

“But… It is the Right of the first Night, your Grace,” protested one, raising from his seat. “A blessing for the young wife to get the seed of a noble man in her.”

“It is the Targaryen’s tyranny that abolished that right we had,” Added another.

She did not take time to see who it was. She was ashamed, for men of the Vale were still here, guests by extension with their lord’s heir. What would they think, she thought, if she did not show she could control her men?
“This is called raping, sir,” she declared, her voice cutting and cold as ice. “This custom is barbarous and should never have been observed again.”

“My queen, we, the lords of…” began another.

She glared at him. This one was the most insufferable of all.

“Lord Morgryn. You were not born here. I wouldn’t have thought you felt so strongly about this. And if I remember well, you benefitted greatly for my giving you what once was called ‘the queen’s gift.’” She uttered, her voice raising in the room, but still steady and strong. “Would you dare contradict me, my lords, when you all gained from what I’ve given you?”

She raised from her seat and looked at each face, sending them a disapproving glare to all of them to make them ashamed of themselves.

A queen had to be a mother to all, she had learned from that year being it. Caressing, comforting. But sometimes, limits had to be given.

“Women’s lives matter, my lords,” She continued calmly, her hands squeezed in front of her to make her point. “And what was acceptable for the survival of the North should not be considered so now. You can certainly grant me that one thing. Let’s prove we are better than this. Let’s end this, for more pressing matters are coming.”

She took a step forward.

“A war is coming, my lords. Ser Hardyng sent us news about the fate of Lord Hornwood, and the destruction of various villages throughout the North. He would soon be among us to help in the future fights. We can’t let such acts unpunished.” She took a break, letting her words sink in. “House Reed will lead the first troupes.”

It had been a difficult decision for her, for House Reed was one of the most loyal to her own. But it was also nearer, and though they were not known as great warriors, it would serve as an example.

The representative of House Reed raised up, his eyes bewildered. He had been quite silent from the debate that had been coming with the woman that was still looking at her with adoration in her eyes. But now his mouth had opened, and she did not think it would please her that much.

“But… Your Grace… My lord told me… We shouldn’t leave you.”

She raised one eyebrow, irritation gripping her stomach as well as that worry she was trying to hide.

“I am your Queen. I tell you to do this. Do you dare question my decisions?”

She had to show she would not accept such doubt, such disloyalty. It would not unsettle her, she decided. She maintained her glare on him until he stepped back and returned to his seat.

Sansa smiled, for such was what power gave her. Obedience. Protection.

Was that what Cersei had felt, when she became queen? Was that why she did not want to let go of it? This thrill on her spine, this feeling of freedom… It was intoxicating.

“The Wildlings were here with us when the Long Night came. They fought with us,” She continued, her eyes leaving the man to continue her plea. “But it was yesterday. Now their loyalties seem to have changed. They will be punished. They stole from us. They killed our people. The
North remembers all of the losses. Now they will now our wrath, eye for eye.”

They were all looking at her, unblinking, until one finally gave out the first cheer, followed by the others. She did not count them all, but she knew then.

She had them now. She had won, for that time. She nodded, satisfied, then announced the end of the session. She then gestured for her handmaidens to come. Some had been sent by her brother’s vassals. But some were also her own, since the beginning. She had learned to know them well, but she was realistic. Each one of them was looking for their families’ interests.

She could understand that. So well. But still, it was one of the reasons she tended to avoid them most of the time. And some times like this, they tended to let her, for a young girl’s eyes could be swayed to more interesting things.

Aerand Sand, one of the minstrels she hired, had arrived in time, and was preparing himself for the feast that would be coming in a few days. Most of her maids had come near him during the discussion, fluttering like butterflies around him.

He was blond, beautiful, and somehow he made her remember Joffrey.

If only it was just that, she thought. But then, since his arrival… She felt something was wrong. That man was talking a lot. Too much, maybe. And he was curious.

“Your Grace,” he said with a grin when she came near him.

She nodded towards him and continued her way.

It was Jeyne that began.

“Lord Tallhart will not attend the feast, your Grace,” She said. “The Wildlings attacked too much of his own.”

She rolled her eyes, unsurprised.

“And so won’t the Hornwoods and Lady Alysane Mormont. Still, the feast must take place. Nothing must be changed. We have to keep the appearances.”

“It will be as your Majesty commands.”

“Cerwyn. Manderly. Glover. Whitehill. Forrester. Morgryn…” She muttered, trying to remember the names of her guests, imagining the number of people she would have to feed.

She still was uneasy with House Morgryn. Of Mira, formerly Forrester, who became one of her own handmaiden, she had sympathy, as she knew her as a friend of Margaery. She knew of the fate of her family and empathized with her situation. But her husband…

At least, House Glover was there. They had felt betrayed when Jon bent the knee. But now they were back.

She had heard a tragedy had befell to them, and took some of their children. She did not dare to raise the subject, this reminding her of darker times. Not to mention she felt it wasn’t her place to do so. Instead, she sent them invitations after invitations, and wools and woods to keep them warm for winter.

“Where is Alys? She did not attend me this morning,” She asked suddenly.
“I don’t know, your Grace,” replied a girl named Anne. “She should have come back from nursing her sick parents yesterday, but I did not see her.”

“No need for her to come back at all if it is to neglect her duties. I gave her three days. I even gave her a delay. And still, she is not there. Tell her that.”

“I will, your Grace.”

“Oh, and have a bed and a supper done for that woman that came before me today,” she added. “She will need it, after her long travel.”

Lya, the youngest and the most eager, replied with a joyful impatience that she would transmit the order, before going into the wrong way. The others caught her and told her where she should go.

Sansa almost smiled. She reminded her of Arya, when she was young.

They went out of the Great Hall, leaving the noise behind.

The door closed behind her, Sansa stopped suddenly on her tracks, her eyes staring at what was presented in front of her. A memory of what once was, one she tended to avoid looking for too long.

Her heart skipped a beat.

It was for her lady mother that Father had built this sept. Theirs may not have been a love match, but feelings came with time. For a long time she dreamed of a hero that would save her, that would kill the monsters that surrounded her.

But no hero came. Instead, there was Littlefinger, who threw her into another monster’s den. Instead, there was Theon, who witnessed her abuse and became kin of sufferings to her.

What little delivery she gained, it was from herself. She was the one who got Theon to stand up. The one who convinced Jon to act and fight.

The Knights of the Vale came at her request. And now they were still here.

*What are you afraid of?* She tried to convince herself. *They are your people. They come from Westeros just like you. Your brother is the King of the Six Kingdoms, and would never let them hurt you. You are Queen. No one can harm you now. No one would dare. You’re untouchable.*

Still, the fear was in her, telling her with the voice of Cersei Lannister that she was never going to be safe. That something was wrong. And she lived with that thought every day.

She looked longingly at the neglected sept, remembering the beautiful statues of her childhood. Father. Mother. Crone. Smith. Warrior. Maiden. Stranger. Their faces were a familiar sight to her, each feature drawn in her mind like a magnificent painting. Her mother once told her it gave her peace, and it made her feel like home, for she had thought for so long the Gods of her husband did not accept her. That the land did not accept her. So when Father ordered it to be built, she considered it as a sign. She could make it her own.

It was a sign of love and loyalty. Better than words uttered in any song.

At the time though, Sansa did not consider it like this. She had her heart full of dreams and grand gestures. Of fair maidens being rescued by noble knights. She wanted to be an Alysanne to a good king Jahaerys.
She wanted to be like the queen Cersei. Beautiful. Gracious.

A beautiful lie, she learned.

For that, with time, now that they were gone, Father and Mother’s relationship became her ideal of relationship, in a world in which dreams could be easily crushed and appearances were not what they seemed. They were the security of a home, when other things were destruction and pain.

Only one had fitted her description of that ideal, but as always she was bound to be disappointed.

Now she only prayed the Old Gods, for such Faith was the one that had been accepted as true in the North after the War for the Dawn.

Once, she thought so too. She was in her home. She was alive. She was the North.

But then Jon made her swear secrecy in front of the heart tree. Ever since then, the Face deeply carved in the wood seemed to glare at her. To reproach her not to have kept the secret. She swore she could see more of that bloody tears coming from the carved eyes…

But how could she not have done so?

The North was in danger. SHE was in danger.

The Gods certainly could not blame her. They should thank her. She was the one who got rid of usurpers who took her home. She was the one who thought to protect that home, and to unite the northern lords to their banners.

And this woman, barely older than her, but so different, so confident…

She could not bear to look at her, for it was like looking at the Stranger. She was beautiful, no doubt for that. She had even Jon and Tyrion Lannister dancing around her fingers. But Cersei Lannister too had been beautiful.

Why her? She had asked. Why would she be allowed to get everything when she, Sansa Stark, had had to survive hardship and abuse to finally go back home?

There’s more to that, had said Jon when she asked him. But how could she believe that?

Cersei had shown herself to be kind and gracious when she met her.

She used her.

Margaery took her under her wing and said they would be like sisters.

To use her.

There couldn’t be more than that. She couldn’t bear to think of it. And she couldn’t let her heart be engaged in such a matter.

Hope was only in herself. And the North. She couldn’t expect anything good from what was beyond that.

Jon had betrayed them. He had been bewitched by her, that foreign queen who came with her dragons and her barbarous soldiers. A queen who made him give up everything, his crown, the loyalty of his subjects…
She remembered hearing the lords. She remembered thinking, “what if it was me? What if I could do better?”. That thought stayed on her mind and never left her.

He still went in the South to fight for that tyrant anyway. He never once took time to listen to her.

Telling the Truth would save her, she had thought. Telling the Truth would save the North. With Jon as a King in the South, she would be safe in the North. No tyrant to make her beg. To make her surrender everything ever again.

She knew Jon. She knew what he would do, and how loyal he would be to his family, his true family. He was like her father in that way, and it was what sometimes brought him to perilous situations. He was predictable like that, and that was what she liked and hated most about him.

She knew that if she managed to convince him once to take back Winterfell, he would continue to help her in the end. And if he failed… If he died on the way…

She shook her head, trying to get rid of these disturbing thoughts. No, it would not be her fault. Nobody could accuse her of wanting him to do so. She had told him so.

Still, there were times when she thought… Wouldn’t it have been easier?

Fight every battle in your mind, Littlefinger had told her. And he had been right. It was that way of thinking that had saved her.

Daenerys Targaryen was the unknown in the scenarios she could imagine in her mind. She was that wild card that could destroy everything she would try to build so hard. A conqueror, a woman that came with strange customs, and with the shadow of madness and tyranny stuck to her, waiting to become one with her.

History still had the marks of these shadows. Harrenhal still bore the scars the dragons left them.

More were to come, Bran had said. Doom would come.

When she saw her, the nightmares in her head took shape.

And this was certainly not appeased by the way Jon looked at her, as if she was the light that guided him in the dark. As if he would destroy everything just to be with her…

She couldn’t deal with that glimpse of this side of Jon. That side was a stranger to her. She did not think she could convince him to do anything.

But when she saw doubts in him… She realized he could be saved. He could come back, just as he was before. All would be just as it always was, and maybe more…

Daenerys Targaryen needed to be destroyed. The world was already dangerous by itself. They did not need her to make it worse.

No, Sansa needn’t doubt about that. She was right. It was what mattered.

The following events proved her right. That was the most important. Surely.

When she heard of it, she was almost relieved. But then came the dread. And the guilt. But none of these feelings survived the weight of the crown.

“Your Majesty?” Jeyne’s voice interrupted her thoughts. “Is something wrong?”
She took a long breath of air and continued her way. A queen should not feel. Should not fear.

She repeated it in her mind a long time before answering.

“No, Jeyne. It’s not. I’m going to pray now.”

The maiden bowed and followed her at the Godswood, silent shadows behind her. Some stopped at the Guest House at her order to prepare for supper. But the others were still here, and though a part of her wanted to talk, to laugh, and to forget everything, another knew better. She was not a girl anymore. She was a queen. And queens should not get too attached to some of their subjects specifically. Too much favor could be dangerous.

She knelt in front of the heart tree, trying to ignore its sinister eyes on her, and prayed. But her heart was not in it, nor was her faith.

She always thought being queen was all she ever wanted. All she could ever dream of. She had asked for it in all her youthful glory. And then she learned the price of it, and once she felt it was too much.

But then came the time when it seemed like the only solution.

Being queen meant having power. Having power meant she was safe, and no one could ever use her again.

At least that’s what she thought. But experiences had left their doubts in her and she couldn’t shake them.

If only she could be someone else, she thought. Someone with a free heart. Someone who could choose. Someone who would love and be loved in return.

It would be so sweet.

Chapter End Notes

There, the trap is completely set. But who are the hunters, I wonder?

PS: Now coming each saturday, because of job issues.
The raven had been following them since the beginning, from the day they arrived at the wall. It was an insisting, persistent creature that croaked every time they looked at it, as some kind of sinister presage. Arya found herself looking at its feathers, bright with the moonlight. It was a nervous thing, ruffling them more and more every day, leaving some part of it on its way.


She could find some kindred in it, though she did not know how this feeling came to be. It was in her, like a sense of belonging she did not feel since a long time. Like the dreams she had night after night, where she was Nymeria and Nymeria was her, a huntress protecting her pack.

“Are you sure it is going to work?” A seductive voice came at her right.

She smiled, then closed her eyes, trying to ignore the thrill on her spine.

“Oh, it will.” She replied. “I know the man.”

Nine days. Nine days since they found their way to the North, and she defied several people in duels, preferably wildlings found too close to this side of the Wall, and impersonating someone much, much taller than her.

Gendry had looked at her with wide eyes when she put her disguise at first. But he did not question her. Though she had heard his laugh ringing in her ears while she did so.

“My name is Brienne of Tarth,” she would say to the one she would vanquish. “Go beyond the Wall and spread the word. Scream it until it came to Tormund Giantsbane. Tell him to come find me here.”

She shook her head, smiling.

“But he sure is taking his time,” She added in afterthought.

Gendry chuckled.

“You’ve always been impatient.”

“Maybe,” she said. “But it is an important matter.”

“You think?” He said, amused. “So much that you have to make a whole scheme just to get one person?”

She looked at him in the eyes, her mouth in a thin line.

“You’ve been here with me. You’ve seen what happened,” She said. “And the one I’m waiting for won’t come for pretty eyes. At least not mine.”

The former blacksmith cocked his head, considering.

“Doubt he would come tonight,” He said. “Maybe…”
She shook her head.

“No. You can go. I’ll stay.”

He sighed.

“You know I won’t leave without you. You might try to escape me.”

She felt a smile slowly finding its way on her face. An opening. One of too many since he found her. Each day she found herself more and more drawn to him, more… at ease. It troubled her more than she would have liked. She was letting her guard down, she realized, and somehow she didn’t mind.

“Am I the one escaping?” She teased. “Or you? Surely all Storm’s End must wonder where their lord must be.”

He shifted, then smiled sheepishly.

Suddenly they heard a loud yell and fighting from behind the Wall.

“My lady…” one of the brothers fidgeted behind them. “There’s someone…”

“This must be him.” She interrupted him, before walking down the stairs.

Briskly, she ran towards the gate and avoided barely colliding with the other brothers, who looked at her with wide eyes. Then she stopped to take her breath.

There he was. Tormund Giantsbane, his fire-kissed hair contrasting outrageously with his dull surroundings. His fists were hitting the gate, as if he thought he could break the metal that easily.

“LET ME IN!” He was yelling. “I HAVE A BEAUTY WAITING FOR ME HERE!!”

Gendry took a step back, wary, but she laughed and ordered the opening of the gate.

“Aaahh…” She heard him say, relieved, before finally noticing her. “My little wolf!”

Fiercely, he took her in his arms and raised her as if she was a child. Gendry got closer, protesting, but she gestured him not to intervene.

Finally, he let her go. His hands on her shoulders, he took a step back and looked at his surroundings, his eyes with an eager glint.

Until it disappeared suddenly, and his lips gathered into a pout.

“Where’s the big woman?”

She laughed.

“Still South, with a handful of guards following her every order. It’s good to see you, Tormund.”

“You little vixen,” He mumbled, visibly disappointed “I made all the way with the little crow over there.”

“Jon is there?”

Her eyes widened in glee, and she couldn’t help the smile on her face.
How good it would be to see him, to talk to him. After all this time.

Surely, this time, it will be like before. Surely, this time he would tousle her hair and call her… What did he call her? She did not remember. She just knew he had once a special name for her.

But when he looked down and sighed, she felt her blood turning cold.

Something was wrong.

“I have to show it to you,” He said seriously, before pointing to a barrow behind him, fully covered with furs. “You’re his sister. You should know. Help me enter with this. Somewhere warm. Somewhere away from prying eyes.”

“I have spotted a room on the ground room of one of the tower. The windows are high, too high and small for someone to take a look without breaking his neck.”

“That should do.”

She nodded, then sent an interrogating glance towards Gendry.

“He can come too,” Tormund sighed. “Strong like a bull, that one. That should be enough to lift all of it.”

“Can’t you just let it outside?” Gendry remarked.

The Giantsbane glared. “Don’t be foolish boy.”

Arya looked at her lover, trying to get him to agree. He sighed, then offered his help.

The barrow was heavy, and somehow she thought she could see the furs lifting themselves slightly. That must be just me, she thought. I haven’t slept a lot these days…

One of the brothers was guarding the door, and she asked him to open the door. Tormund blinked, then narrowed his eyes, stopping on his tracks.

“You,” He snarled. “You’re not one of us. I remember you. But where do I remember you?”

The weight of the barrow was now shared painfully by Gendry and hers.

“Tormund?” She asked.

He looked towards her, then sent a last glare towards the man.

“You. I’m watching you.”

The poor boy was shaking as he opened the doors and let them in. He did not wait too long before running away.

Once the barrow was in, they took a time to look around, seeing the frugal little room, containing a few chairs, a table and a bed which smelled of rotten straw. Gendry raised and lightened the few candles, and then closed the doors.

Tormund sprawled onto a chair and let out a loud whimper.

“Where is Jon, Tormund?” Arya said worriedly. “Where is my brother?”
He closed his eyes, his fingers massaging his temples. Then he gestured towards the barrow

“Here. That’s where he is.”

Gendry raised on eyebrow.

“In the barrow?”

“Easier to carry.”

She got closer, almost afraid of what she may find. Her hand reached out.

“Is he…?” Gendry began.

Unsure, she stopped, and so did her heart. She opened her mouth, trying to let go of that uneasy feeling that came with doubt.

“Dead?” Tormund laughed loudly. Arya breathed out. “Nah boy. Would have been better if he was. This bastard still breathes fine. Whispers sometimes. But still fine, though frost is taking over his body.”

Arya turned towards him, surprised.

“Whispers? What would he be whispering for?”

The Giantsbane sighed.

“The dragon queen’s name.” He said. “Over and over again.”

“Still?”

“Still.”

Silence came after this declaration, and memories came to Arya, messing with her mind.

She did not want to reconsider. No, she did not want that.

But then why…?

“The others wanted to kill him.” Tormund added in afterthought. “Exiled me when I said no.”

“And why didn’t you let them?”

Gendry crossed his arms.

Arya’s eyes widened. How could he think such thing?

“He’s my friend,” Tormund glared, then faltered. “And I made a promise. If this bastard has to die, it must be by the hand of a woman who loves him.”

“To whom did you make that promise?”

“Ygritte,” He looked at the barrow thoughtfully. His eyes were sad and soft. “He broke her heart. She wanted his heart to be ripped out by someone who cares.”

During that, Arya had taken a step closer, consider what she at first thought was furs, but then… Something was bothering her.
“What is this?” Arya asked.

“Warg’s skin. Some said it prevents evil to look for the man who holds it.”

“Whose skin?”

The red-haired man shook his head.

“You don’t want to know.”

She reached out, touching the cover. She needed to see him. To touch him. See if it was true.

“Don’t!”

But it was too late. The cover was already slipping from Jon Snow’s figure, and she could see his face, with long scars trailing from his eyes to his neck. His lips were moving lightly, as if he was trying to say something. But his eyes were closed, and a frown obscured his features.

She gasped and let the cold invade her stomach, feeling it with dread and sorrow.

What happened to you? She wanted to say. What happened to us?

We went our own way, she thought, distraught. The pack died. I shouldn’t have gone. I should have joined him…

For a few minutes, no one dared to say anything.

“I… need to go.” Gendry said, finally finding his voice.

Arya turned towards him, surprised.

“Where?”

“Where? Well… I need some fresh air.”

Arya raised an eyebrow.

“The air is already fresh here.”

“… Out. There.”

At these words, he left the room, taking care of Weird. She did not know he was that sensitive over a body.

Some things may have changed over time. Despite what he declared, maybe being a lord changed him…

Or was it?

She shook her head.

“What happened? Tell me, Tormund.” She pleaded, looking in the clear blue eyes of Jon’s friend. “Please.”

He sighed.
“This is no happy story, lass.”

“I want to hear it nonetheless.”

He considered it some time, then his face turned dark.

“The first weeks, he was good. He had a purpose and helped us find a place to set a camp and live, finally. But then, when we were finally here, and nothing to do but rest and enjoy, he began to act strangely. Bad dreams, he would say. Couldn’t sleep without it. His wolf was becoming more and more restless, and he less and less talkative. Always brooding. Irritable. Sometimes… unavailable. He wouldn’t have wanted me to know, but each night I could hear him. Cry. Scream. Plead. Once he scratched his skin till it bled. And then it happened. Once a woman went to his tent and tried to… well, have her way with him. He threw her out. Her companion did not like it and went after her and him. That’s when he snapped. Killed them. It was a bloody mess, and his wolf was covered with it. It growled at everyone. Jon was on his knees, and he began to hit the soil with his own hands. Then he stopped, and Ghost attacked once more.”

He stopped a little, taking a long breath while Arya tried to process it.

“He’s a skinchanger, your brother. Did you know that?”

She shook her head, trying to put aside her own dreams. No, that couldn’t be that.

A drop of the wolf’s blood, as her father used to said. Surely, he couldn’t refer to that?

“Seems like he didn’t know either. Lost himself to it, until his soul did not know which body was his own. Become more a beast by each day. And people were attacked more and more.”

“No…. He wouldn’t!” She protested.

Tormund sighed.

“Grief does terrible things to people. Drives them mad.”

“But you said he was fine until then?”

“I don’t know, lass. I’ve seen a lot of things happened. I’ve seen men forget for a while their troubles for a greater purpose, and then throw it all away when that that purpose is gone. These things happen. It may seem like irrational, but men were never known to be completely rational.”

He stopped once more, staring at the walls, avoiding her gaze. “The others did not want him anymore. Wanted him to die. I couldn’t let it. He’s a lot of things, your brother. But he’s my friend. I couldn’t let it happen. Not when he couldn’t even defend himself.”

“But…” She tried to press the matter.

“Corn. Corn. Corn.”

Arya jumped, surprised.

The raven. It was on the highest window, looking at them.

It had followed them here.

Tormund jumped from his chair, taking his weapon from his belt.

“This little bastard… There’s something wrong with it.” He uttered menacingly. “It keeps getting
closer and closer.”

And indeed it did. Until finally it flew away and charged towards Jon’s body.

“It’s trying to eat his eyes!” Tormund yelped.

Swiftly, without even another thought, Arya took a dagger from her belt and threw it at the bird. She looked at the eyes of it as life was leaving the creature, and blinked.

Realization and horror came to her. The girl and Tormund looked at each other, then nodded. They understood what it meant, although none dared to voice it aloud.

After it, it was decided. They would take turn to guard the body. They were bounded by the loyalty and friendship. They could not fail him, she thought.

It was the second day when suddenly Gendry returned. She did not even bother to ask him where he had been, so worried she had been about leaving Jon’s side. Tormund was outside, taking a break. He would soon return to give her food…

“Arya, you need to sleep now,” Gendry said.

She shook her head.

“I have to guard him. Else…”

“Else what?”

She snapped, feeling her blood boiling in her veins. All the emotions she had restrained came rushing at her, begging her for release.

“He’s my brother, Gendry. When I was little, he was the one who really understood me. But then, we parted. He went north, I went south. But we still found our way to each other. At least… I thought we were reunited. But he was… different.”

“Different how?”

Her voice cracked.

“I could not reach him. Not like before. And, I… was different then.”

She tried to gather her thoughts.

“Once I thought it was because of the dragon queen. But then…”

Outside, a wolf howled in the night, and she thought she heard the clippings of wings.

Inside, a loud sigh came from Jon’s lips. Then, nothing.

Arya’s eyes widened.

“He stopped breathing. Why did he stop breathing??”

She raised, then jumped towards Jon.

“Jon, wake up!!” She cried, shaking the body by his shoulders. “Wake up, brother! Come back to me! Come back to us!”
“Arya…”

No, she thought. She couldn’t lose him. Not once again…

Gendry took her gently in his arms, and she let him caress her hair.

Jon would do that when she was little.

She cried and cried, until she thought blood would come from her eyes instead of salted water.

“He can’t,” She whimpered. “Not him. Not again. Call a red priest. Anyone! We can save him! We must save him!”

“It’s too late, lass. Even if he came back again, he wouldn’t be the same.”

Tormund. He had entered the room without a sound, seen the scene before him and verified it.

Now she could feel his hand soothingly on her shoulder.

He wouldn’t be the same.

If he came back…

The words ringed at her ears until her eyes closed themselves from tears and exhaustion and she let herself fall into sleep.

When she woke up, she was in another room, firmly tucked under covers. The moon was still glowing, full and big in the darkened sky.

She must have been out for an hour. Maybe two.

She raised.

No, that couldn’t end this way, she thought.

A purpose. I need a purpose, she thought. He can’t be dead. He’s not.

She had to focus on her other objective. Not to think about it.

She couldn’t afford to lose herself to grief now. He wouldn’t want that.

She was not here for him. But maybe, she could be here for Sansa. If there was still time.

There must be some time, she thought with anguish. I can’t lose her too. She’s the only family left…

She raised and came to the common room, where the brothers stared at her as if she was a ghost.

They never did accept her anyway when she came.

Gendry raised, worried eyes on her. “You shouldn’t…”

“Where is he?” She interrupted, staring at Tormund.

“Somewhere where no one can reach him without me noticing. Your guy helped me.”

“Arya…” Gendry began.
His hand was too close to her. Now was not the time to fall back into tears once again.

“Let’s drink,” she said abruptly. “Now.”

He looked, unsure, and Tormund shrugged. He was already on his fourth cup. A certain understanding seemed to come between them, and he sat down.

And the ale began to flow.

That’s when the last brother went out that she found enough strength to reveal what she had seen at the villages.

Tormund raised an eyebrow, disbelieving.

“Us free folks don’t care anymore for your lordly things. Did not really helped us once the war was won.”

“Sansa would have…” Arya tried to intervene.

“Your sister queen never truly spoke to us, and I don’t believe her little kneelers would have liked that,” Tormund laughed bitterly. “The Wall was barely guarded last time I came. Anyone could enter and exit as they bloody wanted. Especially these kneelers. Told us politely to scam, so we did.”

“Oh. So you don’t have means to know, then.”

She would have wanted an easy answer. She would have wanted to shake that uneasy feeling that came to her since she came back. But she should have known she wouldn’t get it.

Tormund looked at her with sympathy in his eyes, and his voice softened.

“Show me that thing you wanted me to, girl,” He said. “Then I’ll tell.”

She did not want his sympathy. She wanted information.

She glared at him, then put out one of the borrowed swords from her belt and showed him. Her eyes inspected his expression, waiting for any sign.

But he only shrugged.

“That is a fine blade. It’s been a long time we did not see such thing.” He swung it a little bit, as if to test its swiftness. But Arya suspected it was more to upset Gendry, who was seemingly cautious of the wildling. “Can’t be the Thenns. They’re ferocious enough. But they would have used their own hands and stayed for a little feast.”

Her mind was dizzy.

“But if it’s not from your people, who can it be?” She complained, turning her cup with her hand. “Who could do such thing?”

Tormund shrugged and served himself once again. She could see the foam of it flowing on his beard as he drank it. He exhaled, satisfied, then continued.

“Someone who would gain from it, certainly. Someone who would want a war with the free folk. Though I wouldn’t dare to know why.”
"You shouldn’t think about it, Arya," Gendry intervened, intertwining his fingers with hers. "You’re in grief. You won’t find the answer when you’re in this state. Maybe we should go."

She laughed bitterly, raising her cup in an attempt at mockery.

“And go to Sansa’s feast without answer and see the lords surround her like a moth to a f…?”

It clicked, and finally she realized.

The cup slipped from her hand, and its fall echoed in the room.

“It is that, isn’t it? A war is coming,” she declared with a voice that sounded not like her own. “I can feel it… And it’s coming at us from the inside.”

She looked at the other men in the room and raised, panicked.

She had to leave quickly. She had to prevent someone. Anyone. Sansa. Bran, maybe…

No. Not Bran, she thought. Bran would have known this, like he always did. Bran would have…

But if he knew… Then why…?

“I’m sending ravens.”

She was almost at the door when she felt hands stopping her. She turned towards the culprit and felt the waves of the alcohol trouble her vision.

“Boy, what are you…” Tormund began, numbed by the ale.

“Sorry Arya.” Gendry said taking her gently but firmly in his arms, crossing her hands on her chest while doing so. “I can’t let you do that.”

Her eyes widened, and that’s when she felt something hit her on the head.

Gendry’s eyes followed her fall as his arms eased it. She blinked.

He was here since the beginning. Always telling her to give up… Always telling her the wrong way…. And all these talks about things not being what they thought they were?

Could it be?

“You should have known, Arya,” She told herself before letting the darkness surround her. “You shouldn’t have let your guard down.”

From far away, she thought she heard her sister laugh at her mistake.

A laugh that wasn’t really the one she had when she was young. But more like the one she had when she was surrounded by enemies.

…

…
A.N.: Next chapter will be the Woman of Driftmark. I hope you liked it. Gendrya (and Jon's) fans... please don't hit me.
Patience had never been one of Reina’s qualities. As a child, she had always been the one to jump from her seat impatiently once the lesson with the other women was done. They called her windy, for her moods were known around the castle, and for the swiftness of her feet.

But wait, she must now, even if it ripped her out. A waiting without answer, only doubts. Waiting for life. Waiting for death. She was prepared for both. That was the path she had chosen long ago.

She was no Reina Snow anymore. What she was exactly now, she did not know. But what she did know was that they called her “the woman of Driftmark” when they thought she was not listening.

The Bastard and his Woman. What a terrific title. She quite liked that accentuation they gave on the “woman” as if it was something dangerous, versatile. Something they should be wary of.

She was no lady. That title irked her like a badly laced corset. She had had a formal education, but it was mostly a way her lord father found to get forgiveness for what happened. A pity that everyone told her she should bow to, that she should be thankful for.

She did not. She was not.

Many told her she had been treated as a princess. But that was the problem with princesses. What they sought was to make her kneel and be thankful for it. What they sought was appearances. A pretty face, and a mouth that only sang pretty songs. They did not care who she really was. She was just another subject for them to prove to themselves they were right, that they were good.

She was no porcelain doll. If she had to wait, she better got herself occupied.

And the subject of her current occupation was a young lord, sick since several weeks, with few moments of recovery. Servants had told her to stay away from him, saying she would get the same illness. But that only encouraged her more.

She had promised. And she intended to keep that promise.

She was the first up, taking Monterys’ food to his chambers, opening the windows to get a brief change of salted air, different from the one illness brought with it once it decided to take someone hostage to its agonies. She would order a bath, call the maid to help him wash, and change the wetted sheets, replacing them with clean, fresh ones. Then she would read him a story to entertain him.

Servant or lady, she had been raised for both. But somehow, that education tended to disturb both commoners and highborns. She was at the same time in and out. In all the discussions. Out of traditional rank. She was a scandal among them, a curiosity.
At least, until came another… she thought.

“You’re extraordinary, you know, “ Lord Monterys’ voice came weakly at her, interrupting her thoughts.

Reina patted his hand, feeling the bone salient through the skin. The child barely ate, and it showed. She tried to wave it off.

“Oh, don’t be a drama queen. Next you’re going to say you love me. You’ll live. I did not spend all my mornings in that shallow room just so the Stranger takes you.”

He laughed weakly.

“Oh,” he said. “You took to the new Gods, then.”

“The Olds have no ears here.” She retorted; “And I never truly believed in them anyway.”

“You shouldn’t say that. The king…”

She made a neglectful gesture, putting a lazy smile on her face.

“I know. But you know me. Strange and inconsequent. No one would be surprised.”

“But you’re also the wife of my brother. That counts for something.”

The boy was cleverer than others his age. Reina sighed. Sometimes it was not enough.

She had known a lot of clever boys. But somehow, it was also the ones who left the most.

She remembered of one in particular…

“Yes it does.”

She remembered one morning after a battle, where eyes were on her, and she smiled and danced, happy to be alive. She remembered a voice, kisses in the dark and unkept promises.

She shook her head. That time was now a memory, as others. She had to move on. Leave the guilt behind. Such was her life now.

His little hand gripped hers, as if he was trying to absorb a bit of her strength to talk once more. But sleep was already taking him, making his eyes slowly close and his breath becoming less ragged.

He was no better, despite her treatments. She could not delusion herself long about that point. All she could do was try, again and again.

“And… Aurane… Where is he?”

She sighed. “Still gone. But he will return soon.”

“I want… to see him. One last time.”

“And another time again. We’re not ready to lose you, little lord.”

He smiled dreamingly. “Thank you, Reina. You’ll be a great lady. Without you I would have been so alone… I’m sorry not to have seen that before…”

He wasn’t listening to her at that point.
She kissed his forehead. Sweat had begun to drop once again.

“You’re not the worst thing that had happened to me, young lord,” she whispered softly to him. “Stay a little longer, won’t you?”

He did not answer. But what could he actually say? He did not know what had happened. Did not know of that man that came at her door for a right she thought had been abolished long ago…

She shouldn’t think of that time. Not now. Not ever. It was all done with.

She waited some minutes more, then got up, leaving the room.

He would certainly be awake in one or two hours and be very groggy. But at least it would give her time for other things. She had duties now. She had to make sure they were fulfilled.

As she walked out, a woman came to her with hurried steps and panic distorting her face.

Alya, she remembered. She had once been so condescending. Now she was soft and nervous as a young lamb.

“Ma’am!” The servant cried. “My lady… The child, she’s gone again.”

She sighed, then gestured for her to watch her voice, for Monterys was sleeping. She waited a little, trying to grasp any change in the other room. Then when she found none, she turned towards the servant. She crossed her arms, irritated.

“Didn’t I tell you to watch her?”

“She’s swift, that girl.”

“She must be at the lighthouse. That’s when she goes most frequently. What are you waiting for?”

Alyn’s eyes widened considerably.

“But… My lady… You know I’m afraid of heights!”

The young woman shook her head. She had to get once more that willful girl back. As if she hadn’t enough. If she had known marrying Aurane Waters would have included taking care of two children, then maybe she would have tried a bit more to escape that fate.

A voice at the background of her mind replied to her that her complains meant nothing, for she cared for them nonetheless. She sighed.

No, these tasks weren’t the problem, even if problems there had been since the beginning…

“Go to the kitchens. Lord Monterys will need his soup when he wakes up.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

She watched her leave with her usual nervous stance and shrugged, amused.

The sooner she would get to the lighthouse, the sooner she could go back.

Smiling, she took off her long skirt, revealing her leather breeches. It was easier to run with it, and to climb the many steps of the lighthouse. She put the skirt on the handle of her door, then went on her current mission.
Monterys would certainly not approve if he knew. Aurane would be amused. But that was the way she was. She did what was expected of her. How did it matter the way she was doing it?

They may call her eccentric all they wanted. They may remark on her unladylike behavior. But this was now her home, and she had already shown them how she intended to care for them. They could talk all they wanted, but in the end, everyone knew where she stood.

They were now very few to be truly shocked when they saw her like that, running in breeches, from one task to another. Maybe it was the way it was, the sea separating them from the rest of the world, making the island a haven where things were more easily accepted. Nevertheless she took pleasure in that little bit of freedom, making her remember her childhood when she was actually escaping lessons.

Thinking it, she could totally understand the little girl that was now hiding in the lighthouse.

She just would have liked it if it wasn’t that far, and with so many steps.

She climbed them two by two, trying to ignore the pain that came at her side while doing so.

Then suddenly she was here, near the flame. Looking at the window eagerly, as if something might appear at any moment.

“Come on, young lady! You shouldn’t be here at that time!”

The child turned back to her, defiant as a little animal.

“Sandei, ma’am. That’s how she called me. That’s how I want to be called. Not lady.”

Reina smiled, taking on the picture of her near the window, her hand still gripping the sill.

For weeks she had tried to find some similitudes between her husband and that little girl he brought two months ago, telling her that she was his bastard and that she would be kept here and treated like a princess. She found none. Not in the soft brown eyes nor the black curly hair. Not in the heart-shape face nor the color of the skin.

She found herself very silly to think of such things, especially considering her own motives.

She knew what she had. She knew the worth of it.

And that was more than enough.

“She wouldn’t want you out like this, unprotected either,” Reina retorted.

The young girl’s face fell. She was about to cry.

Reina sighed, then opened her arms. Sandei glared at her through wetted lashes, then jumped on her.

The first days, she had been crying, calling for someone. “Mhysa”, she called. Reina had been quite jealous at first, she had to admit. Who was she? Where was her mother? Why did Aurane bring her?

Very few answers came. And with Aurane often gone, it was difficult to get them by him. But she could try to guess. The girl at first knew few words in their language, and her accent made her think of Essosi merchants.
“Mhysa” meant “mother” from what she had learnt. The girl missed her mother. Why she wasn’t with her, she did not really know. At least, not until that girl finally let her guards down one sunny afternoon and let out that her mhysa had sent her there to be protected, to prevent her from getting hurt, and that she had an important work to do.

At this, Reina could not help but feel for the girl. She knew that kind of situation.

She smiled lightly, caressing lightly the girl’s back before looking at her in the eyes.

“Do you remember what she told you, before she left?”

Sandei sniffed a little, trying to get her breath right before answering.

“Mhysa… She told me I was her strength. That she needed me safe.”

Reina nodded, encouraging her. But somehow, it disturbed the girl more.

“… But she might not come back. No, she might not come back. She told me…”

She tutted, shaking her head lightly.

“Your Mhysa must love you very much.”

Sandei’s eyes widened, and she looked at her the way some children did, as if they were surprised that people didn’t know what they did.

“Mhysa is not mine. Mhysa is Mhysa to all of us.”

Reina dismissed that last part, for the girl’s body was shaking once again.

“But you said so yourself. You are her strength. No matter where she is, she’ll always be with you. And you’ll always be with her.”

“That’s what Mhysa said.”

The woman of Driftmark nodded.

“Monterys will be soon awake. Maybe you should go to him. He needs a friend. And I believe you need it too.”

Sandei’s eyes widened in wonder.

“May I? With lord Monterys?”

Reina chuckled in amusement.

“Mhysa had said you are a princess, right? That we should treat you like one? Lords bow to princesses.”

“But if he is my friend, I don’t want him to bow.”

“Then you deserve the world,” Reina smiled, caressing her cheek. “Go ahead. Go to him. But before that…”

Sandei turned her head, curious.

“Put a smile on that face,” Reina added mischievously, pinching lightly her cheeks. “You don’t
want to show him your tears, don’t you?”

Sandei grinned, showing a warm, albeit a bit crooked, smile, before running out of the lighthouse.

Reina counted the steps she took, then turned towards the woman who had arrived by the time she talked to Sandei. She was wary of that one. Always lurking in corners with a disapproving glance.

“Are you sure, ma’am, that it’s proper for that girl to go see the lord?”

Reina sighed. “They’re both children, with no other parents than us. They need all the support they can get. So why not in each other?”

She turned her head towards the window, her eyes looking at the sea.

“Still no mention of Aurane?” She asked, weary. “Of what he could do, where he could be?”

“Ma’am… I mean, my lady. None. Not that I’m aware of.”

Reina, she wanted to scream. My name is Reina. I’m not just any lady.

“He should have gotten back long ago,” she mused.

What was keeping him?

“On the other hand…” the woman added, handing her a roll. “I found this this morning. The raven had sent it.”

She read the letter, then put it on her beating heart. She smiled. Relief had come to her in violent waves and she delighted in it. She stayed silent a moment, savoring the instant. Then she put it in the fire, watching it burn little by little.

“So what are we doing, my lady?”

She tried to control the excitement that was raising in her. Finally her wait was finished.

“It had already begun,” She said calmly. “Send the men. We need to prepare.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey! I hope you liked it.

Next chapter (Arya) is already near completion. So here’s a little excerpt to keep you waiting:

“No, Arya Stark. I am no witch. But I know men. Women in power make them uneasy, so they’re making excuses, when they cannot kill us. We are either enchantresses or men in disguise. But behind that, there’s fear. There’s always fear, for no woman should take a man’s place.”

“Women are important too,” She couldn’t help but reply.
Daenerys smiled. “Yes they are. We are proofs of that.”

See you soon!
This chapter is a real roller-coaster of emotions (at least it had been for me), and I hope I gave it enough justice. In the end, it was too long, and I thought it was all happening too fast, so I decided to separate it. This part’s theme is “Hollow Talk” by Choir of Young Believers. Next chapter will be Tyrion’s (and then once again Arya). I hope you will enjoy it nonetheless!

She was trapped, nowhere to escape. She was tied, helpless and afraid. Her struggles only made the knots tighter and tighter, while men were sneering at her. She could smell their rancid breath, and the fear coming from them. They should have been her preys, and they knew this. But still some dared to laugh at her, to mock her...

If only she had enough strength to throw herself at them, to eat these glinting eyes and to delight in their blood and screams...

If only...

Arya’s eyes opened and she gasped, shaken by the realization of her dream.

Nymeria was in danger. She could feel it in all her being, from her toes to the roots of her hair. It ran through her like a winter chill but had the effect of an abrupt thunder. She tried to raise and leave, but it only gave her two vital information, she realized as she tripped and was caught up in strong arms.

One. She was in chains.

Two. She knew these arms.

“Stop moving. You’re going to hurt yourself,” Gendry’s voice came whispering longingly in her ears.

She pushed him back, anger filling her as the memory of his betrayal came to her. But by doing so, it unsettled her balance and she fell back. He tried to kneel and help her, but her glare stopped him.

“Don’t. Ever. Touch me again.” She snarled.

“Oh, Arya…”

His hand was about to caress her cheek, but her head turned away.

“You betrayed me! You knocked me out!” She scowled.

Gendry blinked, then raised up, flicking the dust from his leather tunic. A sign of nervousness, she knew that.
He had rights to be nervous, she thought bitterly. If she wasn’t restrained… If she could only raise up…

… What would she do?

She blinked, surprised by her own uncertainty.

“I’m sorry about that. I panicked. But…”

“Everything that’s before but is horseshit,” she snapped. “That’s what…”

“… your father said,” He smiled, then nodded. But looking at her, he lost his smile, then shook his head. He paced in the room without daring to look at her, until suddenly he turned towards her, a determinate look in his eyes. “Yes. These are wise words when it comes to court, and flattery can get you somewhere. However, we’re not in court here. And I was about to tell you I never promised anything. I’m here to tell you what I think. What I truly think. And you’re going to listen”

But she wasn’t ready to let him.

“So, who did you betray me for?” She continued attacking, a wolf trapped in a dead-end. “Are you with these lords without honor who want to set aside my sister?”

All this time, he was here, with her, and she believed him. She let him be with her. She let herself be in his arms. She trusted him. And him… He threw it all away. For what? To whom?

He crossed his arms, suddenly defiant, and glared at her. But then he took off his tunic and revealed the shirt underneath.

Arya’s eyes widened. A three headed dragon brooch adorned it.

How could that be?

“The Wall had not been properly attended for months. Filling it with men favorable to the cause was easy to do, when they presented themselves among the other rejects of your sister and your brother. It was here the whole time. You just had to look,” He stared at her with cold eyes and had a brief, bitter laugh that provoke a chill down her spine. “Or maybe you were too occupied with taking it off that you did not care to look for what I had become. What Westeros had become”

How could she miss it?

Too intoxicated by his presence, could she have been that blind?

“It can’t be,” she protested. “She is dead! The Targaryens are gone!!”

“She is not. Not anymore.”

He must have lost his mind, she thought. Certainly, there must have been a mistake.

How could she be alive??! After all this time??

The Gods were cruel, she knew that. But that much??

“She is a tyrant!” She tried again, trying to make him see.

“She is not. She…”
She leaned back, gritting her teeth at him.

“So you truly think Daenerys Targaryen is going to build a better world?” She sneered, trying to ignore the distress that was taking over her minute by minute. “How naïve you are.”

He crossed his arms and frowned. As if she was a child he had to reprimand!

She was tempted to laugh at him for his idiocy.

“I don’t think so. I know so.”

“So she has somehow some magical power to change the world and make it full of love and peace?”

“Well, one dragon helps,” He said pleasantly, as if it was all a jest.

She never knew that side of Gendry, and she couldn’t bear to look at it. Just thinking of it made her belly squirm painfully, and her thoughts wander in dangerous places.

It was the tone of a lord that did not care of anything. A lord that could laugh of anything.

What had become of you? She thought.

“You know the power of that dragon. You know the power of that woman.”

Did she make you like that? She thought, before shaking her head, surprised by the jealousy that came invading her thoughts.

“You don’t know her. You did not try.”

She laughed at his folly. It couldn’t be anything but. Had he seen the things she had? Had he seen that mad queen?

What had she done to him? She thought once again, the question becoming more and more of an obsession.

He really must have lost his mind.

“I know her enough. I’ve been in King’s Landing, you know,” She feered. “But you… you do?”

He sighed, then sat down, contemplating what he was about to say. He looked tired, and hurt by her answers.

Good, she thought. He had to suffer for what he had done.

At least she could be satisfied with that...

Could she?

“Don’t do as if I ignore completely what happened,” He replied, not daring to look into her eyes. “But then it’s your time to understand. When you left, I spent several months in Winterfell, hoping you would change your mind, hoping you would return. Then duties came pursuing me there, and suddenly I was in charge of a House I only knew of because of stories and rumors. I’m a smith, Arya, and a soldier. I’ve never been educated to be a lord. I ran away. I couldn’t bear all the responsibilities all alone with these people who wanted to use me as a toy. I felt betrayed. It killed me, you know, that you left like that without a second gaze, to go on your little adventure as if what
we had was nothing. As if I was nothing…”

Her heart jumped in her ribcage, and she couldn’t help it. It threatened to climb through her throat, and to get out by her lips.

“You weren’t…”

“You had a strange way to show me that,” he snapped, before sighing. “Leaving me and letting me in the dark! Show me one night that we could be more, then never look back once at me! I would have followed you anywhere, Arya. I would have abandoned any castle, just to be with you. But you… You did not want that, did you?”

She stared but could not reply. She felt numb, and tired.

He sighed, then continued.

“When I went to Storm’s End, everything was too much. Everyone was judging me. Expecting me to fail. I ran away and came to the Free Cities. I wanted to forget. I wanted to drink everything away. And then I met her again…”

“And you became lovers, isn’t it?”

“You really think I could want another one but you?” He scowled. “No. Not in Seven Hells. I was perplexed, at first, scared. I wanted to tell the whole world she was here again. But that woman… She saved my life. She showed me another way, far from all these games the lords and ladies play to get more power.”

Taken by an irritation she could barely hide, she tried to cross her arms, but the chains would not let her.

She frowned.

“You seem fond of her, for someone who’s not her lover.”

He smirked at her, visibly pleased by her reaction.

Bastard, she thought. Beautiful bastard.

“I admire her, I admit. You have not seen what I have seen.”

“And then you’re going to say she has a good heart.”

He chuckled. Someone called him and he nodded. He looked at her one last time, then waved before opening the door.

“Talk to her,” She heard him said. “Listen to her and you will know. I know it’s hard for you right now, but I believe in the end you will make the right decision.”

“I won’t!” She cried after him. “I HATE YOU!”

But he did not answer. He was already too far for her to reach. She was left in the cold, with the darkness of her thoughts surrounding her like a blanket.

And finally she came. The dragon queen. The one that started it all.

The nightmare they all thought was gone.
She came with the night, a fitting moment for one so dark.

Sansa would have delighted in that, she thought bitterly.

“Sorry for that inconvenience, lady Stark”, The doom of King’s Landing said formally. “I wish there could have been a better way.”

“A better way than being your prisoner? Surprising.”

“Lady Stark, we… we haven’t been properly introduced the last time…”


If she thought she would be a compliant prisoner, she had another thing coming.

But the woman did not flinch. Not even once.

“Fine… Arya.” The dragon queen said, ignoring her scowl. “My apologies for…”

“For what? Wanting to kill me? My sister?”

“I have no intention of killing you. Nor your sister. This is not the plan I have in mind.”

“But you do have a plan…”

“It is up to your sister to decide.”

“Decide what?”

“What she really wants. What is better for the people. And… for her.”

“And what is better for the people is you, isn’t it?”

She laughed bitterly.

“No. The small folk don’t care for who sits on a throne. But they care if that person changes their lives for the worse. They care if highborn use them for their wars and take the bread from them without promising anything in return. They care if lords forget them, mistreat them for a war they want no part of. Too many things happened. The seeds of rebellion have been set in their minds. Soon, they’ll fight for their freedom. For their rights. All they need now is a new and weaker despot for them to get confidence. One they would not be afraid to get rid of.”

“Who?”

The dragon queen raised an eyebrow at that question.

“I want to know the name of the one I will kill after I leave this place,” Arya said, smirking.

She was not afraid of death. She would smile at it.

“After me, I suppose,” Daenerys Targaryen sighed. “Fair enough, Arya Stark. You may have a name, but I doubt that name gets you anywhere.” She then stopped and leaned in, whispering in her ear.

Arya’s eyes widened and she gasped.

What could that mean?
But Daenerys did not elaborate more. She took a step back, then went to the window, looking at the horizon with a resigned glance.

“I’ve been to the South. Something is coming. I don’t know what. But people are disappearing. Babies and children are taken. Injustices are presented as justice by lords who seek their own gains. By a king who talks of future wrong doings. People are asking questions.”

How could she know that? Arya thought. Certainly it couldn’t be true. Bran was not like that, Bran was…

Bran was not the boy from her childhood, she remembered, bewildered. But certainly, he would not… Would he?

Daenerys gripped the windowsill and leaned in a little.

“Is it wrong of me to try to make them realize that no matter which tyrant tries to use them, they have the power to raise up?”

Silence only answered her as Arya tried to process all that was happening.

She really did not want to believe all of that. But then… When she looked back at it… The germs of doubts came nagging her on and on. She almost missed what the dragon queen said after that.

“I did terrible things. I know that. And I have to live with that until the end of my days, however short they may be.”

“Are you asking me?”

Daenerys raised her head, staring at her, then shook it.

“I’m not here to convince you that everything I do is right. I know you can make your own opinion.”

Arya shook her head. No. No. Enough of this nonsense. She would not believe it. Certainly, it could not be true. It was all… Too much.

No. It must be her. Only her. Hopefully…

“You talk prettily. Freedom and all that.”

“You think freedom is not what I intend to give to the people.”

“My sister certainly did not think so.”

The dragon queen faltered a little, then regained her composure.

“Your sister… wanted the world from the start.”

Arya raised one eyebrow.

“Was it really that unreasonable? What she asked?”

She stared at her, and Arya felt suddenly uneasy by the determination in her eyes.

“What was unreasonable were her reasons, and the way she asked it,” She said. “It was Jon Snow, King in the North who gave up his crown. It should have been to that same Jon Snow, who showed
me again and again how he cared for his people, to ask it back. Not Sansa Stark, a girl who I barely
knew anything of. A girl who made her own judgement about me and my people before I even set
a foot in Winterfell. Division never made a kingdom strong. This was not the time for it.”

“And… what about her reasons? Caring for the people?”

Daenerys stopped from her tracks, then stared at her bluntly.

“Tell me, Arya. You know your sister better than I do. You know the North better than I do. What
can the North gain with independence?” She relented. “What can your sister gain with
independence?”

The image of a face long forgotten came to her, with the cold, accusing glare of her sister on her.

You have killed Lady, she seemed to say. You have killed her, all for a miserable butcher boy….

Mycah, his name is Mycah, she wanted to say. But her voice was lost in her throat.

They all went for me, her sister continued. You should thank me.

One day you will call me your Grace… Another younger voice said. One day, you will bend the
knee to me…

“I’ve been to the North. I’ve wandered among the people, trying to see if I was wrong. But nothing
changed for them. The lords are still exploiting them, telling them it’s for the greater good. Your
sister gave them what they wanted. She must have hoped that by doing so they would do good. But
the truth is that they only grew bolder.”

Arya blinked. She tried to refute all of that. But she couldn’t find anything to say.

No. The poors were always poor. And the riches were always rich. And from what she had seen…
None of them was blameless when it came to hurting innocents to get what they wanted.

It’s only a year, she tried to think. Only a year…

“I think now I understand her,” Arya snapped back to reality and blinked, before Daenerys
clarified. “Your sister. I understand, because I lived it too. When you’re in power, you feel like you
need to have control over everything. You need to be what people want you to be. You need to be
more, over and over. But the more you do that, the more you forget who you truly are. The more
you fear, for you may not keep that power for long. You may not be safe for long.”

We are not safe, her sister had said once, agitation marking for once her features. Not while she’s
here. She’s a tyrant. I can feel it. She’s just like the others. She will want to make us kneel, to take
everything from us. She and her armies are already taking our food, taking place in here. It is my…
our home, not hers. They shouldn’t be here, no, they shouldn’t…

“Jon had told me about the North. They are proud people, wary of strangers. But they know how to
bend the knee when they see their interest. They know where their interests are. And now their
interests are not with your sister. At least not only.”

“You did this!” Arya tried to gather her remaining strength in this accusation. But it all came weak
in her ears.

“You’re quite quick to judge. I did not. I only helped a little. But it was in motion far before I even
came back. If you want to find a culprit, you better seek on your side.”
No. NO. It couldn’t be. She couldn’t bear to think it.

But then… It was all she could conclude.

“Tell me, if I had granted the North Independence, what about Jon?”

She took another step forward, and Arya could not bear to look into these eyes, for the answer was too painful to contemplate. It was something she had thought too, and which haunted one of her nightmares.

“What about the man who bent the knee to me? Should he be declared an idiot for doing so?”

Arya did not want to give the answer to that. She did not want to think about it. Instead, the dragon queen herself gave it.

“If I had given up right away what he gave me, his sacrifice would have been in vain, and the lords would have set him aside. We all know how dangerous this situation can be.”

“He said…”

“That he had to? Yes, I was here when he said that. I was the one who asked him to.”

“Why?”

“Because who would follow him if people think he bent the knee because I somehow bewitched him, as words were already saying? The fight was more important than my pride.”

Arya looked at her closely, trying to see the lies in her words.

“Doesn’t sound like the woman who talked of conquests on a land of ruins.”

The dragon queen shook her head, her gaze downward, filled with grief.

“I can’t justify what I did. I won’t try. It was terrible…”

“People died because of you!”

“I know. And people still die every day, everywhere in Westeros, for that game of power is still on set.”

She took a brief breath of air, then shrugged. It was like she was trying to shake off a terrible burden from her shoulders, without succeeding to.

“You know, I spent the whole year contemplating. Trying to make sense of it all. I couldn’t. That wasn’t me, I tried to convince myself. I am the breaker of chains. The Slayer of lies. I couldn’t have done this. I should have known. I couldn’t excuse myself. I could just blame myself. I was the monster everyone thought I was. Fire was in me, waiting for me to release it. And I did. But by releasing the flame, I did not release myself. I burned too. All my dreams. All my wishes to do good by the people. My own reason to live.”

She closed her eyes and exhaled.

“When I came back to Meeren, that’s when I realized. This monster is not only in me. It is in all of us.”
Daenerys crouched, looking deep into her eyes.

“I see it. It is in you too.”

Arya felt the chill running down her spine, making goosebumps on her skin.

“You are…?”

Daenerys shook her head, amused.

“No, Arya Stark. I am no witch. But I know men. Women in power make them uneasy, so they’re making excuses. We are either witches or men in disguise. But behind that, there’s fear. There’s always fear, for no woman should take a man’s place.”

“Women are important too,” she couldn’t help but reply.

Daenerys smiled. “Yes they are. We’re proofs of that.”

She took carefully a step forward, as if she was approaching a trapped beast. Arya scowled at the implication, but fear was still in her.

“But you are not a true monster. The truth is never that clearly set. I can see that,” She continued. “Nor am I truly one. Despite all my faults.”

Which were terrible, Arya thought with satisfaction. Utterly terrible.

But then, faces came to her. Faces she would have wanted to ignore. The result of her revenge. And the ones who should never have been here…

So lost in her thoughts, she almost did not catch what was being said. Until one name made her jump.

“He loves you, you know,” The former queen said, finally. “Gendry Baratheon.”

That name was another living scare in her heart, as if she needed a new one.

“He betrayed me.”

“The people we love always think they act for our own interest. But some of them tend to forget to ask us first about it.”

“He loves YOU, then.”

“Why do you think he went to seek you? To protect you. He knew that once you found out, you would want to die protecting your family. You’ll be conflicted. You love your sister. You love your brother. But you love also the North, and its people. What would you have done, then, against them?” The silver woman shook her head. “You have no part in that war, Arya Stark. That’s my promise to the one who loves you and who was willing to pledge his life to protect you.”

“Jon loved you, you know,” She relented, uneasy with the turn of the conversation. “Did YOU forgive him when he put that dagger in your heart?”

Then she saw it. The heartbreak, the despair, the gripping sadness and self-loathing that was the fault in her mask.

A glimpse of intense suffering among the melancholic stare she had always known on that queen.
A suffering that echoed in her, more than she would have liked to admit.

“Jon… may have thought he loved me. Once. But that wasn’t enough for him. That was never enough.” She shook her head. “In the end that did not count for anything.”

She crossed her arms, as if somehow it would protect her from harm. As if it could gather all the broken pieces of her heart.

“Love and duty. Who was to say they should be always separated?” She mused. “At least, I thought so.”

“You were his aunt,” Arya tried to argue, before biting his lips.

“A fact that I did not know when I fell in love with him,” Daenerys sighed. “And that actually is not that foreign to your own people, if I remember history well. When my brother was alive, it was expected that one day I marry him. This was not what I wanted, but this was what had been decided. Instead, I was made part of a bargain for him to get an army. I did my duty, was used and abused for it, and I thought love would come with it. And I made it come. But with Jon… It’s like something was pulling me towards him, and him towards me. It’s like the more I fought, the more it took control of my heart, piece by piece. But then, he was not just the man I loved. He was also the heir of what I thought I always wanted. And he was my nephew, son of a brother I never knew, but admired all the same… You can call me naïve all you want. But when I learned that, in that time when everything seemed an uncertainty… It’s like everything clicked. All the times people told me I should have been born sooner to marry Rhaegar… I thought it was it. Fate had brought us together, and we were meant to reign together. The throne was not that home I thought I wanted. He was home. And then… he was not.”

She looked like an injured animal, and despite herself, Arya felt the urgent need to cry with her.

She tried to fight it, but the feeling was in her, torturing her more than she could have thought possible.

“I have always wanted to have a family. I would have wanted him to be only my nephew, if he did not feel the same way I felt about him. But he… did not want that.” She laughed bitterly. ‘And that day, when he kissed me, I thought… maybe his feelings had changed. Maybe all the wrongs I had done could be forgiven. All my grief could be overcome, and I could be as I once was. Maybe there was a chance I could make it right, if only he was by my side…”

She closed her eyes, gripping the fabric on her chest as if she still felt the sting of the dagger in her.

“Yes. I’ve forgiven him. But I have not forgotten. And never will I.”

Then, she stared back at Arya, and fire was in her eyes as she talked.

“Gendry, on the other side, never stopped loving you. Never stopped wanting to protect you, and your interests. And I see you still love him, for else you would have never brought up Jon to me this way.”

She took another step forward, and Arya felt her resolve weakening.

“Loving is hard and does not stop every betrayal that goes along the way. But when it’s strong and perseverant like yours, it always finds a way.”

Could it? She thought. Really?
No, it was too broken, she couldn’t… She didn’t want to… How could she ever trust him again? How could she find the will to?

“Did you see him?” She asked, weary of her internal struggles. “My brother?”

“… No. Not yet. I couldn’t.”

No. Indeed. How could she see him? He had killed her, and even now, she could feel the pain of that woman coming from her in violent waves, shaking her core violently.

“What will you do to him?”

“He owed me his life. But now it’s over, and that debt can never be repaid. You of all people know that. Let me burn his body, as my family did to their own.”

She blinked. No. That, she could not accept. She would not!

“But he needs to be buried in the crypts, like my father was!”

“He was a Targaryen too. That blood is in his veins too.”

“Never. He may have some of that blood, but he never was. Never will be. Like YOU.”

Rage overcame any sense she could have had, and blinded by it she was prepared to jump on her.

A growl interrupted her and she blinked suddenly, meeting familiar eyes.

Ghost? Why? Why would he….When did he…

The dragon queen made soothing sounds and leaned down to reach him. Her hand disappeared in the fur of the dire wolf who calmed down and lazily closed his eyes, ignoring the bewildered glance of Arya.

“Ghost seems to like you,” she remarked.

Daenerys smiled, but did not look back at her.

“He’s been following me since I found him.”

“Strange.”

Arya fell on her knees, then tried to massage the bruised marks on her wrists.

Daenerys’ eyes widened in recognition. She called the guard and gestured towards her with a commanding glance.

“What are you doing?” Arya exclaimed.

“I’ve never wanted you in chains, Arya. Or anyone. Despite the risks.”

“What is the trick?” She couldn’t help but ask.

Arya’s voice was unbelieving as she stared at the man relieving her of the chains.

“There’s no trick. I think you’ve been in that game for too long. No one should be in chains, and for that I’m sorry. I was furious when they told me so. You may want to kill me, but what’s the point? What is set to happen is still going to happen. With or without me.”
The dragon queen turned back. The door was opened eagerly for her by the guard.

“It does not excuse the wrongs you’ve done!” Arya scowled.

But Daenerys only replied serenely, and the young woman did not find enough strength in her to fight back.

“No. Indeed, it doesn’t. It wasn’t intended to do so.”

The heroine of Winterfell stood, speechless, unchained.

“Sleep well, Arya Stark. You are no prisoner nor slave. I have never wanted to take freedom from you. You are free to wander wherever you want. Try whatever you want. But know that in the end, it won’t change anything. Your sister has already opened the doors for betrayal, and you can’t stop it. Neither can I.”

She could have attacked her. She should have. Killed her right now.

But she found that she couldn’t.

And that thought surprised her as she fell on her knees and cried until exhaustion overcame her.

She slept, hoping tomorrow would prove it was only a dream.

But it did not.

Chapter End Notes

11/02: To celebrate the deads (a bit belatedly), I'll post two chapters tomorrow (Tyrion, then Arya). Have a nice day!
Here's two chapters for this time, as a belated Halloween's gift (yes, the dead are a central point in these ones)
This chapter's theme is "Angel of Small Death and the Codeine Scene" by Hozier.
I hope you will enjoy!

The girl was pretty, with silver hair and blue eyes. She must have come from Lys with such fine features, almost as fine as what the old blood of Valyria’s once had been. She had danced prettily before him, her eyes on him like he was the only one she wanted to see, the only one she wanted to be with. She wasn’t one to talk, but damn she could dance. Her hips swayed in a way he couldn’t fathom, lightly, softly, like a branch bent by the wind.

He hadn’t kissed her. No, not yet. The vixen had been too swift for this and had jumped out of his way with a smile, taking a cloth off one by one, from the handkerchief in her sleeve to the delicate embroidered ribbon with his family’s word on it hidden in her undergarments. Still, he couldn’t touch, just look. And looks were already a terrible thing.

Most men loved a good chase, and this one was certainly one. But he was old now, and the weight of the age was terrifyingly heavy on his shoulders. He tried to get rid of it, but somehow it just burdened him even more.

They had thought to please him, somehow, but as he looked better at these fine features, it only filled his mind with bitterness and unwanted memories. Memories of that queen he had loved and believed in without hoping for the reciprocity, and who had set all his newly found hopes aflame. In every way.

He remembered the smell of ashes and blood, and the sight of the buildings and mutilated people wandering endlessly in the ruins. That was something he might never forget. Never understand. Had he been that blind? Had she been evil from the start?

Or was it really love? He did not know anymore. He had certainly thought so. But now he tended to reconsider. Admiration, he had felt without doubt. Daenerys Targaryen had been one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. One of the fiercest too. She was brave, that girl. Surviving, again and again, against all odds.

What could have gone so wrong? He had thought.

Maybe he had changed. He entered at her service with fire and blood in his mind, ready to set the world in flames, just to see his sister drown herself in her tears. But then, that woman gave him hope, a new purpose. Made him reconsider, when all he wanted was destruction. He had felt kinship to her, for her darker instincts echoed with his. She would stop him when they come nagging him, and he would stop her when hers went the same way.

At least that’s how he saw it.

He had failed her, he knew. However not like she had failed him in his expectations, and to him it
was the capital crime. But this time was over. It had to be. No need to ponder more about it.

The girl giggled and raised her arms towards him, at last tender and inviting.

*Come girl,* he thought. *Your little show is over. Now you’ll see who’s the master.*

He felt himself rise and reach for her. Maybe this, in a way, could be revenge. Maybe it will satisfy him.

A knock on the door interrupted him.

“My lord!”

The girl jumped, then laughed, before crouching down to get her clothes back. Tyrion rolled his eyes and fell back on his bed, frustrated.

It seemed the time for pleasure was gone. Unfortunately.

The door opened, then closed, and at that moment he knew who it was.

“Oooh…” The man stuttered. “I’m sorry…”

Tyrion put a hand on his forehead, irritated, then raised up. The girl had gone, and he wondered by which door she could have left.

“Come in, Samwell. I did not get enough time to get indecent.”

He raised and dusted the clothes he unfortunately still had on, then served himself some wine from the golden jug he had on his table.

No dornish wine for him. The deliveries had been delayed over and over, until finally they had words that young Quentyn Martell was cornered at Sunspear, his sister’s allies having answered her call once food came to lack on his side. A prisoner in his own city. What an irony.

The door opened again, revealing Sam, who excused himself once more before clumsily closing behind him. His eyes were nervously looking at each corner, as if he feared a spy.

Tyrion set aside his drink, took the jug and eagerly filled one of the goblets. Without word, he gave it to Sam who took it, but still eyed it suspiciously.

“So. What brings you here?”

His fingers tapped impatiently on the table as he looked at the former man of the Night’s Watch.

“I…” Sam began, looking hesitantly at the red liquid.

He took a sip, then gulped it down. This seemed to give him enough courage.

“Did you ever ask yourself if you had done the right thing? Thought the right thing?”

“The right thing? About what?”

“About…” He looked right, then left, before leaning in. “the Targaryens. And the King.”

Tyrion’s eyes widened.
“Of course I did. I was her Hand, remember, and I believed in her. But she was mad. You have seen what that madness did. We have all seen that. Now we have a time of peace. We have a good king.”

“Have we?” He said, cowering, his hands shaking. “I suppose we have. But then… what is it? Why does it feel so… wrong?”

Tyrion raised, images in his mind appearing as the memories overflowed him. He tried to contain it, but it won’t stop. He stayed silent a moment, considering, then looked closely at his companion.

These talks could be considered treasonous. Sam knew that. So why…?

“What changed you, my friend?”

“Many things.” He said, his head down, a sad look on his face. “I’m not who I was before. My purpose… I felt I lost it from the moment Jon was exiled in the North.” He stopped, and then Tyrion thought he was about to cry. But then he continued, looking up, straight into his eyes. “He was my friend, you know.”

Tyrion raised his eyebrows.

“And he was mine. At least, I considered him like that.”

Sam’s hands moved nervously, so much that he spilled wine on the rich carpet that had been a gift from the Reach at the feast.

“This woman… She changed him.”

Tyrion stopped in his pacing. He considered. Did she? Could he really be truthful by declaring this?

Jon Snow was a changed man when he met him again. He had seen it with his own eyes as he came. He had seen the weariness and the quiet anger in his eyes. These were not the eyes of the observant bastard that wanted to prove himself. These were the eyes of a man that had been betrayed, and that stayed vigilant about his surroundings. A man who had seen too many things, and who now felt the burden of it on his shoulders. A man who was seeking for hope, but without actually believing in it, and wouldn’t let himself be burdened by what he considered unnecessary subtilities. He didn’t care if he died on the way. He did not care of titles. He had promised himself something, and he intended to keep it, as if that goal was his lifeline.

“No. Something else changed him.” He shook his head. “I saw him before they even… started their tryst… He was already changed by then, less… sharp, I might say.”

The word was not enough to describe the complete change that had been set upon him, but which word could?

Sam glared at him.

“He was my friend. He had always protected me and my family. I always admired him.”

“And yet here you are, far away from him. I don’t blame you, but I wonder.”

He shook, then sat down, eyes lost in the wine.

“I… tried to write to him. He never answered.”
“And you never tried to join him?”

“I couldn’t. You know I couldn’t.” He tried to justify himself. “I have many duties here. It is Jon who sent me to become a maester...”

Tyrion’s look seemed to stop him in his tracks though and he sighed.

“I’m not who I was supposed to be, I know. But what am I, actually? I feel like I am useless here.”

*Trapped.* The word came in his mind like a forbidden thought. The dwarf shook his head, unbelieving, then put a supporting hand on the bigger man’s shoulder.

If it was only to calm the uproar in his mind.

“No, you’re...”

The Archmaester without chains shook his shoulders, and Tyrion let his hand fall down. From him radiated an anger the lord Hand did not thought imaginable in such a man, that had always demonstrated himself as someone afraid of quarrels. His glare was fierce.

“No need to deny it. You, Me, and the others. We talk around a table, but what does it mean? Do we do good for the people? ... Once I thought so. But then... Do our actions really mean anything now?” He took a sip from his goblet. “My goal was to search for answers to defeat the Others. That goal is finished. But then, there is another thing... Another purpose...”

Tyrion leaned in, foreboding gripping at his guts.

“What do you mean?”

Sam looked at him with a strange glint in his eyes.

“Have you heard the story of Aerea Targaryen?”

The dwarf tried to laugh it off. But his uneasiness was not calmed down.

“Just another story of a teenage girl rebelling against her family.” He said with a mocking tone, taking a sip on his goblet, before reconsidering a moment. “Except this one jumped on a dragon.”

This did not put a smile on Samwell’s face, for he jumped as if he had been stung by a bee, his lips taking the shape of an ‘o’ and his brows lowered with concern.

“Is it?” He replied, his eyes shining with a strange spark in it. “There’s something...”

Before he could continue, a firm knock on the door was heard.


Sam froze, and Tyrion saw the dread filling his eyes. He raised softly, looked at him as the dwarf nodded, encouraging, then left with one last glance.

Tyrion pondered the meaning of it, without daring to find an answer. He needed to go. Now. Breathe some fresh air. Go to the marketplace, see the people. See all the good they had done.

It had been a long time since he had been there, he realized. Now was the time. It would set out the doubts he had, and then everything will be like before.
He went to his bed, looked for the pillow.

His purse was gone. He cursed.

His father would have laughed at him. He had grown soft, and dumb, he would say. His love for pleasures and whores will kill him.

This thought brought him to the sad truth.

He was the last of his family. The last Lannister.

Had he ever fathered a child? He wondered. Was he really the last of his blood?

He hit it. No. No good would come to such thing. Out. He needed to go.

But sadly, as he left the keep and was about to reach the gate, a guard stopped him.

“You can’t, my lord. Orders from the King.”

He blinked numbly.

“Why?”

“The city is not safe.”

“I had no inkling about this…”

Another guard went, confirmed what had been said, but he had no answer to his question.

He was then escorted back to the keep like a punished child, when he should have been commanding and respected.

He was like a lion in a cage, and he had not even seen the walls closing up on him.

He hit the wall, but it did not break.

He heard familiar footsteps and did not look up to it. Instead he just sat down wearily.

“Podrick?” He asked. “Serve me some wine, would you?”

“Tyrion.”

He raised up abruptly.

“My King.”

A new light was in his eyes, for he could barely hide his frustration.

“Why can’t I leave?”

“A temporary annoyance. The guards are fixing it.”

It felt strange, watching a friend’s body move in a another’s way, his eyes blank, then shifting to grey.

Warging. And, adding to that, the use of one body to do as the user wishes it to be. Not only that of animals, but also that of men.
Was it really something he should get accustomed to, from his king? Was it really right?

He blinked. No. He shouldn’t think such things. It was treason. And treason meant…

“The gates are open,” Podrick’s mouth moved, but it was the king’s voice that echoed in the room. “They are open and they’re all entering. Soon they’ll be feasting.”

*Which gates?* He wondered. What was the meaning of this?

Silence only answered it, and he raised to pour himself the wine he so desperately craved.

“Sandei. Who is Sandei?”

The question caught him unaware, and ringed with all these other names he had not known, but still accepted it as evil men.

Or were they?

“It’s like a shadow in my dreams, silent but insisting. I just can’t shake it up. Is that a boy? A girl? An idea? I need to know.”

“Why?”

The King did not answer. Instead, Podrick’s eyes stared at the horizon.

“Quentyn Martell is under siege at Sunspear.”

“We need to send him men.”

“They are on the way.”

“Who? Did the Reach answered the call?”

“Aurane Waters offered his help.”

“My King… Are you sure?”

“I know the risks, my lord Hand. And he knows what his best interests are.”

Tyrion frowned. Last time he had seen Aurane Waters, the visit had been undecided. That man was clever, courteous to everyone. But it was difficult to know where his mind really was. Or where he had decided to go actually. Emissaries had been sent regularly, but reported he was seldom at home. Oh, excuses he had plenty.

Still, each time he came, he made sure to lavish presents after presents. He made sure to bend the knee when it was needed, say words that appeased and that pleased. And the King let him.

He had not been here at the feast, insisting to be there to see personally to the health of his little brother. The King did not seem to take notice of it. Too many persons had to be seen, he reasoned.

Certainly now the King must have reasons to believe this man’s loyalties were with him.

But then… he was not that certain about the King anymore…

Since the incident in Pyke, Brandon Stark was becoming more and more restless. And less and less available in his own body. There was something he hadn’t seen, he repeated, something dangerous
that he had ignored. Something that might be the death of it all.

Tyrion felt the chill of it on his spine, and goosebumps on his flesh like tiny needles piercing him. A terrible foreboding came to him, for what could have missed the three-eyed raven? Such thing was not imaginable. And then, it led to another terrible realization: the King was a man, and like every man, he was bound to fail, bound to have his own ambitions. And if these ambitions went in the way…

“But… Aurane…” He tried once again.

“My lord?”

He blinked, then looked at Podrick.

He had gone back to normal and was now staring at him, questions in his eyes.

Tyrion took a large sip of wine, then put the half full goblet in his hands and gestured him to go.

He then went to his bed and slept, eager to escape. But sleep did not take him a long time, and he felt himself roused with the night. His throat was dry, and he could barely stand the smell of wine surprisingly.

Water had a bitter taste sadly, and did not help his thirst.

He looked at his window, images coming to him and him letting them. Then he remembered.

Varys. He had once told him of a secret passage, from the stables to the sewers. If only he could find it… Maybe he’d have answers.

He did not know if it was strictly weariness that led him to take such actions, or fear. All he knew was that he did not see any other way out.

Eagerly, he raised and left the keep. The guards looked at him, dumbfounded, but he did not care.

No one stopped him when he went to the stables. No one seemed to be there, outside actually. He shivered. What was happening? They couldn’t be all asleep…

It felt like a trap. But still he found himself going on.

He spent like hours in the straw, trying to find a trap, a mechanism. Something. A tiny glimpse of hope.

Until he finally found it.

The tiniest hole for the tiniest member of the Council. And the smell of a thousand shits going with it. Fitting, he had decided.

Once in the sewers, he was tempted to throw up, for the stink was terrible. But hope kept him going, and he followed the way, not even wondering once why nobody had found that passage before, or why it had not been destroyed.

When finally he saw lights from a hatch, he opened it, took a big breath of air and looked at his surroundings.

It looked like that passage led to an inn. People were drinking, some were singing. But what surprised him the most was the lady in red that was talking with a strong and enthusiastic voice.
“The savior arrives, my friends,” she said. “And he will come to free us with fire and blood. No tyrant to take away our children. No restriction. Freedom.”

He hid under a table and listened, staring down at the woman.

“The Lord of Light guides him through the flame of truth, and from smoke and salt he had been reborn to save us. Silver is his hair and amethyst his eyes. And with him will come an eternal Spring and a new hope.”

Silver hair? Amethyst? Tyrion blinked.

But he did not question himself further, for men at arms entered the inn, talked with the owner and turned to her.

Seeing them, she only raised her voice. Hurry marked her words.

“Don’t lose hope, my friends, for the end of suffering is near!” She screamed, with ecstasy in her eyes as guards caught her. “You have the strength, my friends. You can get rid of that tyrant!”

A madwoman. A fanatic. She couldn’t be anything but that.

The people continued drinking, as if nothing had happened.

They heard a scream, then nothing. Some stopped at that, but they almost immediately looked down and hurried their steps.

He felt a hand on his shoulder and jumped.

“My lord Lannister. It is time for you to head back.”
One sting. Two. Three. She smirked. At each sting of the dagger on the wood, Gendry seemed to cower. His eyes were not meeting her, and his hands were clasped at the corner. She let down the tip of her blade once again on the table.

He raised abruptly, then left them.

She shrugged, trying to appear indifferent.

“What?” She said to all that dared looking at her with wide eyes.

No one dared to remark anything. Cowards, she wanted to shout at them.

She took her cup and looked askance at the wildling that stared at her since the beginning.

Tormund said nothing. It innerved her. That silence. These not so discreet glances that were hesitant, as if they did not dare to talk to her.

She shook her head, considering.

She had dreamed once again, and this time Nymeria was led in the main road, reluctant and defiant. They had caged her like a beast, but she knew she had to bide her time. She could smell home. Soon they would reach Winterfell.

She felt hope. But other things too.

“Do you approve of that?” She asked finally. “The Dragon Queen?”

The Giantsbane sighed, then took a big sip from his goblet. His gaze was on the woman who was now conversing with a guard.

“She and her people saved mine, lass. She saved your brother and me when we went seeking a proof for that lioness in the South. She and her people fought alongside us when the time came. You were there, you fought as well.”

“You were not at King’s Landing.”

Tormund met her eyes and maintained her glare. He did not falter in front of it. Only talked calmly, bitterness filling his words with a whole new meaning she hadn’t been prepared to face.

“Aye. Jon told me what happened. Before, during and after. It’s been a discussion that happened
very often. How is that different from when your people came and decided that we couldn’t live among them anymore? When your little lordlings fought war after war, exposed bodies in the open for people to see? Nah, from what Jon told me, there never was such thing in King’s Landing.”

Then he added, looking in her direction as if it solved any question.

“And she loves him.”

That’s when she understood. With that, he thought his promise would be fulfilled. He would leave his burden behind…

“It does not matter if he’s buried or burned. Us free folks don’t care for such frivolities. Should you?”

She snarled.

“He’s my brother. He should be with his own.”

“Are you sure he truly belongs there?”

Arya was bewildered.

“Where else?”

Tormund sighed, but did not answer. Furious, she took the cup from his hand and threw it away. The man glared at her.

“You’re angry. Fine. But not with me, lass. If you want to fight, go find him. I’m not in the mood.”

She understood the meaning all too well. With a raging yell, she took back her dagger and ran back to the courtyard, ignoring all these eyes on her.

He was here, that traitor. The one that dared look at her in the eyes and say he wasn’t sorry for what he had done. The one that could talk on and on about how he had been abandoned when she was in chains, but who did not dare saying anything once she was set free.

Gendry, she said his name in her mind, trying to put some rage in it.


He did not do that. Instead, he stared at her.

His eyes widened, and he dodged as she charged him, dagger in hand.

“Arya, what are you…”

“Dead,” She said as she tripped him up and crouched, blade pointed at his chest.

She let him raise, then threw a punch towards him, that he caught. She felt his hand gripping her fist.

Too weak, she thought as she let the dagger go and went for the belly with her other hand.

“Dead.”

He gasped and let her go. She took a little distance, then ran back to him, screaming with all the
rage she could gather as she did so.

He took his hammer from his back and blocked her attack. But still, he did not dare do anything else.

“Arya. Stop.” He only said, his gaze intently in hers.

This was not a plea. It was not pity he sought. These were the words of an irritated man.

She cursed and kicked him. The hammer fell loudly and she jumped on its owner, maintaining him down. Her dagger was on his throat.

“Many times I could have killed you,” She snarled, her blood boiling in her veins. “Now say it. I’m not yours. I’m not anyone’s property.”

He looked at her straight in her eyes with an earnest expression that unsettled her.

“You never were. But at least I thought I was yours.”

She took a step back, baffled.

“You’re not.”

Gendry smiled, then shook his head.

“That’s not for you to decide at which feet I put my heart at.”

She looked at him and saw no lie in his eyes.

Frustrated, she turned away, trying to ignore the beating of her heart, and the blood that came warming her cheeks.

At that moment, she thought she saw Daenerys Targaryen smiling at her, before she turned away.

She stopped, then followed her quietly, curious about her whereabouts.

This woman was certainly the most intriguing being she had ever met. She did not raise her voice, but still people followed her orders. She did not seduce, but still, eyes were on her, with that kind of devotion that seemed uncanny.

A tyrant? She did not know. Sure, that woman was a killer. She had seen it with her own eyes.

But what she told her, only a few nights ago…

Arya followed her outside the keep, remembering her many lessons. She did not want to be seen. She wanted to see. To learn.

Who was that woman? Who was she truly? What was it that she really wanted?

Somehow, her sister’s words did not seem true to her ears, and it unsettled her.

So she followed, like the other times when she could since she had been released from her chains. She followed and once again tried to persuade herself that at each moment, she could decide to kill the woman.

She felt helpless about the other things. But this she could control.
“That’s a nice dance you led him into,” The woman’s voice raised in the distance.

Arya blinked.

She knew she was here. How could that be?

“I can’t find no other way for him to understand,” She asked instead.

The silver woman turned towards her and stared into her eyes.

“You enjoyed it. I saw it.”

Arya shook her head.

“I did not forgive him.”

“No. Of course.”

She turned away from these piercing eyes, but only met others that kept her fascinated.

A dragon. Once she had dreamed of them. She had dreamed of being Visenya, Rhaenys, or even Alysanne. She had dreamed of going above the clouds, and approach the sun…

But these were the dreams of a little girl. She had grown up since then.

Daenerys’ look did not waver.

“Go ahead.” She said. “I know you want to.”

She did not smile, but her voice was teasing, daring.

Are you afraid? She could almost hear the question in her eyes. Is the wolf afraid of the dragon?

Defiantly, Arya glared at her and took a step forward. The dragon watched her warily, opening his mouth to show his teeth.

Somehow, looking into these eyes, she understood the meaning and accepted. She felt a link, and she reached for it. She took off her dagger and her sword and let them fall at her feet. Then she reached out, taking courage in a memory, that of Jon flying on another dragon.

If he had done that, certainly there was a way…

She touched Drogon’s snout, feeling the surprisingly warm scales under her fingers. The dragon stared at her defiantly, before slowly closing his eyes.

She released a breath she did not know she was keeping, then moved her hand slowly, confidence coming at each stroke. Then she looked at Daenerys, who was smiling at her.

“Who are you, really?” She blurted out. “A madwoman? A witch? Or… something else?”

Daenerys looked at her a moment, then sighed, her eyes downcast.

“Do I have to limit myself to that? Are you just the heroine of Winterfell, or something more?”

She turned to her dragon and caressed him delicately as if he was a child. She smiled at him, tenderness in her eyes.
“I am called the Mother of Dragons. Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea. The Unburnt. These are not only names, titles that I decided to adopt. These are the names my people gave me because they thought it described me well.”

“But I am not just that.” She whispered softly, leaning on Drogon snout as he blinked slowly at her, mirroring her love. “Just like you’re not only a trained assassin, and the one who killed the Night King.”

“How… “

Daenerys turned back to her, a fierce flame in her eyes.

“My son may be considered a monster. But he’s so much more than that. He’s loyal. He’s fierce.”

Drogon seemed to notice her change in behavior and glared at Arya. She took a step back.

Pain was in the queen’s voice as she continued.

“Viserion was the sweetest. Rhaegal was the most disciplined. But Drogon always had a mind of his own. He likes to fly, to discover new countries.”

“You talk about them as if they were human.”

“Don’t you believe animals have a mind of their own? A soul? A life?”

This made her stop as she considered it. She did not even realize at first she was talking aloud.

“I had a wolf. Nymeria. Sometimes… I feel like she is with me, comforting me. Sometimes I feel like I am her. I have a pack. A mate. I wonder through forests, hunting, playing, but always looking. Looking for what, I don’t know. For connection, maybe. It’s like we had the two halves of a same heart, and these halves were always screaming to get back to… us.”

“Then I was right,” The queen’s voice came ringing warmly at her ears. “You can understand what that feels.”

Daenerys’ eyes were bright, and full of understanding, so much that Arya felt startled by that.

“Such love,” The dragon queen wondered. “Why aren’t you with her?”

Arya’s heart broke a little at that.

“She found her own pack. I can’t be part of it.”

She’s trapped, she wanted to add. Trapped and alone. But does she need my help? No… I let her go, I have no right…

A crazy idea came to her as she felt the wind in her hair, but she did not dare.

“Why me? Why taking time to talk to me?” She asked instead, after a moment of silence when she tried to gather her thoughts while rubbing lightly Drogon’s scales. “Is it only because of Gendry?”

“You’re honest, Arya. I like it. It’s a rare quality nowadays,” Daenerys looked one moment in her dragon’s eyes, then turned towards her. “Before we arrived in Winterfell, Jon told me all about you. He loved you, deeply, fiercely. And when I see you… I understand why.”

Arya said nothing, baffled.
“You are alike, you know. I see a lot of Jon in you.” Daenerys giggled, a strange sound coming from her. “Or maybe there was a lot of you in him.”

Arya chuckled. Then stopped, surprised. She blinked, then shook her head.

They were not two young girls becoming friends, no. Arya was an assassin. And Daenerys had killed thousands of people. It couldn’t be. It shouldn’t be allowed…

*Monster*, She heard the voice of her sister whispering furiously in her ears, her eyes glaring at her. *Traitress*.

She saw Daenerys’s eyes turning sad. She had sensed her change of mood, had understood the meaning behind it.

That’s when she realized the signs she had interpreted as madness were more akin to loneliness. A loneliness she had felt too, with the fear of never being accepted.

Gendry’s words rang in her ears, and she felt dizzy by it.

She tried to fight it, but she felt it all the same. Respect, and an understanding she could not help but feel.

“You can do this.” Arya blurted. “Burn his body. But I want to bring his ashes to Winterfell when it’s done.”

She felt surprised by her own words, but she couldn’t help it. Much surprising was the fact that she really believed in them and accepted them. Her heart pounded at her ears.

“NO!” Daenerys cried, her eyes widened as if herself was surprised by that outburst. She blinked, then tried to compose herself while Arya took a step back, hesitating. “Not Winterfell. He can be in the North for all you want, but not Winterfell.”

Arya raised one eyebrow, startled by her agitation.

“Where then?”

The silver woman closed her eyes, distraught. She took a deep breath, then smiled, serene.

“There, near a waterfall, where your brother Robb and he hunted when they were young,” she said, finally. “When he felt at peace, when he felt at home.”

Arya knew that place. She blinked. So he had shown her that…

“I used to run away and hunt them down when I was little,” she couldn’t help the words from coming out of her mouth, nor the images that went with it, heartbreaking with all the memories. “Robb wouldn’t let me in. But Jon… He was always the one to cheer me up.”

“So… is that alright?”

Arya nodded, numbed. Daenerys’s eyes glinted with sudden happiness. She hugged her, and Arya found herself uneasy in her embrace.

“Thank you.”

She patted weirdly this woman’s back, unsure how to react. Then, she asked, eager to leave that awkward moment behind her.
“When will it be?”

Daenerys took a step back and shook her head, her smile unwavering.

“Tonight. Yes, tonight it has to be.”

She nodded. Be it tonight or tomorrow, Jon’s body had waited enough time.

She went away, swiftly, quickly, and settled herself where she could have a better view.

The pyre was quickly risen, and she saw them gather the wood ceremoniously. She looked at them from the beginning to the end, afraid she might miss a thing.

And when finally night had come, and he was brought on it, she got down and joined the others. She went right to it, just where the queen waited for her.

They looked at each other, not as enemies, she realized with surprise. But as if something bound them together.

Jon bound them together.

Baffled by that revelation, Arya nodded and Daenerys smiled. She leaned on Jon’s body. Her hands were shaking as she kissed his brows and whispered in his ears.

“See you soon, my love.”

The words rang back in her ears until she finally grasped the meaning.

Arya’s eyes widened.

“What are you…”

Daenerys gave her a sad smile, and she trembled by the intensity of it.

“He is my end and I am his. This is how it should be.”

“You… want to die?” Arya was taken aback. “What about that plan you talked to me about?”

“It can carry out without me,” the former queen shook her head, frowning as she continued. “People. They all think I can be a pawn in their game. Never again.”

Her eyes widened as she saw Daenerys Targaryen caressing Jon’s cheek, her voice tender as she whispered words she did not catch. Words of love, certainly. But then why was it in another language?

Still, she could not talk. She could not ask.

This was their end, she realized. She could not do anything against it. It was as if it was something that had been written, something that needed to happen. She had no place in it.

Arya was about to turn away, holding back her tears, when Daenerys stopped her one last time.

“Can you do something else for me?” She pleaded. “There’s a little girl…”

She tried to gather the bits of strength that remained, then continued. Her eyes were bright with tears as she talked.
“Her name is Sandei. She’s bright and young. She is talented and strong. She has the purest of hearts and a smile that could heal any wound. She showed me the light when I thought there was none. I need you to find her, where the seahorses guard her. Where my family’s oldest friends can look after her. Find her and protect her. I ask this of you. Keep her from harm. Teach her to be strong, to fight for the rights of the people. She may be one of the keys to peace. Can you do that?”

This was her last will. The last thing the dragon queen ever wanted. The last wish that was supposed to reveal who she truly was, as her father once told her, when she was little.

How could she refuse?

She nodded numbly, feeling the strength of that promise binding her life to hers.

“I will.”

With tears in her eyes, Daenerys Targaryen let out a relieved smile and nodded. “Good.”

And with a heavy heart, she turned away, not daring to look. She breathed, but the sobs took her unaware, and she felt like someone threw a dagger in her chest.

“Dracarys,” she heard the dragon queen cry to her dragon.

Silence. Nothing but the war in her mind, and her heart shattering in pieces. And Gendry, looking at her with sorrow in his eyes, reaching out for her. She raised her hand towards him, slowly.

Then suddenly…

“NO!”

A strong voice was heard, and dread filled her. She turned back. Something wasn’t right.

Drogon roared angrily, then put his head on the flames, reaching out.

A clear silhouette jumped from the blaze to get to him, white as snow and swift as a winter storm.

Another followed after her and ran as the dragon’s wings spread themselves in the dark.

Arya blinked, bewildered.

She could have recognized that silhouette anywhere.

This was her brother, running after the Targaryen queen, eyes only on her. Running, then jumping on a dragon to get her back.

But the dragon was already flying away, with them on his back. She could only stare at their retreating silhouettes, high in the sky, farther and farther away from her grasp.

Chapter End Notes

Aaah... That last scene had been one I was waiting for since the beginning. I hope you enjoyed it.
Next POV will be Larence.
Chapter Notes

I’m sorry but I can’t release the chapter yet. So many things are happening in my life right now, and I need to take time to process it.

I thank you for your patience, and, to keep you waiting, I’m going to give you a little preview of the chapter that will come after

(Jon I; maybe released at the same time, for this one is half done):

"Go ahead, kill me,” she snarled. “Put that blade in my heart once again, I dare you! Or better yet, behead me so I can never come back again!”

“You’re out of your mind,” Jon replied, trying to reach her.

She wouldn’t let him, he knew that. Not now, when memories were still raw. But he had to try.

Daenerys laughed and her eyes glinted with a fire that would have scared anyone who did not know her. He was aware of that. But all he could see now was the pain inside. Excruciating pain, mingling despair and loneliness. He could feel it as his own, cutting through his flesh, tearing up his guts. He stopped in his tracks, trying to gather his thoughts and focus.

He needed to get to her. Or else he would lose her. Once again.

He wasn’t prepared to relive that pain.

Her laugh sounded off, disbelieving. Her arms were stretched out, palms towards the sky, but it was not an act of faith. She had no faith to give him.

He deserved that, he knew. But it hurt nonetheless.

“Now you figure it out?” She asked ironically. “Did you think of it by yourself or Tyrion had to tell you that?”
Hey!
I would like to thank you all for your support and patience. It really meant a lot, especially in these times that had been quite hard for me. I’m so lucky to have you as my readers.
I send all my love to you and hope you will like the chapters.
This chapter’s theme is “The Room where it happened” in Hamilton Musical
PS: A warning for the most fervent admirers of Sansa. The following chapters set in Winterfell will be a very dark and trying time for her, and when I mean dark… I’m not laughing. It’s up to you to decide if you prefer to leave the story like this and to imagine a happier event or to try to see what’s behind the gates like Larence will.

The sky was clear that night, without clouds. They could see the stars shining high above them, their light wavering like eyes winking. A queen had just been crowned. His queen. His friends – if he could still call them that way - were feasting with the others in an abundance of food, songs and dances.

Larence couldn’t bear that. The proximity of his queen, how her crown shined at the light of the fire. He had looked, admired. Tried to ignore the look on Malwyn’s face that seemed too knowing, and the unreachability of her, that made him feel so little.

And then this man came disturbing his solitude and had offered him a drink. And a dream.

“What about you?”

The words had left his mouth before he could stop them. The tone was disbelieving, for what he had heard from his companion was too good to be true.

“What about me?” He laughed, but it sounded fake to the young man’s ears. “These lords came crawling at my door, thanking me for sending troupes when Littlefinger asked them. Telling me sweet words about me, and their queen. That they needed a leader.”

They especially wanted the Vale, Larence had thought at that moment. But he let the other continue.

“But you see... I’m not interested in the North. It is a cold and unforgiving place, that can barely sustain itself alone. The Vale is what I’m after. My inheritance, when Robert is gone. Soon, I hope. For that I will need allies.” He had taken time to make it more impactful, his gaze sparkling dangerously in the dark. “And what kind of friend would I be if I did not help a dear friend to get what he so desperately wants?”

Larence relaxed while his friend leaned in. It felt like a delicious conspiracy between them, an unbreakable bound that would link them until the end. Just like the old legends. A material for songs and glory.

“It all can be settled in one day. And that day anything can happen. It’s a day when bastards may
become kings.”

“And get their queen.” Larence had answered instantly.

The man had cracked a smile. “And her too, I suppose.”

He had looked at him in wonder, taking all his fine features and his shining armor.

This was a man who represented all he ever wanted to be. A man who offered him means to make his dreams come true, and more.

“They want a king.” Ser Harrold had concluded with a smug smile. “Let’s give them one.”

Such words were pleasant to hear, and that man so sympathetic. He had been his true friend, warning him from afar of unpleasant surprises and advising him in his letters. How could he doubt him?

He had squeezed his hand eagerly, letting for once hope blossoming freely in his heart. He did not see the man’s smirk, those of the ones he had brought on. He did not talk to it to his companions, fearing it might be just an illusion. Or worse, that they ended up wanting the exact same thing. They had already betrayed him once, leaving him to death. He knew every one of their secrets, even the darkest ones, the ones that were buried under ashes and blood. He had kept them all, because that’s what he was supposed to be. Noble. Trustworthy. Loyal to his friends. But still the bitterness had come eating him little by little.

He shook his head. No, he wasn’t Larence anymore. Larence was dead, a pale shell he had had to use once again to survive the dragon Queen. He was Jon Snow, King in the North. And he had a Queen to save. A legacy to protect.

Still, the memories came chasing him.

Sansa… He had dared whispering her name out loud that night, before sleeping, for she did not seem just a distant dream. He imagined himself in her embrace, her hair filling the room with the sweet scent of lemons and mint. He imagined her blue eyes on him, and her lips open in a smile.

Such love, such devotion. It swallowed him all, until the only light became the thought of her by his side.

She would redeem him, erase all the wrongs in his life. And he would bring the world at her feet. With her by his side everything will finally make sense. He would not just be the bastard of Hornwood. He would forget what happened with the Greyjoys, what they made him do… He would be what he was destined to be. Finally.

My love, she would say to him.

“My love…”

Baela. Smiling down at him with surprisingly good teeth, her eyes unfocused. He blinked, wanting to come back to his dream.

“We should get going. I want us to be married as soon as possible.”

Married… He smiled as if it was a joke only known to him. She did not see anything, so caught up she was in her fantasy.
She turned on her back, looking at the sky.

“It’s like a dream come true. I can’t believe we found each other.”

His eyes opened wide at that.

A dream. Aye, everything he had lived had been. But now he was woken up.

Words meant nothing.

The man had betrayed him.

And he had betrayed his queen.

No my love, she said tenderly. You did all you could to get to me. It’s not too late. I’m waiting... kill them. Kill them all for me... I’m waiting...

He closed his eyes and sighed. He could almost feel her caressing his cheek, her sweet breath on him, filling him with love and courage.

My love...

“My love?”

He did not answer. No, not now.

She shook his arm lightly. He opened his eyes and raised up abruptly, his hand catching hers firmly.

She gasped, surprised by his reaction. He looked back, breathed a little then let go.

Some times passed, when nothing was said. He raised up and continued his way. She followed, her footsteps heavy and clumsy.

They would soon arrive, he thought. He could see from the distance the fortifications of Winterfell, and hear the loud voices of the smallfolk.

“Lar-...”

He stopped abruptly then put a hand on her mouth, his glare fierce and cold.

“Don’t. even. Say that name.”

She nodded, her eyes wide open in fear. He let her out and continued his way.

“Sometimes you seem so far away...” She began after a time. “Sometimes I look at you and wonder... Where are you, actually? Are you with me? Or... somewhere else?”

What can you see, actually? He wanted to tell her. What can you see with those nearly blind eyes of yours?

His queen’s shadow pouted.

Why did you not get rid of her? Kill her.

He shook his head, suddenly cold.
No. Not now. Maybe she can be of use.

“I am here,” he said abruptly. “Baela, you don’t have to concern yourself with that. Let’s mingle with the others. Quick.”

She was strangely persistent, that girl. Following him all around, her eyes barely leaving him. Despite her poor sight, there were things she could perceive, better than he could have imagined. There were traps she managed to avoid, people she knew instantly not to trust.

She was still a maid, but not a prude one. Or maybe she did not realize she had a feminine body, for she behaved like a child.

Sleep had eluded him for so long, but here, with this light, she almost looked pretty.

You sound like you like her, his beloved ghost accused, her icy blue eyes glaring at him.

He chuckled. Of course no. How could she compare? One was the sun, the moon and the ice. The other was the mud that stuck to his clothes after a battlefield.

She was a peasant. How could she compare with a dream? She was the reminder of how low he had fallen, the burden that kept his feet on earth. With her poor sight, she could easily be lost in the crowd, and he would be rid of her.

But now was not the time, no. He could see all the plans that could come with her, all the doors she could open for him. Doors that would lead him to his queen. She was a mean to an end, and what an end it was. A path to glory and love.

To trickery and massacres, a voice told him.

He ignored it.

They stepped forwards the crowd who had gathered to see the newcomers. All lords and soldiers coming for the festivities and for a queen. He heard some admire loudly the shining armors. Others pestered at their lack of food while the queen and her friends were feasting.

How blind they were.

But when some evoked the relationship between the queen and the Vale, or rather the one between her and Harry, he almost lost it.

No. She was his, and his alone. How dare they consider another man for her? And such man?

Little by little the men and horses entered the gates. He saw Reagan talking with Darren, visibly angry with his companion. Rickard seemed already drunk and barely stayed still on his horse. And Malwyn… Malwyn was all alone, lost in his own thoughts. His face was dark and morose, and he barely moved.

Did his old friend mourn him?

No. it wasn’t his friend. It had been Larence’s friend.

Good for him, he thought. He may as well mourn him. He would have betrayed him, left him to die. Like he already did.

Then his eyes caught a much finer figure and his fists closed.
There he was. Harrold Hardyng. A man without honor. Without faith other than himself. He had lured him in a dream, and then ambushed him in a place where everything should have begun. He had let a maester deliver the message to him as the flames burned and the screams were heard.

It wasn’t supposed to be like that, no no. He should have been celebrated as a hero. He was supposed to enter the gates of Winterfell with glory. Instead of Harrold. The lords would have had to recognize his worth and turned from Harrold to him, for he was a true northerner, loyal to his country. The ones who would have protested would have had to let it be, or else they would have paid the price. Then they would have turned towards the Wall and kill them all. His love would have loved him, for who didn’t love a hero? She wouldn’t get the choice. She would have to marry him. She would have to be his…

And then… With the friendship with Harrold, once Robert would be gone… Who knew? They could conquer it all.

Baela’s voice came disturbing his thoughts.

“We’re so near, now. How do you think we should name our first child?” She asked with an eager smile. “When we’re married, I mean. I know in my country they care not for such ceremony. But I… love songs so much, you know? Those of the knights and the maiden? And you are my knight… So, tell me… I thought Asher for a boy, but for a girl…”

A glimpse of red hair. He swore he could see her. He could feel her.

“Sansa…”

“Sansa? Well, I guess it is fitting for her to take the queen’s name. But…”

Harrold stayed a little more to talk with two of his men, before entering. He was the last one. He turned suddenly towards Baela as the crowd finally scattered, making her yelp in surprise.

“Baela, I need to ask you something.”

Her eyes shined and it hurt.

“Anything, my love.”

His eyes narrowed.

“Go to the village. Tell them their queen is in danger. Tell them Jon Snow has arrived to save her. To save them. Tell them he will come to them at dawn, and they need to be prepared.”

She nodded, and he turned away. She caressed his cheek tenderly, her gaze alight and soft. He did not look at her, eyes on the high walls that were separating him from his destiny.

“You are a true savior. I’m so lucky you chose me.”

He did not comment on it. He couldn’t.

“Do it,” He said. “Now.”

He felt her freeze, until she stood up and went away silently.

He looked back and saw the cage, held by two strong horses and guarded by three heavily armed soldiers. And in it a giant wolf, barely moving, its bloody paws nearly out of the cage.
Milk of the puppy, he thought. They had drugged it and kept it locked in there with its own mess.

What would they do with that wolf? He wondered.

A terrible foreboding took him, like ice gripping his guts. He felt his heart being squeezed by the pressure of his torments. He felt the need to get his hand on his chest, clutching the cloth that covered his chest, for fear it would tear his rib cage.

Something wasn’t right. It wasn’t like it was planned.

He had to be inside. He had to find the way to get to her. Before they claim her. Before it’s too late…

Oh, if he only could be inside. Maybe he could change what would happen. Maybe he could save her…. And take her away. Anywhere.

Yes, she would be his, now and forever. He would keep her safe, he would keep her locked, and no one would ever harm her. And she would only sing for him, only for him…

Rage overcame his reason, and he let himself be consumed by it.

So Harrold wanted her for himself, uh? He wanted the North too, despite what he said? He wanted to have it all?

No, that would not happen. He couldn’t let it.

This man betrayed him. He would destroy him.

He walked towards the gates, as two guards were about to close them.

He had seen them once, in what seemed a distant past. They were Harry’s men, and like him, they had no honor. No conscience. It did not matter who they were. What were their names. They were all the same.

“Hey!” One of them stopped him. “No one enters. Orders of the lord of the Vale.”

This soldier was thin as rope, but his eyes were sparkling with a vicious intelligence. They all were.

“Oh, is that so?” The man that left the snow couldn’t help but laugh bitterly. “Robert Arryn is in there?”

“You’re a fool.”

“What’s with that face?” The other mocked. “You’ll scare even the hungriest spinsters.”

He glared at him, at that man so common, so coarse, with a big moustache that was almost covering his lips fully. It surprised him Harry would accept him so, as he always liked a good look on his men.

“Let me in!” he ordered.

They only laughed.

“I command you to let me in.” He cried once more. “I am Jon Sn-“

He couldn’t finish. The one with the big moustache pushed him, and he fell in the mud. He felt the
warmth of it, sticking on his clothes, but also the sharp stings of the twigs hidden in it.

They laughed once again.

“You are nothing, bastard,” The other told him. “Lords will be feasting on a she-wolf soon, to see if her cunt is as cold as they say. You are not invited. Beastly renegades or not.”

They were guards, used to say such crude words without exactly knowing what would happen.

He was no fool. They would not dare, he told himself. They had nothing to gain from it. What they wanted was for her to take a king… For her to take him.

But they only laugh at him and shut the little opening.

They would be the first to die, he decided. He raised his hand towards them in rage as realization came to him.

The gates were closed.

The feast had already begun without him.
Chapter Notes

Chapter’s theme: “The Chain” by Fleetwood Mac
Finally. They are reunited physically.
I hope you’ll enjoy it. A lot of angst, frustration… and sparks of hope, I believe.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Snow. Cold, hard snow. Slipping through his fingers, through his hair. It felt like a kiss on his cheeks, reviving him.

He had always known it, and with time he had accepted it. He had thought it part of him, but still he hadn’t felt exactly complete.

Now he knew who he was. He had found it out.

Daenerys Targaryen was the reminder of it, but she was so much more.

His heart squeezed looking at her back, her silver hair lightly swept by the wind.

And she was walking away from him. Trying to leave him. Again.

He fell on his knees, remembering what happened. Looking at the bloody scars the scales had made on his fingers, the ones he almost lost by waiting for so long to come back.

He had tried to reach Drogon as they flew away. Make him stop. But the dragon had raged at his intrusion, shaking his head to get him out.

This power was still new to him. He struggled to control it, and it seemed each time he tried, it only made things worse. But still, he tried. For he did not see any issue. For it was who he was, and he had finally accepted it.

Daenerys had tried to calm the dragon. But it wouldn’t do. Drogon flew haphazardly, trying to make him fall. And he actually succeeded in the end, he reflected. But by this time he was already too close to Daenerys. And she herself struggled to keep her hold on him.

When she fell, he let go of the scales and caught her in his arms. He took the fall for her. He had felt the snow on his back and he knew it had saved him from death.

And then came the storm and they definitely lost Drogon.

He had looked at Daenerys and found her unconscious as the snow fell furiously on them. She barely weighted anything. Did she even eat enough? He had wondered. During his time in Ghost’s body, he saw several apples and pomegranates. But at the table, she only picked at her food, handing it to him and laughing when he refused.

But still, she was here, with him, and he pressed her body closer to his, closing his weary eyes in relief.
When he had woken up, she had detached herself from his embrace and was walking away. The storm had stopped. He had followed, keeping his distance. Sometimes she stopped, so he did too.

He knew what she was trying to do. Find a place to stay to wait for her son. But she would not last enough, going on like this. He wondered even how she could even stand.

‘It’s been nearly two days now, Daenerys,” He pleaded. “You can’t avoid me forever.”

She gave no indication she heard him.

“Say something. Please.”

She continued her way.

“Daenerys…”

Then, suddenly she stopped.

“Oh, what an irony,” He heard her mumble.

He looked ahead, his gaze for once leaving her. And what he saw made him hold his breath. He felt his heart going still.

The waterfall.

*We could stay here for a thousand years, she had said. No one would find us…*

Her hair flowed with the wind with the grace of snow falling on a quiet evening. It brought him her scent, and he felt his heart soaring.

*Jon…*

He shook his head.

*No, Ghost. Not now. I need to be in control.*

He took a step forward. She did not notice, frozen in place.

He felt her hold her breath, her gaze lost in the angry waters.

She remembered it too.

A tear escaped her eyes, and he lost it.

He was about to touch her cheek, that was reddening due to the extreme cold. But as his finger grazed her skin, she jumped, her eyes wide open. His hand closed in the air.

“No. Don’t…”

He closed his eyes briefly.

Reaction. At least he had that from her. She was all fire, biting and violent. Good. He preferred her flame to her cold silences.

She had let her guards down to him once. Now she felt cornered, trapped.

Couldn’t she see that he did not seek to put out her flame?
“You were dead!”

He blinked, taken aback.

“I… wasn’t. I never was.”

She raised one eyebrow.

“I see.”

No, she did not. She had not understood. And how could she?

She had seen his body, and the flames surrounding them. She had seen Ghost jumping in the stake as it lighted and heard his cry as he saw the dagger pointing towards her heart. But she did not see his soul leaving Ghost’s form to return to his. She did not feel the pain he had by tearing himself like that, nor the pull he had since he returned so close to it.

Ghost had paid the price of his folly. Greatly.

Jon… He felt him trying to reassure him.

No, it wasn’t alright. He could not control it as he wanted. In the way, he hurt what he loved more than he protected them. He had let go of himself in his grief and found escape in Ghost, who had welcomed him more eagerly than he should have. We are pack, he had said. Your heart and mine are the same. So why not the body?

But when he found her again… He couldn’t escape what he did. What he felt. Nor the need to touch her and hold her close one last time. She couldn’t die. Not while he was still breathing.

So once again he had succumbed to the pull without thinking of the consequences.

He looked at her.

“You were dead too…” He took a step forwards, another attempt at reaching her. “And now you’re back…”

She took a step back. Her eyes blackened.

“And not thanks to you.”

His throat was dry and his hand itchy.

“Dany…”

She blinked. He knew she was about to tell him to stop calling her that name, the protest already forming in her mouth. But then for the first time, their eyes met, truly.

“Your eyes…” Her voice broke. “What happened to you?”

He had broken a rule, that’s what happened. His hand fell back to his side, and his eyes went down.

He felt her coming at him. Hesitantly at first. He saw her shadow on the snow, making slowly one with his. He felt her fingers grazing his cheekbone. He leant on the softness of her hand, but before he could even close his eyes, the moment was already gone. He could hear Ghost whining from the lack of her and it hurt his heart as well. She shook her head, took a step back.
“No, I don’t want to know!” She said, conflict in her eyes. “You’re a monster!”

He stared at her intensely, feeling the fire burning in his chest. A mix of quiet anger and lust. He burned to take her now, just to feel her skin on his, proof that she was by his side, once again.

“If I am a monster, then what are you, Daenerys?” He said calmly.

She opened her mouth in protest, but then closed it. She looked down and he could almost see the process of her thoughts, from defense to self-blaming, and pain, so much pain. She looked at him and then her face distorted in rage. He could almost hear scream “How dare you!” at him, for the indignant flame in her eyes was obvious to see. Swiftly, she let out the dagger she had on her belt and jumped on him, the end of the dagger on his chest, nearly piercing the thick cloth of leather that had been covering him.

The one he had used to kill her…

“I’ll kill you!”

“Do it,” he said in one breath, intoxicated by the nearness of her body. “You said so yourself. I am your end, and you are mine.”

And anyway, if your breathing ever stops, mine won’t last long now that I found you again.

Ghost groaned in disbelief. He felt him daring him to do more.

“Ghost is dead because of you…” She said with a hurried voice, as if she was trying to give herself reasons to plunge the knife into her heart.

He was tempted to laugh at it, but the bitterness was too strong. And he could already hear Ghost barking in protest.

Of all the reasons, this was the one she chose?

“I AM… Ghost. At least, Ghost is me. Depends.”

“You make no sense.”

“I know.” He chuckled. “But you did not love me for my ability to make sense.”

How could he explain to her that they shared the same body and mind, that sometimes he did not know if his doings had more to do with Ghost than him?

He was a skinchanger. A warg. It was a part of him he had tried to ignore until it became the very thing he could not avoid. He almost thought he was becoming crazy, until he was forced to accept it.

Now the damage was done. It had tainted his abilities and even now he wasn’t entirely sure he could ever control them completely. It was still all too new, all too dangerous. But still he had tried, letting his feelings for revenge take over his reason.

Until she came back, and he forgot everything else.

She shook her head, mouth shaking and eyes flashing.

“I don’t love you.”
Oh, sweetheart, he wanted to say. Your mouth may lie, but your eyes don’t. They always gave out the truth about what you really feel. I should have known. I should have payed attention…

She laughed bitterly. But it sounded to much like a cry for him to be fooled that easily.

“You have no idea how much I want to hate you right now.”

“But you don’t.”

He tried to touch her, but her head raised up in determination.

“Go ahead, kill me,” she snarled as she put the dagger in his hands, pointing it towards her chest. “Put that knife in my heart once again, I dare you! Or better yet, behead me so I can never come back again!”

Jon gazed into her eyes until she broke in tears, her chest shaken with the strength of her sobs. He felt the warmth of her breath on his face. He wanted to hold her in his arms. He needed to.

But the dagger was still pointing too dangerously on her chest, piercing her cloth. One unfortunate gesture and she would be gone. Once again.

He couldn’t let that happen. Not on his watch. Not ever.

“You’re out of your mind,” He replied, trying to reach her as she suddenly distanced herself, leaving him with the dagger in hand.

He let it fall between them, slipping at her feet, the sound of it echoing in his ears like broken glass. That’s when he realized the wrongness of these words, and their impact on her.

Was that the sound a heart makes when it breaks? He wondered.

She wouldn’t let him, he knew that. Not now, when memories were still raw. But he had to try.

Daenerys laughed and her eyes glinted with a fire that would have scared anyone who did not know her. But all he could see now was the pain inside. Excruciating pain, mingling despair and loneliness. He could feel it as his own, cutting through his flesh, tearing up his guts. He stopped in his tracks, trying to gather his thoughts and focus.

He needed to get to her. Or else he would lose her. Once again.

He wasn’t prepared to relive that pain.

Her laugh sounded off, disbelieving. Her arms were stretched out, palms towards the sky, but it was not an act of faith. She had no faith to give him. He deserved that, he knew. But it hurt nonetheless.

“Now you figure it out?” She asked ironically. “Did you think of it by yourself or Tyrion had to tell you that?”

Her voice was on the verge of breaking, but she could still bite. She could still fight.

He felt tender pride on that fact, and relief. He had not broken her. She would not let herself be broken. Not by him, not by anyone. But still…

Oh love, he wanted to tell her. What have I done to you? What have I done to us?
He looked into her eyes and then the sense of her words came to him. He blinked in disbelief.

“You… knew?”

“Do you think you could have a conversation with him without one of my loyal subjects telling me there was a risk of betrayal?” She crossed her arms, chin up defiantly. “I’m not stupid. I know Tyrion.”

“Then… why?”

“I trusted you. THAT was my downfall.”

There, he saw her look at the dagger between them.

He had to take it back. But not too obviously, or else she would go away and he wouldn’t be able to reach her anymore.

“That was our downfall,” she whispered, her gaze on it.

Then she closed herself once more and he felt he was about to lose her. Once again.

One step and he could take it. And throw it all away like he should have in the beginning.

Too late. She had seen it. She had taken it back.

“You tell me I’m out of my mind…” She mumbled. “But it is this world. It is insane. Or else I would never have been able to instill rebellion in so many men to betray their own ruler.”

Her eyes were wild and he froze.

“You have no idea what monster you have released once you killed me. Once you killed us.”

She pointed the dagger towards him, preventing him from getting closer.

“I’m planning revenge on those who wronged me. I’m planning revenge on all people who bears the name Stark. Now try to stop me. You know you want to.”

He smiled in relief and shook his head.

“I won’t.”

She blinked, unsettled.

“Go ahead, do this,” He nagged her, daring her. “Destroy them. Destroy her. Here, I’m waiting. No, better yet, I want to be in the front row, watching.”

She shook her head in disbelief.

“I always knew you were a madman, Jon Snow. But this? I can’t believe you…”

He raised one eyebrow, daring her to do more.

He had known insanity. He had tasted the blood of innocents, and he had delighted in it. It was like a part of him had awakened and he had been set free.

He had been a monster. But he regretted nothing. He had felt complete for the first time. Complete and free. No pressure, no expectation. He could run away if he wanted to. He could conquer,
claim, destroy. He could be good. He could be bad. But more than that, he could be the one to decide.

And he had decided he would not live without her. Not if he had another chance to be with her. He would not live in the shadows once again, afraid of his own name.

He felt Ghost’s approval in him, and it gave him strength.

“You had Arya on your grasp,” He added. “And yet you did nothing to harm her.”

“Arya may not bear the name Stark forever….”

“Now you’re making excuses. I don’t believe you. I know your heart.” He maintained his eyes on hers. “You like Arya. You sympathize with her.”

She shook her head once again. But this time she did not meet his eyes.

“Don’t presume to know anything about my heart, Jon Snow. You didn’t know back then, and you still don’t know now.”

“Then don’t presume to know anything about mine,” He said calmly, taking a step forward. “Put down that dagger, Daenerys.”

“Oh, but there are so many ways that you could hurt me, and it always comes with you…”

He took her hand softly with his and used the other to take the blade and throw it away.

She raised her head and met his eyes.

“You still want me…”

“No…”

No… I don’t just want you, he wanted to say. I love you. I need you. You are the warmth in my heart, in my soul. I let you go once, believing I would save us both from infamy and my heart was shattered ice. I can’t do it twice.

But the words were stuck in his throat, and he couldn’t get them out. And words were not enough, he knew that.

Now was not the right time. She was like a little animal trying to limp in a last act of foolish courage. Feelings of love would not reach her yet. She would not believe it, he thought.

He felt the distance coming between them, and that’s when he realized his mistake.

“So it was true, then, what I’ve heard,” She raised her head defiantly and crossed her arms. “It was not I that you loved. It was her. It was always her.”

“Who are you talking about?”

“Sansa Stark!”

The name was pronounced with spite, and something that sounded a little too much like jealousy.
There, he could not help it. He laughed.

“Oh yes, of course, you can laugh! Laugh at me for all you want, for you fooled me greatly!” She continued accusingly. “They all talked about it, and I would not listen to it!”

“And you were right to do so,” He managed to say, shaking his head. “Sansa is a girl, she had always been a girl. Afraid, full of fantasies. Always playing games, playing roles, and expecting others to play their parts as she wants them to. What she had lived only made her cling to what she once had.”

He tried to reach her hands.

“Do you really think I could love a girl?”

She pushed him away.

“Since when being a girl is a bad thing?”

“I did not say that. I said that I can’t.”

She did not seem convinced.

“Daenerys…”

If only he could say all that was on his heart… Would it solve anything?

No. She would not believe him.

“I’ve always seen her as my sister. Such bonds are difficult to overlook.”


“So are the ones between nephews and aunts.”

He raised his head, dumbfounded.

Did she really think that? That the reason he had been so away…

… had been such foolishness?

Oh, how could it have escaped his notice? So caught up in his own attempts to figure out who he was, so disgusted by his own indecisiveness, he let her think he was disgusted by her. When in fact, it was so much more…

He shook his head, unwillingly smiling.

“What do you want me to say exactly, Daenerys? That I was disgusted by the blood we shared?”

That same blood who was boiling again with longing now that she was there?

“There, you said it.”

“You only listen to what you want.”

No. Blood had not been what had disgusted him. This issue had been raised so many times in history, and so many times overlooked that if such link made him uneasy when he learned about it, his rational side took over to make him remember that fact. And his heart… it did not bear any
obstacle. Not after everything that had happened.

“That’s because you never answer properly!” She protested.

“And what should be more proper?”

_To say that I want to fuck you and leave the world behind? That I want to embrace you and never let go, for fear you might disappear once again?_

_That when I saw you distressed after your friend’s death, I wanted them to burn, all of them?_

_That when the city went to ashes, I struggled with guilt over the euphoria I felt? That I hated myself for what I felt, for what I thought I was becoming?_

He still remembered the many faces. Women, children, cripples. This had stopped him and made him realize.

Yes. He was a monster he had decided at that time. That side of him was new, and somehow too familiar, and he wasn’t ready to accept it. It was ruthless, it was burning in him, leaving him breathless. He wanted to kill it in the egg, to close that box people had opened for him. Even if it meant his death. And hers, for she seemed the trigger of it.

When he had felt the life leaving her eyes, he had raised, already dead inside. He had faced Drogon, hoping that he would kill him, that he would erase everything that had been done and bound him and Daenerys in death. That this madness in him would be erased at the same time as him. But the dragon had just glared at him and left him. Once again, he had been proven unworthy.

With her gone, the questions still stayed though, and this being he was becoming was burning him more and more. And then it happened. The anger. The rage. The despair. The thirst for blood…

He had let go of his struggles. And many people died for that.

He would not forget that. But he could not also forget what he had tried to ignore for so long.

Now, he realized. He was only human. Just as she was. This was no madness. It was what he felt. What she felt. Fire burned in their souls, and the more they tried to control it, the more they were consumed by it. And he had to let himself be engulfed in the it to realize…

“Simple. Yes or no. Was there even a chance that…?”

A chance?

Could there be a chance for them?

How could she even love half a man? How could he even pretend to love her when all he could give her was uncertainties and doubts?

All this time, he had been wondering, again and again, how life could have fooled them so. Had fooled him so. One time he thought he was a bastard, a Stark, a king. He was in love with an extraordinary woman, a queen. And then he was something else, something he never thought he could be. Someone he never expected to consider, and who was daring him to claim and take. No matter the consequences.

He remembered the many nights wondering, wandering endlessly. Afraid to meet his own gaze, and hers. Afraid that everything that had been created was now lost.
And it had been lost… Or was it?

He had once said to Theon Greyjoy he could be both. What a hypocrite he was, for himself was afraid to consider what he really was.

Now it didn’t matter. He was here, and she was here.

But will it be enough? He wondered. Had he been enough?

He shook his head.

“I should have… It was my responsibility to…”

“Noble, valiant Jon Snow. Always thinking he has the responsibility of everything.”

Her tone was sarcastic, and distant. It irritated him.

“Don’t…”

Her eyes glinted dangerously.

“You have no right to tell me what I shouldn’t do!”

He crossed his arms. Oh, she wanted to play that game?

“With all respect my queen. I have right to tell you what I think.”

“You have the right. And I have the right to ignore it.” She answered. “You had your time to talk. You didn’t. Now you lost it.”

“Daenerys…”

She did not answer, only stepped towards the water.

He looked at her, befuddled.

“Daenerys.”

She crouched and touched it lightly, looking at the waves she made.

“Your Grace.”

She stopped one moment, as if surprised, then continued. She did not even look at him. She cupped it in her hands, swallowing it slowly.

“My queen.”

Finally she turned, glaring at him.

“You’re mocking me.”

He smiled, amused.

“I wouldn’t dare… my queen.”

She rolled her eyes. But she did not try to distance herself when he came closer to her.
“There’s a cave. Behind the cascade. It’s not as big as what you should be used to, just big enough to gather a fire and sleep near it, but it would be more comfortable than staying here,” He said nonchalantly. “Robb and I used to stay here, you know, when the weather were too hard.”

“You already told me that.”

“Tomorrow we’ll decide. Tomorrow we’ll be fine.”

“Will we?” She asked.

He smiled. But found nothing else to say. Too much had been said, and still not enough.

He helped her getting there, holding her petite figure when she almost fell. They settled in the cave, letting the sound of the water be their song.

He went for hunt and asked her to wait for him.

She did not leave. She only looked at the distance and did not meet his eyes when he came back.

By nightfall, he had set up a fire and the rabbit he caught was cooked.

She still had not come closer to him. She was still keeping her guards up.

He had enough of that silence coming once again between them.

He took off a part of the thigh of the roasted animal and handed it to her.

“Eat.”

She crossed her arms and looked away.

“Eat, I say. You’ll need it,” He repeated firmly, then cracked a smile. “You won’t be able to burn any lordling’s castle if you don’t.”

She did not answer. Irritation went to him. He felt the urge to shake her, to force her to look at him in the eyes.

“One way or another, this food will enter into your mouth. Either you do this willingly, either I do.”

She took it fiercely, glaring at him. Jon chuckled, feeling relief at that.

“I don’t need you to survive,” She said with defiance.

“I know,” He answered softly. “But you’ll survive better with food in your belly.”

*Let me care for you*, he wanted to say. *Let me in.*

There was something she was trying to hide. He could see that. Something that was keeping her away from him. A cold accusation filled with grief and despair. Something more than he could have ever imagined. And he wasn’t prepared for such answer.

It will come with time, he reasoned. Or maybe never. Maybe it will disappear as snow under the sun.

In the meantime, he had to find way. Or to create them. For them to find each other once again.
Crude images came to him, mostly of animals. He shook his head, trying to get rid of them. No, Ghost, he scolded. That is not the solution.

Then what is?

He pondered the question and looked at her closely.

She was still on her guards with him, and with reason. And if she knew he was the reason they were stuck in here… He did not dare to think of it.

He needed gain her trust once again.

“If we want to survive this, we need to help each other. Not quarrel.”

“That is common sense. But what if I want to quarrel?”

He shrugged.

“I can’t win against you. You know that.” He smiled, his gaze turning downwards, where he tried to steady his footing. “I don’t want to.”

“Good.” She replied in one breath. “Then you’re more reasonable than I thought.”

She walked towards the bottom of the cave and looked at him.

“Your side. Mine.” She pointed at the opposite corners.

He only went closer to her.

“I said…”

“Always so commanding.” He chuckled. “I do remember you telling me that dragons did not recognize propriety.”

“You’re no dragon,” She snapped. Then, after a moment of silence, she added, more softly. “You never wanted to be.”

“I did not have time” He managed to utter. “But I did survive the fire, didn’t I?”

She said nothing at first, as if considering. She sat down and slowly laid on her back. Then she met his eyes and her lips opened softly.

“And now?”

He looked at her intensely.

“Now, it all depends.”

She raised an eyebrow.

“On what?”

“On you.” He declared. “What do you want?”

Daenerys rolled her eyes as she turned away and Jon had the sudden urge to kiss her brow.

“For you to leave me alone.”
He cracked a smile.

“I’m afraid that’s not possible, your Grace.”

He laid closer to her, his chest against her back. She stiffened.

“What are you doing?”

“Keeping my queen warm”

“Stop it. I’m not your queen. You made your point clear that day, when you killed me.”

“Then you misunderstood when I said you’d always be. The night is cold in this land. You won’t destroy any little girl’s land by freezing to death.”

“You’re insufferable.”

“I know. You won’t change that.”

He closed his eyes, appreciating the warmth of her body against his.

He heard Drogon’s cry in his head. *No now, he tried to answer. I can’t let you find us. Not now….*

She wasn’t rejecting him now. It was one step forward.

“There were many things that I seem to have misunderstood, then,” She mumbled, her eyes slowly closing.

He smiled, then waited for her to be completely asleep to gather her more in his arms, burying his nose in her hair.

Spiceflowers and cinnamon… It was faint, fragile, but he couldn’t help but hope. it smelled like a new beginning. It smelled like summer.

And this time, he was determined to let nothing come in their ways.

Chapter End Notes

Author’s notes: Some doors close themselves. Others are opened.
Next chapter will be Sansa’s.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!