What Lurks in the Wolfswood

Its 1994 and Jon and Dany are new parents, doing their best to raise their son. But when baby boys start disappearing in the small town of Winterfell, will they be able to keep their son safe, and will they learn what lurks in the Wolfswood...

Excerpt:
Gods, a smoke would feel nice right now. Impulse opens his desk drawer and finds the emergency pack he's kept hidden for months. The subtle scent filling his nostrils as soon as he peels off the plastic wrap. Urgently digging around to find the lighter. The rush of finally giving into to craving already soothing the stress. But as the filter touches his lips, he stops.

He promised Dany he'd quit. For Benjen. For her.

Notes

So few content warnings. First, this is a story that revolves around the White Walker’s penchant for Baby-Napping. There will be some Baby-Napping this fic. But, I have no
problem ‘spoiling’ (spoiler culture is bullshit) that at the end of this fic, all children will be safe and back with their parents/guardians with no harm done to them.

Second, this is sort of a horror story. There will be no gore, or excessive violence or gross shock value. And any ‘horror’ aspects will be well-padded with lots of Jon/Dany/Boatie domestic fluff. Hopefully, If I can pull it off, it will just be tension and suspense, and ultimately the only violence will be the when our hero and heroine destroy the White Walkers. (oops spoilers. :rolls eyes:)

Third, there is mention of domestic violence in this fic, nothing will be shown ‘on-screen’.

Fourth and finally, in this fic, the Free-Folk are roughly analogous to Native Americans and First Nations peoples. I did alot of research, and am actively doing my best to avoid any harmful tropes. The last thing I want with this fic is to bring harm.

Thanks to JustWandering-NeverLost for the gorgeous moodboard. She and Ashelyfanfic just started a new story called Dragons Dark and Deep. It's a canon AU starting in Season 6 where Jon/Dany are your "Doesn't answer to gods nor men" Targaryens. Targ!Jon is :sploosh:. Also thanks my wonderful Tarts for always supporting me.

Music for this piece is The Devil and The Huntsman - Sam Lee & Daniel Pemberton. It’s a creepy, bassy track that’s sooo fucking good.

Oh one more thing, it's set in the 90s. Enjoy.
But it's not by bone, but yet by blade
Can break the magic that the devil made

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Jeor's words ring in his ears. Growing loud but muffled, as if he's listening through a glass bell. A high pitched whine piercing his perception. Clouding his vision as he struggles to reconcile with reality. All his plans, all *their* plans shattering in a few quick minutes. Sudden nausea twists his stomach. Horror hollowing his chest as all the ramifications are realized.

“We just had a kid…”

Mormont hangs his head, shoulders slumping. The old bear slowly nods his understanding and takes a few long deep breaths before answering.

“I know, Jon. I know.” His captain and mentor scratches at the back of his neck as he chooses his next words. “If it was within my power, I'd promote you in a heartbeat. There's no-one I'd rather have taking over after I retire.”

Rage charges through him, white-hot and instant. “Then why-”

He cuts off the sneer and shakes his head. He already knows why. Seniority and small-town politics. All the hours he's put in. All the improvements he's made. All the work and the training. It doesn't mean anything. Not when Alliser Thorne has 20 years under his belt and plays golf with members of the town council once a month.
It was foolish to hope.

Jon slumps into his chair, staring into the pattern of the wood grain on his desk. A small stack of papers piled up on the corner of it. Reports and responsibilities passed onto him, work to prepare him to keep the park and ranger station running after Jeor's retirement. Work that he relished up until a few minutes ago.

“Everything alright, Jon?” Sam asks, not really looking away from the computer. Clacking at the keys at an irritatingly fast pace.

“Mormont's retiring…”

“And?” an excited tone growing in friend's voice.

He twirls a pen between his fingers, not yet ready to answer the question. Not yet ready to accept his fate. Licking his lips and glancing about the station. Taking a deep breath when he sees that Thorne's desk is empty.

“Thorne's gettin’ promoted,” he answers with a flat monotone.

Hope fades from Sam's face, draining the color and deflating his shoulders.

“We're gonna lose our jobs.”

“Aye, probably.” Gods , a smoke would feel nice right now. Impulse opens his desk drawer and finds the emergency pack he's kept hidden for months. The subtle scent filling his nostrils as soon as he peels off the plastic wrap. Urgently digging around to find the lighter. The rush of finally giving into to craving already soothing the stress. But as the filter touches his lips, he stops.

He promised Dany he'd quit. For Benjen. For her.

With a reluctant sigh, he replaces the cigarette and tosses the whole package in the trash before burying his face in his hands and raking them up through his hair.
It's hard to focus on the work in front of him. Hard to work on things that won't matter in a few months. Hard to do his job when he’ll lose it soon enough. Hard to plan for the future when it's slipped through his fingers.

The annoying whine of Sam’s computer connecting to the internet interrupts the downward spiral of his thoughts. The modem screeches through the speakers. Beeping. Buzzing. Dialing into the net while Sam squinches his face up in embarrassment. Fumbling around his desk to try and block the noise. Covering the speaker with his large fleshy hands.

“Sorry,” Sam murmurs.

Jon shrugs and looks around the ranger station, locking on Janos Slynt on the opposite side of the room. Slynt’s eyes narrow on Sam, giving a disgusted scoff, and Jon feels his lip twitch. Sam’s better with computers than anyone in this goddamn town, and Thorne will fire him anyway. Spouting some bullshit about the Forest not needing soft bodies.

Soft bodies who know how to easily track disease spreading through trees. Who can keep tabs on the number of campers and hikers so they can figure out if someone is lost quicker. Who has better records on who has a fishing/hunting licenses in case something goes wrong.

“You’ve got mail!” the computer announces loudly.

“Sorry.” Sam buries his face in his hands. “I don’t think it will always be like this.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Jon answers, glaring back at Slynt. The man’s weasely features twisting into a wry, knowing smile as he slips into Thorne’s office.

Sam will land on his feet. He’ll find a new job soon. The Ranger’s station was lucky to have him in the first place. Any place would be lucky to have him.

“Oh!” Sam squeaks, leaning close to the monitor, eyes moving over the screen. The blue-white glow reflecting in his thick glasses.
“What?”

“What?”

“Some disturbing news from the N.W.C.Z.”

Jon hides his groan as best he can. The North Westeros Crypto-Zoological Society. Bunch of hunters combing the Wolfswood searching for Bigfoot or Direwolves or any other manner of monsters. They’d be little more than a nuisance, if they hadn’t roped Sam into all their bullshit.

“Beric says there’s been reports of White Walkers coming south from Last Hearth.”

“That so?” he answers dryly. Fucking White Walkers, the latest in a string of non-existent obsessions. This is the last thing he wants to listen to right now. He doesn’t have the patience or the will to hide his feelings. Not when everything’s going to shit.

Sam nods. “A handful of kids went missing on the FreeFolk reservation.” His face falls as he reads further into the email. “Really young…”

“What Tribe?”

“He didn’t say.”

Jon glances up at the clock, letting out a heavy exhale. It’s late, and Tormund was probably already getting shitfaced in some shithole bar. “I’ll give Tormund a call tomorrow. See if there’s anything we can do to help.”

“You won’t do anything of the sort,” a voice answers from behind him. He turns in his seat to find Thorne standing over them. “If the Free-Folk wanted our help, they would tell us. I won’t have you waste Department resources on a bunch of Thenn bastards running off into the forest.”

He feels his lip twitch and his jaw tighten.

“If kids are missing, it’s our job to find them. No matter whose kids they are.”
“County feels differently,” Thorne counters.

“County is wrong.” The words fall out before he can stop himself, and a hot snort of air rushes out of Thorne’s nose in response.

“And that’s why you’ll never get ahead, Snow,” he shortles, turning back towards his office.

At the end of the day, it all feels like it's for nothing.

He pulls on his jacket, a ball of beaten up black denim that Dany’s patched a half dozen times. She always threatening to throw it out, the bright smile on her face telling him that she would never do it.

“Night Sam,” he wishes, checking his keys, and wallet.

Sam’s face contorting as he sputters platitudes. His friend searching and failing to find a bright side to this mess. There’s no bright side to this mess.

He glances at Thorne’s truck sitting across from his old pickup in Ranger Station’s parking lot. An all black brand-new 93’ Chevrolet C/K. A muscle spasms, and his lip twitches with anger. Of course Thorne got that fucking truck.

Jon had seen it, months before. When he and Dany were looking for a more kid friendly car for her and Benjen. Dany’d caught him staring at it, gave him a peck on the cheek and whispered “someday” sweetly in his ear, before taking his hand and guiding him to the used car lot. He would’ve been content to forget about it. Would’ve been content to run Robb’s old pick up into the ground.

But Thorne had to fucking get it. Had to rub it in his face every goddamn day. He catches a glimpse of the asshole walking to his truck in his rearview mirror. Slynt, ever the loyal lackey, following right after. Both climbing into the oversized vehicle and pulling out much too quickly. The large snow tires spewing out a grey slush into the road as he speeds off.

Dany would joke that men like that are compensating for something.
Gods… what is he going to tell Dany?

The drive home seems longer than it should, each red light in their sleepy town grating on his last nerve. Winterfell hasn’t changed much since he was a boy. A few more buildings at the edge of main street, a new Blockbuster, a few new faces here and there.

But for the most part, it's the same town he grew up in. The same town that rejected him before. The same town always looked down on Lyanna Stark’s bastard boy.

Why would he have expected it to be different now?

The railway crossing lights flash, and the warning bells ring as the crossing arm lowers. Cutting him off and delaying his journey home. A rush of bile floods his tongue as he watches the train cars pass. Flatbeds stacked high with lumber heading south to mills in places like Riverrun. An agonizing churn twisting in his stomach as the forced stop leaves him with nothing to do but ruminate.

Was this all a mistake? Bringing Dany here? Having Benjen here? Leaving their tiny apartment in Dragonstone to move into his uncle's empty home? It was supposed to be a good thing. A gift from his cousins. A place where their family could grow. Where they could raise Ben without worrying about drugs in the street, or gang violence, or any of the issues that plagued the cramped southern cities. A chance for them to finally get ahead, finally make something of themselves.

A car honks loudly behind him, startling him out of his brooding. The pathway home free and clear from obstruction.

Gods… What's he gonna tell Dany?

He rehearses a dozen explanations as he navigates the twists and turns of the road. Old pavement puckered with potholes and puddles of snow melt. The Wolfswood growing thicker as he follows the road outside of town to the quiet neighborhood pressed up against the trees. To the old house at the end of the road, with its grey shutters, and grey brick, and the haunting white weirwood tree with its blood red leaves hanging over the second story.

He stops the car and stares at it for a long moment, the rotted wood bench his uncle used to sit at covered in a thick blanket of snow.
What would Ned have told Catelyn? If all they had worked for had disappeared in a moment? What would his Uncle tell him now? Probably something about not lying. Not running away. Facing his problems head on. Taking responsibility for his actions.

All the things he should do.

“Right” he murmurs, steeling himself. Letting the air out of his lungs in a long heavy exhale before he approaches his home. Fiddling with his keys and letting himself into the house.

He may have grown up here but, she’s the one who makes it feel like home. As soon as he walks in he’s overpowered with the smell of her cooking and the sound of her Pat Benetar cassette. Those rich Essosi spices she grew up with. Her winter boots stacked neatly by the door, the diaper bag and coats hung on hooks in foyer. Pictures of them and Baby Ben lining the stairwell up to the second floor.

The little antiques and nick-nacks she collected in her years of travelling the world filling their home with her. A handwoven Dothraki wall-hanging. A harpy incense holder from Meereen, and a dozen other artifacts from places he can hardly pronounce.

Nails click along the hardwood floor as Ghost turns the corner to greet him. The albino malamute nosing his hand as he undoes the laces of his boots.

“Hey Buddy,” he says scritching under the dogs snout. “All quiet?”

As usual, he is greeted with Ghost’s silence, and large red eyes turning to the leash hanging next to the diaper bag.

“Later,” he snorts, pulling himself upright, petting the dogs head. “Help me find mum.”

She’s in the kitchen, as he suspected, her boombox masking the noises of his arrival as she bops her hips back and forth. Dancing to herself as she flips over some sizzling meats, shaking an herb container to the rhythm of the song. Her long platinum braid swaying even as she freezes, catching his reflection in the window overlooking their snow covered garden.
A bright smile spreading across her face as she spins to him.

_Gods. What did he do to deserve her?_

“How long were you standing there?” she teases, something ever so slightly embarrassed turning the tips of her ears pink as she reaches to turn off the music.

“How long enough.” he answers.

“How enjoying the show?” She rolls her eyes and turns back to her cooking, tossing in some chopped veggies before covering the skillet with its lid.

“Always.” He wraps his arms around her waist from behind and buries his nose into her hair. Her smell filling and calming him. Her shampoo and her cooking and that unique smell that only belongs to her. She relaxes back into his hold, craning her neck to peck a kiss on his jaw. Her hand reaching up to scratch at his beard.

“How was work?” Dany asks and he practically growls in response. He doesn’t answer and instead presses a kiss to the back of her neck, moving aside her hair and trailing more up her throat to just behind the shell of her ear. She gasps quietly as he scrapes his beard along the sensitive skin there.

“Is Ben napping?” he asks, nipping at her ear.

She nods absently, tilting her head to the side to give him more access. “Not for much longer though.”

“Good.” He captures her face and twists her lips to meet his. Her mouth opening, letting him greedily invade hers. Gods, he needs her. Needs her to comfort him. Needs her to strengthen him. Needs her to remind him that it’s all worth it. Desperation drives his lips against hers. Diving into her with everything he has. Letting himself drown in her. She purrs against him, muffled noises escaping her nose as his hand snakes beneath her shirt.

“Gentle,” she reminds him, nipping at his lip in warning as he works his way under the bulky bra. The fabric slightly damp, her breasts full and heavy from nursing Ben.
It was the first thing that changed when they found out she was pregnant, her luscious curves seemingly rounding overnight. His greedy neanderthal brain reverting back to a horny adolescent everytime he looked at her, barely able to keep his hands off her.

He paws at her breasts, sucking at her neck. Her hips grinding back against him. Teasing his erection with the swell of her ass. Her groan muted, humming behind her lips as she struggles to stay quiet. No, that won’t do. He needs her. Needs to hear her. Needs her whines and moans to drown out the voice in the back of his mind.

The button of her jeans is easy enough, zipper too. Scooting the waistband down to bunch around her knees. Trailing his hands over her stomach, over the small rivers and divets of stretch marks. The battle scars their son left on her. The silver stripes of skin leading him down to her prize.

She gasps as he circles her. Her back arching even as she leans forward, hand clamped onto his wrist. Her rounded nails carving half-moons into his skin as he dances his fingers along her seam. Her reflection haunting and beautiful in the kitchen window. A ghostly apparition caught in a moment of ecstasy. Mouth open in a slack jawed cry as he dips inside her. Gathering her growing wet and spreading it around. Smearing it over the hard nub protruding near the apex of her sex.

“Jon,” she hisses his name, her blue green eyes popping open. Meeting his in window pane, a wicked look dancing across her face. Worrying her plush bottom lip between her teeth. “We don’t have time to tease.”

She pushes him off, bucking back against him before leaning over the kitchen counter, spreading her legs as far as the jeans bunched around her knees will allow. Her perfect peach of a bare arse presented to him.

He doesn’t need to be told twice.

Fumbling with his belt buckle. Fishing his cock out of his boxers. Smacking her rear once. Twice. Enjoying her surprised yelp for a split second before lining them up and driving home.

Relief washes over him. Warm and wet and home and her. The force of it leaving him suddenly breathless, gasping for air as her walls clamp down around him. Clutching him, holding him inside her in the most intimate embrace. A swear shudders out of him, matched by a high keening wail from her.
Dany’s hips rock and circle back onto him, impatient and greedy.Demanding his attention as his hands circle her waist. Grabbing hold of her so he can pull her onto his cock. She preens and giggles as he snaps his hips. Her back arches as she pushes back on the counter’s edge, taking him, urging him.

“Harder,” she whispers. Her voice harsh and hoarse as she throws her head back over her shoulder. Gritting her teeth as he gives her what she wants. What she demands. His rhythm slowing, becoming methodical and deliberate as he drives into her. His hand slipping from her waist back down to her center. Brushing over her button to take her over the edge.

The mother of his son swears as he circles it, a steady stream of curses and filth erupting from her. Crying out as her body seizes and shudders around him. Gripping and releasing. Her legs wavering, back bowing up before collapsing atop the countertop for support.

The baby monitor crackles with Benjen’s babbling. The first cooing warning sounds signalling that he’s awake before it becomes a screaming cry for food and attention.

“Jon,” she murmurs, a familiar whine in her voice.

“I know, Dove,” he answers, grabbing her hips and fucking her with renewed vigor. His balls hanging heavy and slapping up against her. Dany holds herself up and open for him, her slick sweet folds enveloping him, clinging to him with each retreat. Her soft pants encouraging him to climb higher, to fall over the edge after her. To join her in the sweet release they offer each other.

It builds deep inside him, gathering at the base of his spine. Muscles pulling taut, and stones drawing up tight beneath him. Fingers digging into the flesh of Dany’s hips with bruising force as the coil within him suddenly snaps. Eyes pinching shut as it cascades through him. Sucking down air as his cock shudders and pulses.

He falls over Dany, forehead pressed into her back as he regains his senses. Her body gently rocking into his release. Softening and slipping from her. Straightening himself out and standing upright.

Dany pulls up jeans and spins around, capturing his face and kissing him. Force and tongue and demand pinning back against the island. Her fingers scratching at his beard, brushing along his jaw. Cradling his face in her hands as she breaks away.

“Better?” she asks quietly. Giving her a breathless nod in return. Turning to press a kiss into her
palm. A small gesture, filled with all the things he wants to say, but can’t put into words. She smiles back, understanding filling her blue eyes. “Tell me at dinner. Whatever it is, we’ll get through it.” Popping up on her tiptoes to kiss his forehead. “Now go get your son before he starts screaming, and I’ll finish this up.”

He curls his hands around hers, dotting her knuckles with kisses. “Thank you, Dany.”

She rolls her eyes and slaps his shoulder, a broad smile painted across her face. “Go, before he riots.”

Jon climbs the stairs to the nursery, the fourth step creaking loudly under his weight exactly as it did when he was a kid. Robb and him used to jump it whenever they were sneaking out late at night. His other cousins were never so clever. Their rooms are all empty now. Empty except for cans of paint and buckets filled with shreds of Catelyn’s terrible wallpaper. Dany’s diligent work to turn the old house into their home.

But Benjen’s nursery is away from all that, in the finished wing of the house, right next to their bedroom. They wouldn’t have him any farther away. It had taken every bit of his persuasion to convince Dany to let him sleep in his nursery instead of in their bed. But even then, it only works half the time.

There’s an ache in his heart that grows whenever he looks at his son. Like it's being stretched out, so that more love can fill it up. Their little miracle, after years of tragedy and trying. Their little boy.

He’s so small and yet so big all at the same time.

The mobile of dancing dragons spins slowly around Ben’s head as he stares up at it, letting out small chirps and squeaks of delight each time the green dragon passes above. His little feet stretching and kicking out. A small toothless grin on his face as his wide blue eyes finally find his father. Eyes so much like Dany’s it almost hurts to look at him.

“Hey buddy,” he whispers, leaning over the crib and tickling his son’s stomach. Ben kicks and gurgles, shoving his fist in his mouth. “Mum was certain you’d be fussin’. But yer happy as a lil clam aintcha.”

He’s so heavy, and yet so light all at the same time. His winter onesie sweaty, and sticky, and stinky.
“You need a diaper change little man,” he muses patting his son’s back, resting him on his shoulder as he gathers a change of clothes from the little dresser. All his little clothes neatly folded. Mostly hand-me-downs from Sam and Gilly. Little Sam is around year ahead of Benjen and… they just grow too fast.

With the messy diaper disappearing into the genie, he lifts Ben back onto his shoulder to head back down the stairs. He can’t help how he presses his nose against his son and inhales deeply. That baby smell triggering happiness chemicals in his brain. That smell that tells him to protect and care. That smell that says ‘this is a part of me’.

“Hi Benji!” Dany squeals, wrestling their son from his arms. Cooing and kissing him all over his face. “Are you hungry!? My big boy! We are gonna try some carrots tonight.” Poking at his belly and tickling him. “Mmmmmmmhhhh yummy yummy carrots.”

Jon snorts a laugh as he pulls the high chair tray out so Dany can set him in his seat. His wife bouncing back and forth excitedly as she buckles their son in and ties the bib around his neck. “Daddy…” she coos as she sits, popping the lid off the baby food jar. “Will you please get mommy a pop from the fridge?”

“Aye, Love.”

He doesn’t think he’ll ever get tired of watching her interact with Benjen, the little games she plays with him. How she pours her love over him. How their identical eyes seem to say so much. It distracts him from his own dinner. One of Dany’s Essosi dishes, meat and vegetables over rice. Simmered and coated in a spicy glaze.

It’s something he would never have tried if he hadn’t met her. Something Catelyn would have never even bothered to cook.

Dany sticks out her tongue as she gathers the orange overflow spilling from Ben’s mouth with the tiny baby sized spoon. “Aww, are you a messy boy, Benji! How can such a little boy be so dirty?” Her voice high and breathy, modulating playfully as Ben reaches for her, carrot slurry smearing all over his face.

“He wants yer tits.”

“I know.” His wife gives an exasperated sigh as she clinks the spoon on the edge of the baby food
jar, the excess falling back in. “But he can’t always get what he wants, and he needs to start on solid food.”

“Let me give it a shot, you eat.”

He pulls Ben out the high chair and sets him on his lap. Airplaning the food into his mouth like he used to do with Rickon when he and Robb would get stuck babysitting. It doesn’t work as well as he’d like. The orange carrot goop ending up mostly on his jeans and Benjen’s onesie more than in his mouth.

“Maybe he’s not ready yet.” Dany shrugs as she stands, going to the sink and wetting a washcloth.

“I think he did alright. Maybe it’s just carrots.”

“Maybe…” she answers, Ben fussing as she cleans him off. “I’m just trying to follow what the books says.”

“If you think he’s not ready, then he’s not ready. We’ll try again another time.”

She hums, picking Ben up and settling him in the baby swing as he clears off the table. Scraping leftovers into tupperware for work tomorrow. Rinsing dishes off to load into the dishwasher.

*Gods… What’s he gonna tell Dany?*

Her hand slides along his back, as she pops up on her tip-toes to plant a kiss on his cheek. Taking a dish out of his hand and setting it in the sink. Asking without words. He turns off the water and leans heavily over the sink as he searches for what to tell her.

There’s nothing to say but the truth.

“Mormont pulled me aside today. Told me he was retiring at the end of the month… and that Thorne is getting promoted instead of me.”
“Oh Jon...” she sighs, wrapping her arms around his waist and tucking herself into his side. “I’m so sorry. I know you wanted it.”

“It’s not fair.” He hates the way it sounds coming out of his mouth. A whinging, huffing noise that has no place coming from an adult. “I’m the one whose been busting my ass. I’m the one that’s improved relations with the Free Folk. It should have been me.”

“I know. You worked so hard. You deserved it.”

“It wouldn’t even bother me so goddamn much if it wasn’t him.” He feels his voice raising, getting harsh and angry. “He’s going to fire me and Sam”

“He has no grounds to do that.” Dany hugs him tightly around his waist.

“He’ll come up with something.” He buries his face in his hand, raking it back through his hair. “And then what are we going to do?” He turns in her arms, cradling his wife’s face. “What are we going to do, Dany?”

She grabs his wrists under her chin, giving a hard squeeze. “Listen to me, Jon. We are going. To. Be. Fine,” she punctuates each word, stretching them out. Forcing him to hear her. “No matter what happens. We are together. We are a family. And we are going to be okay.”

The moment is tense and tight. Every fiber of his being wanting to believe her. Wanting fall into her blue green eyes and know that they are going to be alright. And for a moment he does. For a moment there’s peace.

And then the phone rings, shattering the spell and letting the stone of worry fall back into his stomach.

She kisses his hand and lets go. Spinning to go answer the phone while he finishes loading the dishwasher.

“Hello, Snow residence,” she lilts, meeting his eyes, with a small helpless smile. “Oh Jeor! How are you? Jon told me you were planning on retiring soon. Are you going to finally finish that fishing boat?” He hears his boss’ laugh on the other end of the line. The deep and throaty chuckle, followed by indecipherable words. That knot of anxiety tightening in his belly. “Well, all the salmon off the
coast of Bear Island don’t stand a chance.” He moves next to her, drying his hands, and waiting for her to finish. “Of course I’ll cook some up. I know a Quarthonian recipe- No, nothing too spicy, I promise.” She laughs, and across the room Benjen lets out a squawk as one of his colorful plastic rings falls off his little playset to the floor. “Anyway, I’ll let you talk to Jon.”

She hands the phone over, blowing out a long breath that she urges him to mirror before answering.

“Hey Jeor.”

“Sorry to call you at home, lad.”

“What’s going on?”

“Some folks called in, reported a bonfire near the campground at the Fist’s trailhead. I need you to check it out.”

“I thought Gren was on overnight tonight.”

“He is. He’s already on a call. Checking out some unauthorized campers on the Rez.”

He lets out a deep breath and looks over at Dany, crouching in front of the baby swing, playing peek-a-boo with Benjen. She meets his eyes, hiding her face from their son behind her hands. A sad smile touching her lips as she nods.

“Alright, I’ll check it out.”

Overtime is overtime, and if he’s going to be out of a job soon, he needs to take every cent he can get.

Dany holds Benjen in one arm, and his coat in the other, hovering over him as he tugs on his boots and laces up.

“Don’t wait up for me,” he urges.
She shakes her head as she helps him into his coat. “You know that won’t happen.”

He presses a kiss to Benjen forehead. “Be good for mum. Don’t fuss.” Then presses another on Dany’s lips, and then another and another. It’d be so easy to just stay with her. Stay here in the comfort of their home, of her arms. Hold his son, watch dumb sitcoms, play with her and Benji, listen to them laugh.

“I’ll be back soon,” he whispers against her lips.

“Go,” she says quietly, her mouth twisting into a teasing reassuring smile. “Bring me back a treat.”

“I will, love.” Her sweet taste lingering on his tongue. Longing swelling in his heart.

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The darkness of the Wolfswood seems to press around his car, even his headlights can’t seem to cut far into the oppressive black. Branches cast menacing shadows in the mist, long clawed fingers reaching to snatch him, and drag him out of his truck to be swallowed and devoured by the forest. Animal sounds pierce through the droning of his truck's engine. Croaks and crickets all punctuated by the occasional howl of a wolf.

“The woods are a dangerous place at night,” Old Nan used to say, as she told her ghost stories in front of the wooden stove in the living room. He and his cousins sprawled out on the floor around her, hugging their knees and pillows. “You never know if you’ll come out.”

An orange glint glimmers in the mist, as the dirt road widens into a clearing. The small campground is a popular one during the summer. The closest one to the trailhead for the hike up to the Fist of the First Men. But in Winter, the trail is closed to the public. Ice and snow making the climb too dangerous for even advanced climbers. And so the campground is usually dead and empty, save for a handful of RVs, mostly hunters, or drifters bunking down for the night.

But tonight, the campground is alive. A big bonfire burning angrily in the center of the campsite, a beat-up old RV parked dangerously close to it. So close that the plastic side panelling of it warps under the heat.
“Seven fucking hells,” he hisses, pulling off to the side. Grabbing the fire resistant drop cloth from the bed of his pick up. It’s meant for smothering small fires. Nothing like this. Dead tree limbs, furniture, leaves, cardboard, old magazines, clothes. Anything nearby that could possibly burn has been tossed into this pile. The thick smell of gasoline hangs in the air. The smoke burns black, dotted with bright wisps of embers.

Not even the coldest of Winters can stop a wildfire.

Jon pulls up his T-shirt to cover his mouth and nose. To keep himself from inhaling the toxic fumes as he spreads out the fire tarp on the ground.

It’s hot. Very hot. Flame licks out at him as he maneuvers around the bonfire, dragging the cloth over the pile. It doesn’t cover it all, but the orange glow diminishes.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing!?” a voice screeches from inside the RV.

“I’m with the Wolfswood Ranger Station,” he announces, pulling out his wallet and ID as he approaches the RV Door. “Can you please come out Ma’am? It’s not safe.”

“Don’t come any closer.”

“Ma’am, I’m sorry but-”

A gun shot cuts through the side of the RV, and Jon hits the ground. His heart leaps up to his throat, pounding heavily. Sweat beading on his brow as he mentally catalogues himself for injury.

“ That was a warning shot, I said, ‘Don’t come any closer.’” the woman yells, over the sound of a baby’s wailing. “Don’t you come any closer to my Brynden.”

Brynden… The name rings familiar in his addled head. Dany’s group of mom friends who all come together for storytime at the library and playtime at the park. It’s a small town after all.

“Walda!” he shouts, pushing himself to his feet. “It’s Jon Snow, Robb’s cousin. I’m standing up now. I know you’re scared... But we can fix it.”
“Jon?” the voice whimpers, confused and shocked. And the door opens, the warped panelling, wavering pathetically. “Jon Snow?” Walda looks at him through the melted screen door. The netting pooling and sagging, the plastic stretched into long thin spider web shards. The gun in one hand, and a crying baby in the other. A boy, just a little bigger than Benjen. Tears streaking down her face, a red-yellow bruise growing around her eye. Cuts and scratches on her thick arms.

“Aye. It’s me Walda.”

She shakes and sobs, fresh tears rolling down her cheeks. Leaving a trail of fresh skin cutting through smokey grime built up.

“There’s something out there, Jon,” her voice thick with her tears. “It wanted my baby. It wanted my Brynden.” Something wild flashes in her eye. “You have to build the fire back up!” she hisses. The baby lets out a throaty cry, his little lungs warbling as he screeches. “It’s the only way he’ll stay away!”

“Okay, Walda,” Jon answers calmly, keeping a watchful eye on the gun in her hands. “Just put the gun down and I’ll help you. I can take you home.” As soon as the words leave his mouth he regrets them, eyes flashing to the bruising on her eye. “Is Roose hurting you, Walda?”

“It was that thing in the woods!” she hisses. “It attacked me! It attacked my baby!” She waves the gun in the air, clutching her son to her chest. “It wants him. He’s gonna take him away from me.”

“I can help you,” he says taking a cautious step toward the door, and then another. “I can take you to your sister’s house. Roslin lives just a few blocks away from us. No-one is going to take your baby.”

“I know what I saw!” she cries, baby Brynden wailing in her arms. “You have to believe me.”

“I do, Walda. No-one is gonna hurt you, or Brynden, I promise.” He reaches a hand up through the ripped hole in the screen door. “Please just give me the gun. Please Walda.”

“You’ll take me to Rozzy’s?” she asks, clutching her son to her chest. Terror and trauma tightening every tendon in her body.
“Aye.”

She nods, slowly extending the gun out. And with a relieved exhale he takes it. Quickly removing the clip, and disarming the weapon before anyone can get hurt.

“Thank you, Walda,” “C’mon Walda, let’s get you somewhere safe.” He opens the door and gently takes her arm, leading her down the slow cautious steps out of the RV. “Do you need anything from inside?”

She shakes her head, bursting into tears again as she stares at the still burning pile of belongings in smoldering under the fire blanket. Now that fire has gone down, he can make out the withered and charred shapes of Walda’s things. Blankets, curtains and clothes, books and a wooden bed frame. Pieces of her life now burnt to ash.

“It’s alright. They’re just things… They’re only things…” rubbing her back as she leans against him, sobbing into his shoulder. “You’re alright, and Brynden’s alright.”

The vigil is interrupted by the flash of red and blue sirens and painfully loud squawk as the Sheriff’s SUV pulls into the campsite. Walda looks up at him, terrified.

“Don’t worry,” he offers. “Just stay here.” He pulls out his ID and walks over to the car as Jamie Lannister and Bronn Blackwater slam their doors shut.

“Well, well, what have we got here?” Blackwater spits, a greasy grin on his face. “I knew you were too clean, Snow. Messing around on that pretty blond of yours with…” he tilts his head to the side, appraising Walda.

“Don’t be an ass, Bronn,” Lannister adds, walking up to him. “What are you doing here, Snow?”

“Mormont sent me, bonfire. Came up to put it out. What are you doing here, Sheriff?”

“That’s not any of your concern,” Lannister leans over his shoulder. “Hi Walda. How are you?”

Walda rocks on her heels, gripping her son tightly. “I’ve been better, Sheriff.”
“Roose called and asked us to check on you. He’s been worried since you ran off.” She doesn’t answer, only swallows hard. Her eyes going wide with fear.

“You think that might have something to do with the fucking welt on her face,” Jon sneers, stepping into Lannister’s space.

Jaime grabs his shoulders and pulls him in, his voice going low, “If that’s the case, there’s nothing we can do unless she presses charges, and even then…”

“So what, you’re just going to take her back.”

“Watch it, Snow.”

“She wants to go to her sister's. Roslin Tully. She lives on-”

“I know where she fucking lives,” Jaimie spits, looking back over at Walda. Sympathy painting the lines of his face as he exhales heavily. “Take care of the fire. We’ll take care of her.” The sheriff pats him on the shoulder as he crosses around to greet Walda.

“Leave the the real work for the real civil servants,” Bronn laughs. “You take care of your trees.”

Rage runs hot through him, the frustration of the day threatening to boil over inside him. Fucking Thorne getting his promotion, Walda sticking a gun in his face, fucking Sam and the fucking Crypto-Zoological fucks, Mormont dragging him away from Dany and Benjen and his bed. His lip twitches and he turns on his heel to lash out at Bronn.

But then Brynden starts crying again. Walda tries her best to shush him and comfort him as Lannister talks to her. And all that rage simply fades away in a long deflating breath.

“Sheriff?” he asks, “Do you need to borrow a car seat?”

*~*
The Sheriff’s SUV peels out the campsite, leaving him alone with the dying fire and his truck. Pulling his truck around and using the headlights to illuminate his work, he pulls a shovel out of the truck bed and starts tossing dirt onto the embers.

The RV is ruined, Walda’s lucky she didn’t get cooked alive inside it. They’ll have to tow it out, and probably have people come in to clean up all the charred remains of the bonfire. With his fucking luck it’ll be him. Thorne’ll flex his new power and give him shit detail until he fucks up or quits.

His breath fogs in the Winter night air and he shivers as he stomps out the remaining orange flares. The cold seems to cut through him. Each lungful of air is sharp. Cold scraping down his throat. And he realizes that he can’t hear the noises of the forest. There are no crickets or croaks. No wind through the trees. And even his trucks headlights seem dim compared to the oppressive darkness.

The Fist of the First Men looms above the clearing, over the trees. The rounded plateau punching up at the sky, its shape black against black, yet clear.

Every hair on the back of his neck stands on end, and he is overtaken by a tremendous feeling of fear. Freezing him in place, every muscle of his body locks up, except for his heart, which pounds with a terrifying rhythm. Adrenaline coursing through his veins. Some animal instinct he cannot name screams in his mind.

He’s hallucinating. It must be some toxic fumes from bonfire burn that has poisoned him. Making him to see things that aren’t there. Shapes move in the black edges of the forest. Ghostly forms circling around the clearing. All slowly turning to look at him.

They see him. He does not know who or what they are. But they see him.

And he must run.

Jon hasn’t been afraid of the woods since he was a boy. Not since old Nan’s stories. His uncle taught him a long time ago to respect the Wolfswood. To stay on his toes, be aware of his surroundings. That the trees were just trees, and there was nothing that he couldn’t overcome with his wits and his will.

Yet he runs, dropping the shovel and bolting to his truck. The tires spinning and spitting out gravel and dirt as he peels out onto the dirt road. Driving fast, too fast through the narrow mountain roads,
nothing but his headlights cutting through the dark mist. Nearly hitting a tree, nearly rolling Robb’s old pick-up. Nearly getting T-Boned by an eighteen wheeler as he turns out onto the highway.

The hauler blares his horns. The loud honk piercing the night, startling Jon back to himself as he parks on the side of the road.

“What the fuck?” he gasps, breathing heavy, panting. Confused and unsure of what exactly happened. Burying his face in hands, forehead resting against the steering wheel. “What the fuck!” he repeats, raking his fingers up through his hair, the adrenaline, and exhaustion taking its place.

It’s stress. Has to be stress.

There’s nothing in the Wolfswood.

*~*

He stops at the Truck stop at the edge of town. It’s the only store open this late, and as he learned when she was pregnant, it’s the only place that sells Dany’s favorite Dornish ice cream. He slides open the freezer door and pulls out a Choco-Taco and then thinking better of it grabs another.

“Haven’t seen you come in this late in a while…” Ros pops her gum as she rings up the items. Leaning over the counter, giggleing as she cocks her head to the side. “Did you knock your girl up again?”

He snorts a laugh as she bags the ice cream. “No… Not yet. Hopefully not for a bit. One’s enough for now.”

“Well, you best work on it Jon Snow.” Ros flashing and grin and biting her lip. “I miss your late night visits. Just like that night back in high school,” her voice goes low and throaty, as she winks.

He pulls out his wallet, and puts down a few bucks on the counter. “Have a good night, Ros.” Grabbing Dany’s Choco Tacos, and leaving, not waiting for the change.

All he wants his bed. To kill this fucking day. To have Dany curled up against him. Fall asleep.
listening to her and Benjen babble. His eyes begin to droop as he crosses over the train tracks, the rumbling startling him to alertness.

Working his way through the winding neighborhood, he spies the high peaked roof of the Tully’s house. The lights are on, and as he passes, he sees Roose Bolton leading Walda out to his car. Roslin and Edmure standing in the doorway, waving a goodnight.

A wave of sick passes over him, impotent rage mixed with a hollow helplessness. And the faint afterglow of that tremendous animal fear he felt in the woods. There’s nothing he can do.

Finally reaching home, he trudges through the light flurry of snow, finding Benjen’s car seat left on the porch. And for a split second he’s grateful. It would have panicked Dany to open the door and find the Sheriff late at night. He pulls it inside, tugging off his boots and coat. Doing his best to dust off the dirt from his knees. Trying to hide evidence of the excitement.

He’ll tell her, of course, just not now. Not when all he wants is his bed and his girl.

Ghost lifts his head from the foot of their bed, blood red eyes examining him as he strips off his shirt. Dany smiles and brings a finger to her lips, nodding down to Benjen.

She looks like a dream. Laying on her side, in her ratty red and black plaid flannel PJs, the shirt unbuttoned about halfway down. His son sleepily nursing beside her, his big blue eyes blinking awake to greedily suck before slowly drifting off.

He smiles as he shucks off his pants, sitting carefully on the bed next to them, and silently presents her with her Ice Creams. Dany tries to suppress a squeal of delight, but a small noise slips out anyway, startling Benjen, and starting his sleepy cycle over again.

Ice Cream drips from the corner of her mouth, as she carefully maneuvers the confection around to avoid any drops landing on Benjen. Happily munching as quiet as she can as he returns to their bed after pulling on a clean shirt and some sleep pants. Ushering Ghost off the bed so there’s enough room for him to join them.

She licks her lips, Benjen trilling happily as she tickles his stomach. Dotting her finger into the sweet cream and smearing it across his sons lips. Jon laughs as Benjen freezes in surprise. His little tongue darting out to taste.

“Oh you like that didn’t you?” she giggles, dabbing another dot on his lips. Benji kicking his legs
“Do you think he remembers the flavor? You ate enough of those.”

Dany scrunches her face in a mock glare before it cracks into a bright smile. “Maybe…” she shrugs handing him the remaining bits of the second Choco-Taco in its wrapper. “Here, I saved you some.”

He chuckles staring down at the corner edge of the ice cream. “Greedy girl,” he muses, finishing it off quickly and discarding the wrapper.

“I seem to recall you swiping your fair share of deserts.” she settles in under the covers with Benji. “You haven’t told me about what happened yet?”

He sighs heavily, pulling up the covers and sliding in next to her. “Can I tell you tomorrow? I don’t want to think about it right now.”

She nods and offers a small smile, then leans over their son, popping an ice cream flavored kiss to his lips. It was meant to be quick and reassuring, but it soon opens, widens, deepens. Giving freely of herself as he greedily takes the comfort he needs.

Benji lets out a small squawk, breaking them apart. The little thing they made, wanting their attention. Dany lets out small snort, eyes flashing with mischief and a promise of all the things she would have done were the kiss allowed to continue.

“It’s your bed-time, baby boy…” she whispers, rubbing his pouchy little tummy, in slow circles as she starts to hum. The rhythm mournful and familiar, the way most lullabies are. The hum steadily taking shape, and her soft voice gradually forming the words.

-danced with her ghosts

The ones she had lost

And the ones she had found
And the ones who loved her the most

And she never wanted to leave

Never wanted to leave

Never wanted to leave

He drapes his arm over her, gathering her and Benji up. Pressing a kiss to his son’s head and settling into the pillow.

And he never wanted to leave.

End Notes

Whoooo! I’m back on that good Jonerys shit. :sprays it in a paperbag and huffs:

Season 8… shook me up a bit. I had to hide away in the sweet sweet embrace of some of my other OTPs for a bit. I wrote a Romy (Rogue x Gambit: Xmen) one shot. And I started a new Eotheriel (Eomer x Lothiriel: LOTR) fic. I also started working on Nolden (Naomi X Holden: The Expanse) Zero G Smut.

And that all cleansed my palate so that I could jump back into GOT stuff. I’ve been really struggling as a woman, with shipping Jonerys. Shipping a woman with her murderer is… appalling. But, as I’ve been parsing through my emotions of it, I’ve come to a couple of conclusions. One, my stories are my own. My Jon(s) have never been that Jon. They are simulacrum of Jon. Distinct copies in a multi-verse of Jon’s. (or perhaps S8 Jon is the simulacrum and the real Jon is still on that boat with Dany). Anyway, I owe it to my Jon and my Dany and most importantly myself to finish my stories.

The second conclusion I’ve come to is: FUCK D&D. From this point on… everything I write is partially motivated by spite. Yea there’s the creative fulfillment, and community, and self-betterment Yadayadayada. But also at this point, I’m just fucking FLEXING. I know this is gonna sound sooo arrogant. (But they are the ones who submitted that flaming pile of shit for an Emmy, sooo...) But I’m a fucking better writer than them. In fact, all of us are. There isn’t a fic that I’ve read that has botched the characterization of Jon/Dany as bad as they did. So This is me flexing, flipping a double bird and back-flipping off a cliff.
Anyway… if you like it, let me know. I do have a praise kink. Indulge me.
If you don’t, the back button is usually in the upper left-hand corner of your browser.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!