A Dream of Dragons

by stormsandspires

Summary

Jon Snow, in the throes of anger, grief and bitterness, leaves the freefolk to journey deeper into the North, deeper into territory no man has ever ventured before.

He never expected to ever come back. In fact, he expected to die there. But instead, his exhibition brings him face to face with magic more ancient than the First Men.

He kneels before a heart tree and begs for the life of the woman he loved the most. The woman whose heart he pierced with a dagger. But instead, he opens his eyes and lying in front of him is a wailing child, with silver blond hair and lilac eyes. A child that would have been born had he not plunged a knife through her heart.

But that is only the beginning.
As Jon navigates fatherhood alone, he discovers new things about himself and uncovers ancient secrets about a foe he thought once vanquished, all while the realm is on the brink of collapse once more, and in the East, a dragon has awoken, and thirsts for Fire and Blood.
Several weeks had long past since he left the Night’s Watch.

When he had arrived to what was left of the wall, his brothers – or at least the little who remained – were more than happy to welcome him back as their Lord Commander, but as soon as his eyes found the wild, red eyes of his furry companion, he knew just like his direwolf, he no longer belonged south of the wall.

It took three long weeks of camping and traveling through The Haunted Forest until they finally found a site worthy to make their home. Or at least, for a while as they rest. Tormund had suggested that they make for Hardhome and rebuild the homes that were devastated in the attack years ago.

“‘It will take weeks if not months to travel there on foot, especially in this snow. I had Stannis’ ships then, I have nothing now.’ Jon had replied solemnly to his ginger friend as they gathered firewood. Tormund raised a brow.

“‘You don’t have nothing, friend. Look around,’” Tormund gestured the surviving freefolk setting up camp. “They will follow you wherever you go. They look at you the same way they looked at Mance, our King Beyond the Wall.”

Jon winced at the mention of yet another kingship being thrust among him. “I don’t deserve it.”

“You do.” Tormund placed a big hand. “We are here because of you, we are alive because of you. That means something, Lord Crow. Wear the title or don’t, it changes nothing.”

But it should, Jon thought. I don’t deserve it, I don’t deserve any of this.

Every night he dreamed of her beautiful violet eyes… and the tears that drowned them as she felt the cold steel pierce her heart. Drogon should have burned me to death, I wish he had.

But instead, he was sent back to The Wall. He had lost everything and wound up right where he was once more. Separated from his family, and exiled. Everything happened so fast, he barely had time to register the events as they unfolded. His brother was a king now, his sister ruled the North as its queen, and his sister was off discovering what was west of Westeros. He had left without saying a word to Davos or Sam, but he had heard that they were given the highest positions on Bran’s Small Council.

Sam, the very first man who told me I should be king of the seven kingdoms, Jon laughed bitterly at the thought. Couldn’t be bothered to see me off once he was named Grand Maester. Was that what he wanted all along? For me to be king so he could gain power?

After he and the wildlings had dinner, Jon retreated to his tent with a skin of ale and Ghost at his heels. He took a long, deep swing and collapsed onto a pile of furs.

He closed his eyes and once again, he was met with familiar, purple-blue eyes. His heart twisted itself into a knot.

He had killed Daenerys to save the realm… or at least that’s what Tyrion led him to believe. That she was a risk to everyone and herself. Tyrion had convinced him it was necessary. And he succeeded.
Gods know how much he didn’t want to, but he couldn’t risk Dany unleashing her dragon on the whole of Westeros and burning countless more innocents. So, he had to put his love for her aside, for the good of the realm. *For the good of the realm.*

Then why did it feel so wrong?

It seemed like everyone benefited greatly from his sacrifice, except him… A sacrifice he questioned more and more with each passing day.

“*Be with me, build the new world with me… this is our reason.*” She had said, smiling and holding him close. “*We do it together.*”

He told her she was his queen, now and always, and that was not a lie. Daenerys would always be his queen, even in death. He would never love another woman like her, there would never be another woman like her. She was a conqueror, a queen, the mother of dragons and breaker of chains… who could compare to that? And she fell for him when he was only the bastard King in the North, asking her to help him fight a threat that sounded all too imaginary.

Yet, she still let him mine the dragonglass he needed and saved his life, twice, from the Night King.

_She lost everything trying to help me, Jon thought bitterly. Her dragons... her children, her closest advisor, most of her army... all to save the entire realm from the Night King. And I repaid her generosity with a dagger through the heart._

These were the thoughts that filled his head in waking hours, but it was his dreams that was harder to endure.

_“We do it together.”_ He could still hear her voice, echoing loud and clearly. He would turn and see her standing there, blood pooling around her boots. Her skin the colour of curdled milk and blood trailing down her cold, lifeless lips.

At the sight of her, he would always fall to his knees. _“We could have, Dany, we could have...”_ He would tell her in a broken whisper. _“I could have convinced you to choose peace, I know I could have.”_

The ground beneath him would shake then turn black as the shadow of Drogon loomed above him. Jon would lift his head and gaze into his molten gold eyes...

_“Dracarys.”_ She whispers, but the command is deafening in Jon’s ears. Then, he would stare into the open mouth of her fearsome dragon be bathed in dragon fire.

Not even living in the coldest land in Westeros as it’s in the throes of winter could stop him from waking up in a puddle of his own sweat; scared, mournful, hateful of and furious at himself. It haunted him mercilessly, day in and day out. It hardened and embittered him and filled him with painful self-loathing; so much so, that others began to take notice.

_“You don’t seem like yourself, Jon.”_ Tormund commented as they watched Ghost disappear into the trees to hunt.

_“What do you mean?”_ He had asked, avoiding his inquisitive blue eyes.

_“Well for starters, you wake up screaming every other night. You’re starting to scare the children. And don't think I haven't noticed that you refuse to sleep because of it.”_ Jon opened his mouth to speak, but Tormund continued. _“Don’t try to deny it, two days ago you nearly fell off your saddle.”_
Jon looked out into the landscape for a while, wiped his eyes then sighed. “I’m fine.”

“You must take me for a fucking fool, then.” He snorted. “Do you want to talk about your nightmares?”

“No.”

“Because they about the Dragon Queen?”

“Aye.”

Jon could feel Tormund’s pitiful gaze on him. But he didn’t need his pity, he didn’t need anyone’s. I don’t deserve it. Tormund nodded before he turned away to leave. “At least eat something, you’re starting to look like a wight.”

Jon blinked. He hadn’t noticed he had hardly been eating.

Days began to blur together and now, even Jon couldn’t deny that he was unravelling like cheap wool. He couldn’t eat, he developed a dependence on whatever drink could dull his senses for a while and some days, he could barely rise to join the men on hunts or stay seated in his saddle for long. Every night Daenerys would visit him, and every day she occupied every nook and crevice of his mind. He couldn’t escape her, and that was his punishment.

Ultimately, he decided that instead of trying to run from it, he would embrace it.

“You want to kill yourself, is that it?”

“I just need some time alone.”

“I believe that. But I also don’t trust you to not do something unbelievably stupid while you’re gone.”

Jon looked his friend in the eye. “And so what if I do? What do I have left Tormund? And don’t say I have the freefolk! I’ve barely been leading them these past weeks, you’ve been doing a better job of it than I.”

Tormund stared at Jon with a stone face, tense jaw and such sorrowful eyes. “So that’s what you want, hm? To go off into the mountains and die?”

“I was thinking of traveling to the Land of Always Winter, actually. No man has ever seen it—”

“Aye and there’s a reason for that, Snow.” Tormund interrupted. “No man has ever survived it.”

Jon nodded his head and attempted a smile. “The Night King is gone, mayhaps now I will be the first.”

Tormund gave him what could only be an exasperated mix between a grunt and an angry growl. “Even without those icy fuckers, the land is too cold to survive. It’s still winter, Jon. It’s already hard enough finding food this close to the wall, do you think you’ll find any further down north? How will you survive? It’s too cold for fires to burn there, and what are the chances of you finding any shelter.”

Slim, he thought, but he smiled anyway. “I’ll see for myself when I get there. Hopefully I return, and if I don’t… you’ll make a great leader, Tormund. And thank you… thank you for trusting me all those years at Castle Black, for fighting by my side, for fighting for my home… thank you.”
Jon could have sworn those were tears Tormund was blinking away. He knew he couldn’t stop Jon from leaving, and so he pulled him tight into a bear hug and whispered in his ear. “I hope you make peace with yourself and return home friend, I hope you do.” Jon held him tighter as warm tears rolled down his frozen cheeks. *I hope so too.*

He solemnly watched Tormund and the freefolk disappear further into The Haunted Forest and urged his horse in the opposite direction. He and Ghost wandered somewhat aimlessly for a week. He had wanted to leave him with Tormund again, but this time his direwolf refused to leave his side, and a part of him was grateful that he wouldn’t have to make this trek alone.

The first place he stumbled upon was what remained of Craster’s Keep. Winter had covered the house in a thick blanket of snow, but he recognised it all the same. Ice crunched beneath his boots as he approached the charred wooden bones of the keep and placed a gloved hand on a beam.

His other hand absentmindedly travelled to Longclaw’s hilt as he thought of his Lord Commander. *What would Lord Commander Mormont think of me now? Would he have handed me Longclaw if he knew it would end up with me here?* His son came to mind next. *Would Ser Jorah regret letting me keep it? Knowing the bastard who wielded it would kill the queen he died trying to save?*

He gripped the wolf-head pommel. *Ser Jorah had said it would serve my children after me… children I will never have.*

He couldn’t stay here any longer. He strode to his horse and climbed onto the saddle. Glancing back, his eyes lingered on the haunted keep, and he galloped away from its ghosts.

Eventually, he and Ghost reached the Fist of the First Men and camped beneath a weirwood. He enjoyed the solitude and the quiet of the land, and the scenery was a beautiful thing to look at. *I wish I could have brought her here, she would have loved to see it.* Laying on his back, he watched the red leaves sway as the cold winter blew. The gentle shaking of the leaves made him feel calm, but only for a moment. The peaceful rustling of the leaves was soon replaced with the squawking of a black raven perched on one of its thick branches.

Jon’s eyes narrowed on it. It cocked its head to one side, then the other. Its beady little black eyes never left him. *Bran, Jon realised. He has come to watch me.*

He didn’t know why but the intrusion of his brother… *cousin*… irritated him. Bran had said he couldn’t feel anymore, so he found it unlikely that he was here because of brotherly concern. *He has come to spy on me, to make sure I won’t do anything foolish… like rebel and take his throne.*

The bird squawked at him and watched, and Jon grew even more tense. *Is this how it’s always going to be?* He wondered grimly. *Having my every move watched until I die?* With the chaos of assembling armies to beat the Night King and Cersei, he hadn’t stopped to consider what Bran was now. *The Three-Eyed Raven,* Jon sighed. *What the fuck does that even mean?*

Apparently, it meant that Bran could see the present, the past and the future. He had informed him of the Night King’s whereabouts, he had discovered the true identities of him mother and father, and yet… he couldn’t inform him of what was to come.

*Did you know, Bran? If you did, why keep it to yourself? Why not warn me of what was to come? Surely, you could have told us about Euron’s ships, so Rhaegal wouldn’t have had to die, and Missandei would never have gotten captured and Dany… Dany wouldn’t have unravelled like she did. Jon stared long and hard at the bird. Or did you let all of that happen because you knew you would be king?*
He felt like a fool. *I should have been smarter, I should have realised sooner. The war changed all of us, but I assumed that once we were all together again, things would resume being the way it was before King Robert rode into Winterfell.*

Arya – though he was happy to see her again – wasn’t the same little sister he would play swords with in the Godswood. She was a woman grown now, and a killer. He had heard she slit Lord Baelish’s throat without hesitation and left him bleeding on the floor of the great hall. At first, he couldn’t believe it, but Arya had returned home cold and distant… he just didn’t want to believe things had changed that much.

But with Sansa, it was sometimes hard to know if much had changed between them or not. He was relieved to see she was alive, and absolutely incensed at what Ramsay had put her through. He thought that maybe, since she made it all the way to the wall, to him, her feelings for him had changed. He had only ever gotten cold indifference from his little sister, Lady Stark made sure of that. But that was before the war, that was before they thought they were the only survivors of House Stark left.

It was foolish of him to believe Sansa wouldn’t tell his secret. He should have listened to Dany that night during the feast. He wasn’t sure if it was sheer ignorance and stupidity or blind trust that drove him to tell his sisters the truth of his parentage after they had told him they didn’t like Daenerys, perhaps a bit of both. Sansa betrayed his trust and got exactly what she wanted: Daenerys gone and an independent North she could rule over. *And perhaps, she got what she wanted with me here and out of her way.*

The Northmen crowning him over her wounded her pride, especially since it was because of her and Lord Baelish that the battle between Ramsay had been won. The chasm between them had always been there, but his crowning had ensured that even if they built bridges, the divide would remain.

And he should have known. He should have seen it. And ultimately, he realised that though Tyrion, Bran and Sansa had played him like a pawn in their own games, he was in control of his own actions throughout it all.

Jon clenched his jaw and squeezed his eyes tight. He felt the familiar sting in his eyes and he refused to cry, especially not in front of Bran. It was Jon’s choice to kill Dany, and his alone. He couldn’t lay all of others. In the end, he did it. It was his fault. *She felt spurned by me, that night on Dragonstone. Why didn’t I hold her, why didn’t I assure her that she was more to me than just my queen? She was vulnerable, she was alone, she had just lost the people she held dear and I didn’t comfort her the way I should have. The way I wanted to…*

Arya had told him that family was the most important thing, but he wasn’t sure now how true that was considering where he was and how he had gotten there. Because if he truly believed it, Dany would be beside him right now. She was his family, the only family he had from his true father’s side. And he was hers, her only family left with true blooded relation. *She never would have hurt or manipulated me, she loved me… She was the family I should have chosen.*

Jon turned to his side, away from the raven. Ghost, possibly sensing his sadness, curled up around him and laid his head on Jon’s arm. And for the first night, beneath the weirwood tree, his dreams weren’t about a silver-headed queen, but instead, a flock of ravens with long sharp beaks watching him, ready to devour him if he dared to move a single muscle.

A moon passed before they made it deep into the Frostfangs. He had followed the Milkwater and tried to recount the memories he had as a Mance’s captive then to guide him. Just past Skirling Past was where he met Ygritte, but the land was covered in a blanket of snow so high it reached his knees.
When he was finally able to find a hospitable cave in the mountains, the harsh winter storms prevented him and Ghost from leaving for a full week. He chuckled at how naively thought winter would be over once the Night King had been slain. The further he trekked, the harder it became to hunt and explore. Every so often, Ghost would have to go out by himself and return to share with him his spoils. But eventually, he stopped returning as often. His direwolf was fine, he could feel it, but this land and its harsh winter weather was too much for a direwolf, it was too cold for any living creature. But Ghost remained as close as he could, and that was all he could ask for from his dear boy.

Jon was inching closer and closer to coldest land in the realm, he could feel it… If he headed west from the Milkwater, he would be entering uncharted territory, and finally he would see what no man has ever returned to tell tales about. So, when the storms finally died down, he was off. He passed the white stony peaks, the icy lakes and rivers, the frozen waterfalls that cascaded down the mountains and trekked between their valleys.

Jon ignored the chill that slowly began setting into his bones with each step he took deeper into the North. The further he and Ghost got, the less food and water – that wasn’t completely frozen – they encountered. But Jon wasn’t going to stop, he was determined to reach the land no man has ever lived to see. Or at least, that’s what he told himself.

The more he focused on his mission, the easier it was to push thoughts of Daenerys out of his mind. 

*At least once I reach there, I’ll find the peace I’m looking for,* he thought. Where he would find it, he wasn’t sure. But he was certain that there was something there to find.

And what exactly did he find when he reached the end of the Frostfangs? Nothing. Just leagues of leagues of snow-covered land, as far as the eye could see. There was no life in sight, only falling snow and grey-blue skies.

Looking at the empty land ahead of him unsettled Jon. Does he continue? Turn back? His food and water stores were nearly depleted, he only had a few pieces of dried, salted deer meat and half a skin of water. And besides, evening was approaching, and he was tired. His heavy, laboured breaths told him as such.

Yet… he couldn’t turn away. The vast, emptiness reminded him of a feeling quite familiar, the feeling he had when he realised there was nothing waiting for him in death. Just vast nothingness. And he let out a small chuckle, then followed it with a loud body shaking laugh that filled the empty, cold silence.

*This is what life is. You trek through the hardships, you overcome the odds, you beat death and survive until you can’t any longer... and then you’re rewarded with absolutely nothing,* Jon mused.

*It would be hilarious, if it wasn’t so fucking tragic.*

The realisation gave him the confidence to go boldly into the icy unknown.

*If I die, I die,* Jon decided. *Hopefully Ghost makes his way to Hardhome, hopefully Bran won’t have to worry about me threatening his rule any longer, and hopefully... I’ll get to see Dany again.*

And so, he stepped into the ice and walked until night was upon him, and he couldn’t see his surroundings anymore. Even under layers of furs and leathers, the biting cold seeped into his bones and rattled them from the inside out. He could barely feel his legs or the vibration of his chattering teeth as he advanced.

It took him a moment to realise that he had stopped moving, and it took him even longer to realise
that he was now on his back, lying in a pile of snow staring up at the sky.

He opened his eyes, and gasped.

He had never seen such colours before. Wispy lights that were as green as wildfire and as violet as Dany’s eyes snaked across the starry sky. It shifted and moved and danced as Jon’s breathing slowed, as he finally stopped feeling the cold, as he finally stopped feeling at all.

He slowly let his eyes drop as a feeling of calmness washed over him.

And with that, after many moons of mental torment, he happily slipped into oblivion with the sound of his lover’s name misting over his cold lips.

Chapter End Notes

D&D royally screwing up everything in the last season inspired me to write this. I love writing but I rarely ever do it because I suck at time management, but wooooowww the finale got me HEATED, but at least inspired.

One that really confused and annoyed me while writing this was the fact that wildlings, for centuries, have been trying to cross the wall because that’s where the fertile lands are, not just because they’ve been running from the white walkers. Considering that the Night King reached the wall and passed it, AND the fact that he can even reanimate animals, wouldn't that mean almost everything north from the Wall is probably dead? Which would mean there’s nothing left to hunt?

So why would the wildlings choose to forget the reason they’ve been climbing the wall for hundreds of years, just to return to a land without any animals to hunt or crops to grow? While simultaneously choosing not to inhabit the many castles, villages and fertile land that have now been made vacant by the Night King? Ask D&D because I have no fucking clue. There’re even a bunch of empty castles on the wall they could stay in, it’s not just Castle Black and Eastwatch. But nope… they’re happy struggling for food and shelter again, I guess?

Anyway.

I hope you enjoy the story.
“Is he alive?”

“For now.”

“Do you think he’s going to die?”

The voices were silent for a moment. “No. I don’t think so.”

The faraway small voices echoed into the hollow silence of Jon’s mind, as if they were down a long, narrow hall and hidden away in a room with the door left slightly ajar.

Pale yellow light trickled into his vision, and he registered the blurry figures crouched above him.

“Look! His eyes are opening!”

The blur dissipated like fog in the wind, and he was met with big, glowing, curious leafy green eyes, and black lips stretched into a wide smile. “Hello.”

Jon screamed.

“Do not be afraid!”

He jumped and crawled away kicking from the three, little strange creatures, hitting his back on something rough and hard in doing so.

“Wha- what?” He stuttered. Alarmed, he instinctively reached for Longclaw, but found nothing on his hip. His eyes darted wildly around his surroundings, searching for his trusty sword, and finally paused when his brain stopped panicking for a moment, and realised that he was no longer surrounded by snow.

The grass ahead of him was green and spotted with wildflowers. He found a dark glittering pond on his left and tall dark walls with stone arches surrounding him in the near distance. He slowly turned and was face to face with a large carving of a serene face with blood red sap trailing down its cheeks like bloody tears.

The tree was so massive that Jon strained his neck as he tilted his head up, trying to take in its multiple spawning trunks that were bigger than he was. The red leaves vastly stretched over him and the creatures, providing them with shade. He looked down and touched the thick roots of the weirwood tree.

What perplexed him the most was not the colossal size of the weirwood tree, and it was no longer the little creatures staring at him with wide, curious eyes… but the fact that in the distance, beyond the grey stone arches, a violent snow storm raged, and yet, he sat on the roots of a weirwood, warm and untouched by the ice.

“Where are I?” He wondered aloud.

“The Heart of Winter.” One of the creatures replied as it cautiously moved forward.
“The heart… where is that? How did I get here?” His head scanned the terrain. “The last thing I remember was… I was in the Land of Always Winter and then--”

“You still are.” The creature replied.

His head snapped in its direction. “What?”

“You still are in the Land of Always Winter.” It explained as it stepped closer towards him. The creature lifted its arms and tilted its head towards the tree. “You sit beneath the Heart of Winter. In the original Godswood. The very first weirwood to sprout from the ground, its seed are what has pollinated our land for thousands of years.”

Jon stared at the thing for a moment, his eyes travelled from the top of its head to the tip of its toes, then back again. “What in the bloody hells are you?”

The creature blinked. “We sing the song of the earth. I believe your kind refer to us as the Children of the Forest.”

Jon’s jaw fell.

Another one of the children approached him to examine him closely. This one had big golden eyes and skin the colour of oak. “It has been centuries since we’ve seen a man… alive.” It poked his arm. Jon recoiled.

“No… you can’t… I thought the children of the forest were… were extinct.” Jon was going to say ‘weren’t real’ but he didn’t think the white walkers and wights were real either until he fought them. If anything, the last decade had taught him to be open about the possibilities of what could exist in the world.

“Not all of us. Some of us are very good at hiding.” The green-eyed child looming over him stretched its hand. “My name is Twig.”

“I’m Acorn!” The golden eyed one beside Jon squealed excitedly. “I’m the youngest. Then there’s Twig before me. The glum, shy one over there is Red Leaf. She’s the oldest and she doesn’t talk much, but when she does, it’s not in your tongue.” Jon peered behind Twig and saw a child silently watching him from a distance. Its skin was as pale as snow and its hair and eyes were the colour of weirwood sap. She reminded him of Ghost.

He hesitantly reached out a hand and grasped Twig’s. “I’m Jon Snow.”

“Jon Snow.” She tasted his name and seemed pleased. “You are far from the wall of ice.”

Jon cocked his head, slightly puzzled. Twig pointed a finger to his black garb. “Oh I…” He looked away. “There was no purpose for me there, not anymore.” He looked up at the children. “The Night King has been defeated and the free folk are welcome beyond the wall. There is no purpose for the Wall anymore, there is no purpose for the Night’s Watch. So, I left to join the free folk as they rebuild their life north of the wall and I… decided to go off on my own.”

Twig nodded her head.

“No living man has ever made it this far North. Without the Night King, it makes it only a little bit easier to travel as far as you did. But it is still winter, Jon Snow. The cold can still be just as deadly.” She crouched in front of him. “Why are you truly here? What are you running from?”
Jon froze.

“I’m not running from anything.”

“But you are, or else you never would have come here.” She extended her small hand, placed it on the bark of the weirwood and looked up at the leaves. “The Gods speak through the rustling of the leaves, they tell us things only they could know. And you, Jon Snow, they have spoken your name.”

Jon looked up at the swaying red leaves. Acorn leaned towards him and spoke.

“It is them who told us where you would be when we found you in the snow.”

“They told us to bring you here.” Twig narrowed her big cat-like eyes. “What troubles you, Jon Snow? Why would you wander into the snow and risk death?”

Jon opened his mouth, but momentarily paused. “Because I don’t care much for my life, I suppose.” He admitted.

“Why?”

“Because I’ve lost everything. My home, my love, my life… my family. Everything. I can never return to Winterfell, I killed the woman I loved and now I have been exiled to the wall, a criminal.”

Jon gritted his teeth and continued. “I am tired of fighting, and I’m tired of people treating me like a pawn in their game. I’ve been manipulated for the benefit of others then tossed aside, I have betrayed the woman I love most in this world, I have no home, no family, I have nothing!”

Once the words tumbled out of Jon’s mouth, it felt like they would never stop. “And I don’t want hear another fucking word about the Gods. I thought I had a purpose in life, I thought I was brought back from death for some magnificent reason but what did it truly matter in the end? Was I simply brought back to put an end to the woman I love? Or was I brought back to be miserable? What is the point of all of this? What is the point of my entire existence? Do the God’s just enjoy seeing me fucking miserable?”

Jon angrily stood. He looked around and finally spotted his sword leaning against a moss-covered rock. Before he could approach it, Acorn spoke. “Where are you going?”

He turned and looked at her incredulously, but then paused. Where can I go?

“I… don’t know but,” he looked up at the weirwood. “Far away from here.”

“You leave here, and you die, Jon Snow. You cannot survive that storm, it has been raging for four days and it will not be stopping anytime soon.” Twig informed him.

Jon spluttered. “Four days?” He glanced at the falling snow. “Have I been asleep for that long?”

Twig nodded. “The heart tree kept you alive, Jon Snow.” She smiled. “We helped, of course.”

He shook his head. “Why?”

Twig looked back at the tree. “We only know what the Gods want, not why. Perhaps we should ask?”

Jon blinked. Ask… a tree? Jon cocked his head.

Acorn beckoned him closer. “Please sit! If you wish to leave after, no one will stop you.”
Jon gestured to the storm. “Except the snow, perhaps.”

She giggled. “No one will stop you after the snow settles, then.”

Silently, Jon considered it. He didn’t want to become involved with anything magical again, he had had his fill. But there was nowhere else to go, and nothing else to do. And besides, for the first time, perhaps he could get actual answers from the Gods.

He hesitantly approached the tree and sat below its branches.

Immediately, the leaves began to shake as a gust of wind brushed over them. It sounds like they’re whispering.

“They speak!” Acorn exclaimed excitedly.

They sat and listened to the swaying of the branches.

“They speak about your bloodline. You are a descendant of two very old and powerful houses.” Twig said.

He nodded. “My mother was a Stark and my father was a Targaryen.”

“You have wolf and dragon blood. What a rarity!” Acorn marvelled.

“Yes,” He replied soberly, “Very exciting.”

The leaves shook again.

“They talk about you, and the things you’ve done. From protecting the Wall to saving your home, they are pleased with your work.”

“Good to hear.”

“And they know of your heartbreak, they know your pain.”

Jon breathed. “And?”

“And… they are willing to offer you a boon.”

His head swivelled to Twig. “A boon? Of what kind?”

“To return someone you have lost.”

His heart seized, and his breath stuck in his throat. “Bring back…” He barely whispered. The possibility of holding her in his arms again, the possibility of begging for her forgiveness and living alone together undisturbed. It was too tempting to be true.

“What do they want in return?” He asked.

“It is a boon, Jon Snow. Gifted to you for your service to the Gods. Repayment is not necessary. They may ask more of you in the future, but you will have the choice to decline without fear of retribution.”

He considered this.

“I need… time to think about it.”
Twig nodded. “Take the time you need.”

This is no small boon.

He sat on the moss-covered rock with Longclaw in his hands, staring into the rubies embedded in the pommel.

On one hand, he wanted to bring her back. To apologise for his mistakes and beg her forgiveness. He wanted to hold and kiss her again, to lay beside her and treat her the way he should have treated her when she still breathed – with unwavering loyalty and devotion. But on the other hand, she may never forgive him for what he did. She could hate him for the rest of her life, swear vengeance on him and House Stark and burn the whole of Westeros down in retaliation for how they treated her. Maybe in the afterlife she has found peace, and it would be unfair to her to force her back to the living where she will only find pain and disappointment.

If she returned, would she want to be queen again? Retake the lands she had conquered? Or would she settle for a quiet life north of the Wall with him? He knew her, though. Dany had made mistakes, but it didn’t make her less of a natural ruler. She was meant to command armies and be in control, it was in her blood. But the same fire in her blood that allowed her to be as fierce as she was, could also lead to the destruction of others, including herself.

Would she return the same as she was when she died? Would she plot to kill Sansa and Bran? They were still the siblings he grew up with; he could never wish harm upon them. But if she returned, what was the possibility of her letting them live? Would he have to stop her again, or would he stand idly as she unleashed her wrath upon them?

Jon held his head in his hands. There is no easy choice.

“Hungry?” A high, airy voice asked. Acorn presented him with a wooden bowl full of white paste with red veins. He looked at her.

“It’s made of weirwood seeds and sap. Eat.” She pushed the bowl into Jon’s hands and he looked at the food with discomfort.

“Um, thank you but… I’m not hungry.”

“Yes, because I was asleep.

Jon accepted it with a forced smile. “Thank you.”

When Acorn twirled around and left, he stared at the food in unmasked horror. It looked like the very last thing in the entire realm he would ever want to eat. Gods, he would probably eat an entire person before he would want to eat this. The red veins made it look like it was alive. He sighed. Right now, I don’t have a choice.

Grimacing, he tilted the paste into his mouth and resisted the urge to spit when he tasted the bitterness. But then to his surprise, as he chewed the food, the taste shifted to something quite sweet and… pleasant.

He stared at the food, then at the heart tree, the violent storm outside the walls and then finally to the small creatures sitting about.
What have I gotten myself into?

When night approached, Twig brought him a mat to sleep on made of red woven leaves. When she asked if he had decided yet, he assured her that he had, and he would be offering his response to the Gods in the morning, then turned away to sleep.

In truth, he hadn’t made his choice. He hoped that somehow when he woke in the morning, he would miraculously know what to do.

To his great relief, the answer came to him in a dream. This time, she wore a long flowing pale dress as she walked around a garden beneath the summer sun. Her silver-gold hair wasn’t done in ornate braids but cascaded over her shoulders and glittered in the shining light. She turns to face Jon, and gives him a dazzling, warm smile that leaves him weak. Her violet eyes aren’t confused, hurt and filled with tears, but warm and happy.

She stretches out a hand and as he reaches for it, laughter as sweet as honey erupts from behind him. He turns and sees a child with curly pale hair run past them and hop into Dany’s arms. He stares with wide eyes, and his heart feels full.

He wakes the next morning with tear stained cheeks, and his decision.

“You have made your decision?” Twig asks him as they all kneel before the heart tree. He looks up at the red leaves as they shake in the wind.

“Yes.”

Twig nodded. Her small hands found his and guided them to the face of the heart tree.

“Shut your eyes.” She instructed. He did as he was told. “Tell the Gods you accept their boon.”

“I accept your boon.” He whispered.

The winds grew more forceful and every branch from the tree shook above him.

Dany.

He took a deep breath and felt tears roll down his cheeks once more. We’ll see each other again.

The wind stopped, and the leaves grew still.

Jon could barely breathe. He waited, and waited, but the godswood remained quiet.

Until, a wailing cry pierced the silence. Jon turned, and found the source of the cries. A little baby wrapped in furs.

He looked at Twig, Acorn and Red Leaf. They too, stared at the baby.

“Go on.” Acorn urged him.

He stared at the baby in disbelief. I asked for Daenerys, why would the Gods give me a baby?

He approached the baby and, with slight hesitation, picked it up. It quieted as he gently soothed it in his arms.

Jon gently removed the furs and gasped. Wisps of silver-blonde hair gleamed in the light, and he gazed at the child’s face in complete astonishment. A baby boy?
The child’s eyes fluttered open, and the sight took Jon’s breath away. For he gazed into the child’s eyes and knew exactly what it meant.

*Grey violet eyes.*

*A mixture of Daenerys’ and my own.*

*Our child.*

*Our son.*

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed the chapter!
Six years later.

“Father… Father?” He felt a small hand shake his arm. “Wake up!”

Jon’s eyes fluttered open and was met with wide purple-grey eyes and silver-gold curls.

He groaned. “What is it Daemon?”

The boy excitedly leapt onto his father’s stomach, pushing all the breath out of him.

“Can I go play with Toregg, Kari and Munda?”

Jon cradled his son in his arms. Daemon affectionately laid his head on his bare chest as he hugged him close. For a moment, Jon noticed Daemon’s eyes linger on the dark markings on the inner part of his forearm, but he didn’t say a word about it.

“Have you packed your things?” Jon asked.

“Yes!”

“Good, take Ghost with you.”

“He’s hunting.”

Jon glanced over to the centre of the room, where he saw an empty pile of furs missing a direwolf.

“Hm… Water and feed the horses before you go play. And don’t stray too far, I’ll come get you when it’s time to leave.”

Jon grinned as his son bounce off him, left their home and ventured out into the snow, calling his friends. But his happiness was quickly replaced with a familiar, serene melancholy when he realised how big he’s gotten since the Gods gifted him to him. If only Dany were here to see him grow. If it wasn’t for him, she would be. She had told him years ago in the Dragonpit that she couldn’t have children, and he didn’t believe her. Or maybe he was just hopeful that if he planted his seed enough times, something was bound to grow. And it did. If only they had realised sooner, before he stuck his dagger into her. The consequences of his actions filled him with shame, he had killed his lover and inadvertently his own child, and it haunted him to this day.

When he held the babe in his arms six years ago, he was unsure if he was ready for such a responsibility. He never dared to dream about having a son of his own before he met Daenerys, and he was certain it would never happen after her death. But here he was, a father who had to raise his son alone. A father who would one day have to tell his son the reason why his mother wasn’t here to raise him.

These thoughts made him appreciate and deeply miss his father– uncle, Lord Stark, more each day. For Jon, it was painful not knowing much about his mother, but it must have been even more painful for Lord Stark to raise a son all on his own because his mother no longer breathed, and to not be able to tell him about her.
The day he realised this was the first time Daemon asked why his mother wasn’t with them, almost three years ago. He nervously dodged the question, and Daemon got so upset he didn’t talk to him for the remainder of the night. The following day, he knelt beneath a heart tree and whispered a prayer, hoping Lord Stark would hear him. *I understand now, father.*

He left his bed and sleepily walked to the hearth. Empty bowls beside the hearth signalled that Daemon and Ghost had been awake for a while. He grinned. Those two had become as close as brothers these past few years. It warmed his heart to see how affectionate and fiercely protective of his little brother Ghost was. Even if the two of them together meant mischief was afoot.

Hungry, he opened the iron pot to eat whatever hare stew was left over from last night. To his great disappointment, he found nothing left. His eyes flickered to the empty bowls, causing him to roll his eyes. It was common for Daemon to forget that his own father needed to eat as well. Jon had little doubt he had shared the stew with Ghost, even though they’ve had several conversations about how Ghost can hunt for himself, there is no need to feed him their food.

But he couldn’t fully blame his son. Ghost had a way of getting what he wanted from him with a single look and whine, so Jon was happy to blame them both.

He eyed the packed bags in the corner of their cabin. He had already calculated how much food they would need for the entire journey and packed their provisions accordingly, so he was wary of dipping into it, even for a light meal. *I suppose I’ll have to go hunting then,* he thought as he found his quiver and bow and exited his home.

The winter air at Hardhome was cold and crisp, and the snow fell heavy; regardless, life continued for the free folk as they went about, doing their daily duties. The snow crunched beneath Jon’s boots as he walked between the other wooden cabins, passing his greetings to his people.

They still looked to him as a leader, even after he disappeared from them six years ago. They took great pleasure in calling Daemon their ‘little prince’ – he technically was – but even without his dragon blood and unusual grey-purple eyes, Jon was certain they would treat him as such not because of his royal blood, but simply because he was his seed. It made him smile, it was truly touching.

“JON!” A loud booming voice jolted him out of his thoughts, causing him to nearly drop his bow.

A large figure clad in layers of grey fur, a heavy white cloak and fiery red hair stomped towards him, arms stretched open and a wild smile on his face.

“Tormund,” He greeted, clutched his hand. “How are you, friend?”

“Better, now that I’ve managed to get a good night’s sleep. This babe’s a fucking crier, worse than Toregg, Kari and Munda were at his age.”

Jon chuckled. “Little doubt he gets it from you, I bet little Torwynd’s going to be as loud as you are one day.”

Tormund’s booming laugh startled several children and a few fishermen nearby, Jon saw them shake their heads and laugh amongst themselves. He clapped his big hand over Jon’s left shoulder.

“That’s what Dagny said! We were just talking about you, actually.”

“Really, why is that?”

Tormund’s eyes travelled to his bow. “You’re going hunting?”
Jon nodded.

“Come to our cabin, Dagny is cooking fish and we have enough to share.”

Jon smiled, grateful. “Thank you. So, you were saying you and Dagny were talking about me?”

Tormund nodded as they walked to his cabin.

“Aye. We were talking about how it would be nice for the little prince to have… a mother in life.”

Jon glanced at Tormund. “Tormund… I know you two mean well, but I can’t—”

“I know, I know,” Tormund interrupted. “You still love the Dragon Queen after all these years, I understand. But the boy needs a mother, Jon.” He stopped and turned to him. “Dagny has two younger sisters, they can bear you more children if you want to give Daemon brothers and sisters.”

Jon’s face warmed. “I- I don’t want to father more children, Tormund. Daemon is enough of a handful.”

Tormund lifted a brow and gave him a sceptical look. “You don’t want more children, or you don’t want to father a child with any other woman?”

Jon remained silent, so Tormund continued. “Is that why you’re going back to the Land of Always Winter? Are you going to ask the Gods for another one?”

Jon scoffed. “It doesn’t work that way, Tormund!”

Tormund shrugged. “Well how the fucking hell am I supposed to know how it all works? All I know is that you disappeared down North for over six bloody moons then when I thought you were as good as dead, you returned with a bloody babe in your arms! At first, I thought you had gone mad and stolen some poor woman’s babe, but when I looked at him and saw his eyes, I knew you were telling the truth, as crazy as it sounded.”

Just then, two young children being chased by two older girls came into view across from them. Three had messes of fiery red hair while the other smaller one had silver-blonde. They laughed and squealed in joy as the girls pelted them with snowballs, unaware of their fathers watching them play nearby.

Jon’s heart swelled as he looked at his son with adoration. He never dreamed he would ever raise a child of his own, and it filled him with such pride and pain that he was the spitting image of his mother. *He has her nose, hair and eyes.* Jon’s smile faltered. These past six years seemed to breeze by, it was only a matter of time before he would start demanding answers on what happened to his mother. *Just like I did.* He stared at his son, and silently prayed to the Gods that he would remain as young and ignorant for as long as he could, for Daemon’s sake and his.

He cleared his throat and turned away. “I’m hungry Tormund, let’s eat.”

The smell of fish wafted through the room of the large cabin. In the centre of the room was Dagny, Tormund’s wife, kneeling beside the hearth with her babe tied and swaddled to her chest. She looked up and beamed at her guest.

“Jon! How are you this morning?”

Her auburn hair was braided into a crown and her green eyes looked tired but happy. She was tall, taller than Tormund even, with a thick frame. Torwynd, who she birthed only a few moons ago,
made small snoring sounds snuggled against her chest.

“I’m well, Dagny. I hope you’re well.”

“I am, this little one has been keeping us up for the past few moons and last night he finally slept through the night! He’s like his father in every way, difficult but somewhat manageable.”


Jon lifted a brow. “Just four moons ago you insisted on fighting a bear with your bare hands, Tormund. After Dagny and I warned you not to.”

“Bah! I’m not afraid of any fucking bear, it was easy work taking that bastard down.” He proudly boasted.

“It clawed your chest and nearly bit your arm off.” Dagny reminded him.

“A surface wound.”

“You nearly died, I had to carry your mammoth-sized arse all the way back.”

“And here I stand today, with a beautiful cloak made of bear skin.” He turned to show his wife and best friend the spoils of his battle. “So, who really won?”

“It should have been the bear.” Jon remarked.

Dagny laughed. “Enough you two. Jon, are you hungry? I’ve just finished frying some fish if you’re interested.”

“I’ll help myself. Thank you, Dagny.” He sat down at the hearth and scooped some fish from the pan into a bowl.

“Eat as much as you’d like.” She smiled. “You have a long journey ahead of you. When will you be leaving?”

“After I eat. We’re packed and ready to go, and I trust Daemon has fed and watered the horses like I’ve asked. I’ll let him play a bit more before we set off.”

Dagny nodded. “I hope you don’t mind me asking…”

“You can ask me anything.” Jon invited.

She smiled. “Why are you going back to the Land of Always Winter? And do you need to take Daemon? He’s only six, and the winter has been so long with no end in sight yet, I’m concerned he’s not ready for such a journey yet. Shouldn’t he stay here? You’re welcome to leave him with us.”

Jon shook his head. “I made an agreement six years ago that I would return with him to the Heart of Winter when the children of the forest or the Old Gods requested my presence.”

Tormund, who was in the middle of scoffing his face with fried fish, paused. “Did the... did the Gods talk to you? When they asked you to return to them?”

“Not in any language I understand. The children said I would see a sign: a pure white leaf. Four days ago, I found one growing from heart tree in the godswood.”

“Oh.” Dagny said, leaning forward. “What do they want?”
Jon shrugged. “No clue. It’s been years; your guess is as good as mine.” Jon paused. “Though, I suspect it might have something to do with Daemon, but I’m not sure.”

“What makes you think that?”

“Well,” He hesitated. “The other day I heard him talking in his sleep. I thought it was just nonsense, but it wasn’t, I realised that as soon as I heard the dialect… because I’ve heard it before. He was speaking in High Valyrian.”

“High Valyrian?” She asked.

“It’s an ancient language spoken by those of the blood of Valyria, like Targaryens.”

Tormund shrugged. “Well it’s nothing to worry about. Maybe it’s just in his blood then.”

Jon gave him an incredulous look. “If that were the case, I would be fluent in it as well. You learn languages, you’re not born knowing them. And none of us speak High Valyrian, so how does he know it?”

“Did you ask him?” Dagny asked.

“I did, but either he doesn’t want to tell me, or he truly doesn’t know because when I ask him, he said he doesn’t remember where he learnt it.”

Dagny looked up in thought. “Strange.”

“And it’s not only that.” Jon continued. “Daemon… he’s only six years old, but the other day I heard him speaking perfect Old Tongue to the elders.”

“Is that strange? I’ve seen him playing around them a few times, and they like him very much. They could have taught him.”

Jon thought about it. “I suppose, but at six years old, should he be so fluent in multiple languages?”

“Daemon is very clever for his age.” She returned.

“He is… but that’s not the only thing that has given me pause… The other day, we were praying in the godswood and the leaves began to shake. I opened my eyes and saw him looking up. He was staring at the carved face on the heart tree with this strange look on his face, like he was being told something… and he was trying his hardest to listen with this scrunched up look on his face.

I asked him what he was doing, and he said, ‘They’re whispering, but I don’t understand what they’re saying yet.’ I know the Gods can communicate through the trees, but I never knew it was possible for men to understand their whispers. The children of the forest, sure, but not men like us. And besides, I don’t know how comfortable I am with them whispering words I cannot hear to my son.”

Dagny placed a finger under her chin. “The Gods gifted you Daemon, perhaps there are just some things he can do that we’ll never understand.”

Tormund blew air through his cheeks. “This is above any of us, friend. We would like to help but when the Gods are involved, I don’t know how much help we could possibly be.”

Jon nodded. “I suppose we’ll just have to see what they want from us when we get there.”

He stood. “Thank you for the food. It’s time I go, we should begin travelling while we still have
light.”

While Jon readied the horses and strapped their bags to their saddles, Daemon was saying goodbye to his friends. Tormund and Dagny watched their children say their goodbyes, and each gave Daemon hugs of his own.

At age six, Daemon was already a competent enough rider. That, Jon admitted, he might have gotten from his grandmother, Lyanna Stark. The boy rode like the wind and every so often, had to receive a chiding from Jon for not following his instructions and riding off without him. But for the journey, he made Daemon promise not to go off on his own if it meant he could ride on his own horse the whole way there. The boy was more than happy to comply.

Jon lifted his son onto his mare and tightened the reins.

Dagny and her children huddled beside Tormund. “Don’t be gone too long now.” She grinned.

Jon returned her smile. “I don’t plan on it, but I’m sure you and Tormund will handle yourselves quite well while I’m gone.” He looked out towards the wildling village. “I’m sure everyone will.”

“You never know.” Tormund shrugged. “What if we get attacked by wights again? Or a large group of bears seeking revenge for their fallen brother?”

Jon glanced at his cloak. “Punch them in the snout, like you always do.”

Tormund placed a hand on his shoulder and looked him in the eye. “The Night King might be gone, but who knows what else is out there. Be safe.”

Jon nodded. “I’ll try my hardest.”

He climbed onto his saddle. He took one last look at Tormund and his family, gave them a smile then spurred his horse forward.

And together, father and son rode out of Hardhome.

They rode in comfortable silence for a while, enjoying the beautiful scenery. The trees of the Haunted Forest were dusted with white, and the landscape was coated in a blanket of snow. Jon let out a heavy breath and watched the white mist leave his lips. He loved the haunting silence of the forest and took pleasure in the serenity. A snowflake floated down slowly in front of him and landed gently on his glove.

He turned to his son, and saw him with his mouth wide open, trying to catch snowflakes on his tongue as he rode. It made him chuckle.

Rustling in the distance caught his attention and made him stop in his tracks. He held out his arm to stop Daemon from proceeding any further and mouthed to him ‘behind me’.

Longclaw sung as he unsheathed it, he held his breath as he shielded his son from the unknown creature that lurked behind the trees.

A black snout appeared, followed by ruby red eyes and a white, fur covered face. Jon breathed.

“Ghost!” Daemon joyfully called. The direwolf padded closer to him. He was the size of a full-grown horse now, and he could easily pet his head from where he was sitting. Daemon’s horse shifted, uneasy. By now they had gotten used to Ghost, but it didn’t mean they liked him one bit.
Jon laughed. “Good boy.”

Daemon laughed. “You were scared!” He teased.

“I’m not scared of Ghost. I’ve had him for years, what is there to be afraid of?”

“You were scared.” He sang.

Jon snorted. “Wouldn’t you be scared if you heard something rustling in the woods? Stay alert, Daemon, it’s dangerous out here.”

“I will, I’m keeping my eyes wide open. Nothing is going to scare me!”

They rode in silence for a while… until Daemon got bored.

“Tell me a story.” Daemon asked.

Jon tried to think of one, but nothing immediately came to mind. “Hm. What do you want to hear?”

“Anything.”

“How helpful.” He replied sarcastically.

Daemon hummed. “I want to ask you something.”

“Ask.”

“How come you have the same marks on your arm as me?”

He knew Daemon would ask this eventually. He had told Daemon years ago that his was a birthmark, but that didn’t explain why his father had the exact same markings too.

“The truth is,” Jon began, “it’s a tattoo.”

“Tattoo...” He repeated, sounding the new word on his tongue. “What’s that?”

“It means it was drawn on your skin with ink. And it will never go away.”

He thought about it. “Why?”

“Because it was necessary.”

“Why?”

Jon lifted a brow at him. At his age, ‘why’ and ‘because’ had become two of his favourite words.

“The markings on your arm are runic inscriptions of the Old Tongue.”

“Some of the elders speak Old Tongue. I do too a bit.” He proudly smiled.

“Yes, I’ve heard. But the runic letters have been lost to time, unfortunately. I don’t know if there’s any living man who could understand it.” His hand gently brushed his forearm at the memory of getting the tattoo. “The children of the forest gifted it to us. It’s a spell.”

“A spell for what?”

“To keep unwanted, spying eyes away from us.”
Daemon scrunched his little nose up. “Who would want to spy on us?”

Before Jon could reply, Daemon gasped and pointed towards the sky.

“Look father! Ravens!”

Black ravens circled the sky in a flock and eventually settled on a tree across from him. Daemon called and waved at them, but the birds continued cocking their head from side to side, searching for something they could not find.

Daemon pouted. “Birds don’t like me.”

Jon glared at the ravens. “You don’t have to like them either.”

They rode forward, leaving them behind.

“Tell me a story!” He pleaded. “Tell me about… when you were my age.”

“I barely remember what I was doing at your age, I was probably playing swords with my brother, Robb.”

“Uncle Robb? Tell me about him.”

“What is there to say that I haven’t told you already? He was my best friend growing up, we used to steal cakes from the kitchen together and eat them in the Broken Tower. We thought we were so clever and sneaky, that your great-uncle Ned would never know, but we found out later that he had actually told the kitchen maids to leave them out for us to take.” Jon laughed.

“You’ve told me this before! Tell me about… your other brothers and sisters.”

Jon was silent. “I’d rather not.”

“Why?”

Jon sighed. “Because.”

“Because…” Daemon urged.

“Because, I would rather tell you another story.” He thought for a moment. “Have I ever told you about how you got your name?”

Daemon shook his head.

“Well, Daemon is a Targaryen name. There have been many famous ‘Daemons’ in history. There was Daemon Targaryen, who was known as The Rogue Prince. During the Dance of Dragons, he slayed Prince Aemond by driving a sword through his eye after jumping off the back of his dragon.”

Daemon gasped, amazed. “He rode a dragon?”

He nodded. “Aye. He was a fierce warrior as well. And let’s see… There was also Daemon Blackfyre, also known as the Black Dragon. I don’t think I’ve told you about the Blackfyre Rebellion, have I? No? Well, some other time then, it’s quite a long story. He crowned himself king over his half-brother, King Daeron Targaryen and it caused a war. After him, there have been a few other Daemon Blackfyres. But truth be told, I didn’t name you after some random Targaryen or Blackfyre from a history book, your name is a mix of two very special Targaryens I once knew.”
Daemon tilted his head. “Who?”

“When I was a man of the Night’s Watch, I had the fortune of meeting the maester of Castle Black. Maester Aemon, or Aemon Targaryen as he was once called, was my great-great uncle. I didn’t know it when I met him, and he died not knowing that either. But he taught me so much in the time I knew him. He taught me the importance of duty, leadership and the choices we make. I always thought I knew what his words meant, but now I realise that perhaps, I didn’t.” Jon swallowed.

He looked at his son with sad eyes. “And the rest of your name comes from your mother. Daenerys and Aemon… Daemon. It seemed fitting that I honour them both by naming you after them.”

Daemon opened his mouth then closed it, conflicted. At the mention of his mother, Jon could see he had unearthed several hundred questions that he dared not ask. Though it guilted him, Jon preferred it this way. He wasn’t ready to answer all of them yet.

But what he could answer, he would. He would at least give him that mercy.

“I know you want to know every single little thing about your mother, and in time we’ll have that discussion. Just know that… there are some things I’m not ready to say, Daemon. But what I can tell you, I will.” Jon looked out towards road ahead of them.

“Your mother was a great woman. The greatest woman I have ever known. No light could match her fire, not even the sun itself. Everywhere she went, she earned title after title. The Mother of Dragons. Breaker of Chains. The Unburnt. Khaleesi. Queen. She helped people, she freed them from oppression and saved countless lives. She made mistakes like all men do, but her heart was good. She was fearless, she was strong, she was a conqueror and she was just. Never forget that, son. She may have been a Targaryen, from the blood of Old Valyria just like the both of us, but she… she was a dragon. She was fire made flesh. When you think of her, think of her that way.”

Daemon listened to him, silent but attentive.

Jon glanced at his son as he silently thought over his words. There will come a time where he would have to hear his mother’s full story, and how it ended. And there was a possibility that Daemon might hate him at the end of it. It was his deepest fear, and he prayed that that time wouldn’t have to come so soon.

Jon cleared his throat.

“Perhaps I can tell you a different story?”

Daemon lifted his head.

“It has more Targaryens in it. And a love story. It has a very sad ending, unfortunately, but it’s a story you’ll have to hear sooner than later. Do you want to hear it now?”

Daemon’s eyes widened, and he nodded enthusiastically.

Jon looked out onto the long, open path. They had a long journey ahead of them before they reached the Land of Always Winter.

“Well… It all started with a tourney at a place called Harrenhal.”

Chapter End Notes
Thank you all for your kind words and kudos!!! I really appreciate it! And yes, you’ll be seeing more POVs in this story (including the one you’ve been waiting for, I actually just finished her chapter), Westeros is a big place and the world of ice and fire is even bigger.

Apparently Tormund does have two daughters in the show, but they were brought up one (1) time and then never mentioned again. So I included them, and their names are Kari and Munda and they're in their early teens. He has other children in the books, so I just took some of their names and gave them to the children he has in this story. His wife is unnamed though, I just called her Dagny.

My original plan for this fanfic was much different to what I’m gonna write now. I got bored one day and decided to watch a playthrough of God of War (2018 game) and that’s where the main inspiration came from. I loved Kratos and Atreus so much, and I enjoyed their dynamic. So, I wanted to write a story about Jon and his pre-teen son having adventures up North, discovering crazy stuff and fighting together.

But I realised that it wouldn’t work with the rest of the story if he was aged up by that much, because even if Jon has become disconnected from the drama south of the wall, it would somehow find him one day, and it wouldn’t take 10-12 years for it to happen. Even letting Jon live peacefully for six years, free of drama, seems like a stretch. And boy, will there be drama! The ending of the show made sure of that. It might seem like there’s some stability now with no war, a new monarch and a new council, but there’s absolutely no freaking way it would stay that way for longer than two years.

So, what’s what we’re exploring next chapter!

Buh-bye!
Tyrion I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tyrion Lannister stood on a balcony of his new office, over-looking the city.

From where he stood, he could still see the blackened trails of where Daenerys Targaryen unleashed her dragon upon the streets of King’s Landing years ago. He took a long sip from his wine glass and imagined what the smallfolk where doing. Were they simply going about their day, performing their daily routines of waking, working then drinking themselves to sleep like him, or where they plotting the demise of him and his king?

Lately, it was hard to know for certain.

It has been over six years since Daenerys attacked King’s Landing, over six years since her death. Since then, he and his council had done somewhat of a good job rebuilding King’s Landing. The fallen Dragon Queen had damaged the city to such a great extent, that the crown was forced to take another large loan from the Iron Bank of Braavos to start reconstructing.

On top of the rubble of the Red Keep stood a new one. The Raven’s Keep was already two thirds constructed; made of dark brick, its towers loomed over the streets of King’s Landing and cast a large shadow. From a distance, it stuck out like a sore thumb. It looked nothing like the rest of the city, which was built from sandy coloured stone, wood and red roofs. It looks more like it belongs in the North than the South, Tyrion thought.

Each tower had dozens of windows, big and small, that served as entrances and exits for the king’s winged eyes and ears, as well as spires that stretched into the sky and provided resting places for the several dozen ravens flying in and out at once. Even Tyrion found them menacing, like sharp, dark daggers pointed to the sky.

Tyrion strolled the halls of the keep with his wine in hand. His office was only a short walk away from the throne room and he took his sweet time, whistling a merry tune.

At least the throne room looked somewhat cosier and more impressive. Gone was the ugly, pointed chair – courtesy of Drogon – replaced with a more comfortable, red-wood throne with a cushioned seat. Tyrion had a hand in its design, he insisted on it, since it was his arse that would be doing most of the sitting. He had it built on an even bigger platform, so it loomed high, over the entire throne room. Seated there, the imp was bigger than any man.

And perhaps it was the Lannister in him, but if he had a choice on which throne to sit, it would be one embellished with gold, with twisting spires on either side, and a long cloth of red velvet draped strategically over one side as to not obstruct the shining golden magnificence of the throne, but also show the dark red material flowing down beside him like a waterfall and pooling at his feet, like blood. There were still so many who questioned him, who questioned his rule as hand… and he would make it clear to all those who approached him, just what happens to those who want him dead.

Tywin Lannister, the bastard Joffrey, Catelyn Stark, Lysa Arryn, his sister Cersei and even the Dragon Queen who he once served and betrayed. The pool of blood represented them, and he sat above them all, a survivor, powerful and in control.
Though, that was something he could never say out loud. His eyes lifted to the roof. The beams
crossing the roof hid them well, but after six years, he knew what it felt like to be watched. He
couldn’t see the king’s little feathered spies, but he could feel their black, beady eyes on him
everywhere he went.

He shifted uncomfortably and cast his eyes downwards, towards the windows of the throne room.
The colourful stain glass windows cast a rainbow of light around the room; it was so beautiful, and it
made it easier to be lured into a state of peace, no matter how false it was.

He took a deep breath and shut his eyes. Cersei is gone. You escaped Daenerys and her beast. You
are the most powerful man in the realm. All is good. There is nothing to worry about.

“Lord Tyrion?”

His eyes blinked open and found a tall, gold-armour clad woman staring down at him. He sighed. Of
course, he would never find peace. The people of Westeros hardly respected the concept of peace.

“Ser Brienne, I believe you’re here to deliver me news I don’t want to hear?”

She looked troubled.

“The Faith Militant and their Sparrows, I have gotten reports that they’ve been burning every
weirwood and godswood they can find from here to the Riverlands.” She reported.

Tyrion shrugged. “What matters is that they aren’t trying to burn us.”

Brienne bristled. “They are burning the weirwoods in protest of their king, Lord Tyrion. They feel as
if the king is pushing the Old Gods on them.”

“Strange, why would they feel that? The king barely speaks to them.”

“No, but they have seen all the weirwoods he’s ordered to be planted.”

“Bran isn’t forcing them to pray to the Old Gods–”

“Then why is he doing it?” Brienne asked. “Why is he ordering more heart trees to be made, more
weirwoods to be planted down south?”

“CAREFUL BRIENNE.” Tyrion chastised. “Do not question your king.” She looked taken aback,
until he looked at the roof, signalling to her why she should consider watching her mouth.

Follow me, he thought. And he hoped that he had conveyed the message perfectly with just one
look. Luckily, she did. It was something he and his council had gotten quite good at, sending
messages with nothing but a look. It was necessary when you had a king who could hide a raven in
any nook and crevice and listen in.

They walked in silence until they entered the keep’s gardens. One would think the gardens were the
worst place to conduct secret conversations away from a king who could hear using birds, but if one
walked further along towards a large balcony overlooking the bay, they would find an open space
away from the trees. A space vast enough to speak in hushed tones without being heard, and if a bird
flew close, they could easily spot it.

The weather was crisp, and the sky was grey. They were fortunate that it wasn’t snowing today.
When they reached the space, Tyrion turned to her and spoke. “Now we may speak.”
“This is madness!” She said exasperatedly.

“Maybe, but his powers are both a gift and a curse. Sure, we can’t voice everything that pops into our head, but our enemies don’t know they aren’t supposed to either.”

She closed her eyes and ran a hand through her yellow hair. “Right. So, would you care to enlighten me now? Why has the king ordered weirwoods to be planted throughout the South?”

“The king is a boy of few words, and even when he speaks, a cipher might be necessary.” Tyrion said, looking into his glass. He needed more wine. “But I’ve been thinking… I think he draws his power from them. The weirwoods, but heart trees in particular.”

Brienne understood. “So… He’s trying to get stronger?”

“Perhaps. Most likely.” He took a sip of wine. “But I take it his plans aren’t going well, are they?”

Brienne sighed. “I just received word that our suspicions were true. The new High Septon was the one who ordered that the heart trees be burnt, and his Faith Militant grows stronger with each day.”

Tyrion frowned. “We gave them what they wanted, we built them a new Sept to replace the one Cersei destroyed and we made it bigger and better than before. We offered the High Septon a seat on the king’s council and he refused. We offered him peace and the opportunity to build a brighter future for Westeros together. And he refused, he would rather sow seeds of rebellion against his king. What more does he and his military want?”

“They say a king who prays to the Seven, they’ve made that clear. But remember, the new High Septon is a Hightower, Lord Tyrion. And so is his brother, Archmaester Addam who I hear has great influence at the Citadel. They have little love for you or the king, from Oldtown to the Starry Sept.”

Tyrion was taken back. “Me? What did I do?”

“They haven’t forgotten what the Lannisters did to their beloved House Tyrell. Lord Mace was married to one and his children were tied to them by blood, and Cersei killed them. Your brother also killed Lady Olenna Tyrell and sacked Highgarden.”

“I don’t see what that has to do with me personally—”

“And they personally hate you for killing Daenerys. House Tyrell bent the knee to her, she beat the Lannister army and avenged them, and you betrayed her. House Tarly betrayed their overlord and you elevated Lord Randyll’s son to a position on the Small Council. And finally, you gave Bronn Highgarden and made him Lord Paramount of the Mander, Warden of the South and Master of Coin.”

Tyrion stared at her and took a swing from his glass, to his great disappointment, he found it empty. He threw it over the ledge. “They would find a reason to hate me anyway.”

“Maybe, but you certainly love giving them reasons to want you dead.”

“Let them wish me dead, so far everyone who has, has ended up dead themselves.”

“And I’m afraid you’re going to use up all that luck one day, Lord Tyrion. It isn’t just the Reach; the Westerlands, your own region, land and people, hate you as well.”

“That’s no surprise.”
"You served Daenerys when she took Casterly Rock, you stood beside her when she burnt down the Red Keep and King’s Landing, and you stood by her when she burnt men sworn to your house alive. *Twice.*"

Tyrion scoffed. “I didn’t agree–”

“It doesn’t matter. You killed Lord Tywin, and the people think you killed Queen Cersei and Ser Jaime as well. They haven’t forgotten that you helped Daenerys come to Westeros.” Brienne leaned across the railing. “Dorne, the Iron Islands, the North, the Riverlands, the Vale, the Reach, the Westerlands and even right here in the Crownlands… is there no place you aren’t despised? Maybe the Stormlands… But they too waged war against the Lannisters once, many men haven’t forgotten the Battle of the Blackwater either, and your part in it.”

For once, the imp was silent. Moments passed before he spoke, venom dripping from every word.

“Let them despise. Let them hate. I’ve been hated all my life, it doesn’t make a difference to me what those cocksuckers think.”

Brienne hummed, before she decided to change the subject.

“Before I found you in the throne room, I looked for you in your office. I noticed an unopened letter on your desk.” She looked at him pointedly. “It had a direwolf seal.”

Tyrion shut his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Sansa.” He grumbled.

Brienne looked hopefully at him. “Are you going to help her?”

“Why would I do that?”

She frowned. “What do you mean? I thought you two were friendly.”

“I like to believe we are, but that reason alone is no reason to help her. I have six kingdoms to worry about, she was the one who decided to become an independent kingdom. We have no obligations to her.”

Brienne looked at him with thinly veiled disgust. “Lord Tyrion,” She whispered, shocked. “Just six years ago, we helped save her kingdom—”

“*Daenerys*’ kingdom. Jon Snow bent the knee. We were fighting for her kingdom, not Sansa’s, not an independent North.

“She’s the king’s sister—”

“And? He, or better yet *I*, have my own kingdoms to run. I’m already dealing with enough hungry peasants, I don’t need to care for any more.” He turned away from Brienne. “This is what it means to run a kingdom. If I could help her in a way that wouldn’t limit the resources we already don’t have, I would. But it’s impossible.”

Brienne glared at him. “Surely you could at least help her where the Ironborn is concerned.”

Tyrion pinched the bridge of his nose; a headache was coming, and he needed to numb it with wine as soon as he could. “Until they start attacking our shores, it’s out of our hands.”

“Tyrion,” she pleaded. “Don’t do this.”

“I don’t want to do this. I have no ill feelings for the Queen in the North. She is trying to look out for
her people to the best of her ability, and I am only trying to do the same.”

He left Brienne standing by the balcony, with his thoughts only on the wine awaiting him in his office.

Sitting in his office, he began to sift through the numerous letters and documents that needed his attention.

It was times like this that he missed the days he could relieve his stress with whores and wine, but he couldn’t stand to look at another whore, not since he choked one in his father’s bed. So, all that was left to him was the wine, and he had been drinking a lot more of it since his problems began.

First it was the Citadel declaring Samwell’s appointment as Grand Maester as illegitimate. Sure, for centuries the position of Grand Maester was elected by the Citadel, but Sam is smart lad and had earned a few links of his own before the crown gave him the title. Not enough, apparently.

Tyrion could admit he was a stubborn man, stubbornness was in the Lannister blood. He told the Citadel to piss off and figured that would be the end of that. He expected them to protest, and he was prepared to ignore them. What he hadn’t expected was for them to aligned with the lords of the Reach and the Faith, forming a coalition of some sort against the king… and that many more lords, from the Stormlands to the Riverlands and to the Westerlands would pledge their support. It seems the only thing I’m exceptional at is making people despise me.

The lords of Westeros feel as if they weren’t included in the decision making of their new king. And Tyrion couldn’t give two shits for their feelings. The last time a new ruler was elected to the throne, it took half a year and included over a thousand lords – minor and high – from all over Westeros. Perhaps forming another Great Council would have been the right thing to do… but Tyrion was no fool, he would never let that happen. Allow all the lords and ladies of Westeros to decide the fate of the realm? Most of them hate him, they never would have let him live long after the decision was made, much less be Hand of the King.

It was his genius that got him out of his imprisonment and onto the throne, no other man could do such a thing. If Daenerys was smarter, she would have burnt him on the spot when he threw his pin at her feet. The worst thing she could have done was give him time to think alone in his cell, and even worse, allow her foolish lover to visit him. He liked Jon Snow well enough, he has since the day they first spoke outside the halls of Winterfell during King Robert’s feast, but he was a fool.

Foolish enough to let the secret of his parentage out and not expect there to be consequences. Foolish enough to bed the woman who would be his queen. Foolish enough to definitively tell Cersei he would never bend the knee to her. Foolish enough… to let him persuade him to kill the woman who wanted him dead.

Tyrion sighed as he read over a parchment. It seemed like each one he leafed through delivered more bad news.

The Faith are protesting Bran’s rule. The smallfolk, ever so easily swayed by the Faith, are protesting Bran’s rule. Bronn, acting like a bloody buffoon, making enemies, threatening allies and spending gold like he shits it out of his arse, all while giving the Reach even more reasons to rebel against him. The North has run out of food and is requesting aid. Whispers of Lord Edmure Tully wishing to style himself King of the Trident. Mountain clans attacking the Vale. The Ironborn have declared complete independence from the crown. The Ironborn are attacking and raiding Northern ships. The Ironborn have taken Bear Island. The Ironborn are taking more Northern territory. Dorne is invading and stealing land from the Reach. Dorne and the Reach have rekindled their centuries long feud. It goes on and on and on and on.
Tyrion placed his head in his hands. *How long? How long until they storm the Keep and drag me out and put my head on a spike?*

*Surely not long,* Tyrion thought. *All they need is someone to rally behind, someone with a claim to the Iron Throne.* Even with the stupid, pointed monstrosity gone, it still casted its large, jagged shadow on the realm.

But there was no one left to claim the throne. Daenerys is dead. Jon has been exiled to the Wall and made to swear never to wear another crown again. There is no one left.

Except… *No,* Tyrion shook his head. *They would never crown a bastard, legitimised or not.* Gendry was a Baratheon now, and Lord of Storm’s End, but they would never rally behind the son of an alehouse whore. *But he has some Targaryen blood, through Robert’s line. He has a claim through his great grandmother…*

But on the other hand, he would never take the throne, even if they rallied behind him. Or at least Tyrion didn’t think he would… *Perhaps with enough encouragement, he would find being a lord too beneath him and seek a kingship…*

Tyrion pushed the thought out of his mind. It was ridiculous to assume Gendry would have kingly ambitions, he was lucky to be given that lordship, and if he even heard one whisper of disobedience, Tyrion would be sure to take it all away and declare him a lowly bastard once more.

Unexpectedly, his thoughts travelled back to Jon Snow.

*He will never disturb us again. He can wear no crown, take no wife and father no children. He is no longer a concern. And if he were to rise to take the throne, he would have to fight his brother and perhaps his sister to do so. And Starks are blindly loyal to their family, even if it serves them no favour in doing so. He would never rise against his family, never.*

*But then again… the man is easy to manipulate. If I could do it, who else could? He left the Wall once and became a king, why not do it again?* For the first time in years, Tyrion’s thoughts returned to his eunuch friend. *Who else did Varys tell? Who else knows the truth about Jon’s parentage?*

The Tyrells were loyal to the Targaryens, and the lords of the Reach still admire them, even in death. If one Targaryen ruler didn’t work in their favour, another might. If the new monarch and his council fail to inspire loyalty, they are bound to look elsewhere for their king. And with whispers of rebellion and protests, how long until they make it North and request Jon take the throne?

*Would he say yes? No? He said he didn’t want it once, but that was a long time ago. He didn’t want it because he didn’t want to take it from Daenerys… would he feel the same way for his brother?* Tyrion rubbed his forehead, trying to ease the creeping ache. *After years of exile, surely, he has realised what a raw deal he received?* He used to think of the Starks as honourable fools, but the end of the war might have proven that it was not entirely so.

They are slow to learn, but they do learn.

And it was hard to know where Jon Snow stood now. And where the Lannister imp stood with him. *Does he blame me for what happened to his precious Queen? Would he rather see me dead? And if so, would I be able to convince him to let me live if we fought on opposite sides?*

Tyrion wasn’t sure anymore.

But there was one thing he was sure of.
Thank you so much for the comments and kudos!

I based Tyrion's new throne off Kratos' throne from God of War. Not entirely but it will give you a good idea of what I mean. Though Bran is king, Tyrion does most of the actual ruling so the throne is more of a reflection of him than Bran. A lot of people have had to die for Tyrion to get to where he is now, and he would probably show subtle and not-so-subtle hints to reflect that. A Lannister is a Lannister, I don't believe Tyrion has changed, he's just learnt how to lie and manipulate better.

Some of you might be waiting on Dany's perspective and don't worry, it will come. Our Queen is quite busy at the moment ;)  

Next chapter takes us to a new perspective on what else is going on in Westeros.

Bye!
Jason I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

High from the towering castle of Hightower, as evening descended onto the land, a lad with chestnut brown hair and downcast honey-coloured eyes stared out into the surrounding city with his arms crossed over his chest.

Jason Hightower, the youngest son of the late Old Man of Oldtown, Lord Leyton Hightower, looked out through the city. He hugged his furs closer to his body and leaned across the window, a look of melancholy on his face.

It had been three years, yet he couldn’t forget her. Desmera Redwyne. The name was as sweet as honey drizzled lemoncakes; on his lips, in his mind, whenever he said her name, it brought back the sweetest of memories, of youth and happiness and sweet arbour wine and stolen kisses in the rose garden.

If he closed his eyes, he could picture her. Dancing around the gardens in her lilac silks, smelling roses then picking the petals off as he followed her like a puppy. Long, curly auburn hair that reached her waist, big doe-like brown eyes that could make any man melt, her fair skin, her freckled nose, her smile… her lips…

He opened his eyes and sneered. She was meant to be mine, and I was meant to be hers. We were supposed to wed, we were supposed to build a home together but instead… Jason’s breathing became jagged.

Instead she was sold off to that sellsword who fashions himself a lord. He couldn’t even say his name. He is not worth the shit beneath an old, hapless and forgotten boot. He doesn’t deserve her hand, he doesn’t appreciate her and never will. Jason’s hands turn into fists. The worthless bugger. How dare he insult the memory of my sister and good-brother by ruling the same halls sweet Alerie and Mace did? Walk the same halls as Lady Olenna Tyrell? Expect us to bow and have loyalty for him when we still mourned the death of the once great house, the Tyrells of Highgarden?

And the gall to march into Highgarden and claim its lands, with authority from a king we barely know, and Lannister no less! A Lannister whose sister killed my dear cousins Margaery and Loras, a Lannister whose brother murdered the Queen of Thorns and sacked Highgarden, a Lannister who betrayed the Queen the Tyrells served!

What Daenerys Targaryen had done in King’s Landing was known throughout the land by now. They called her the Mad Queen, they say she was just as mad as her father and craved the blood of innocents and fed little children to her dragons. But the Reach still remember how she beat the Lannister forces, avenged house Tyrell and rid the realm of the traitorous Tarlys.

Not all of them, Jason remembered. But the Reach weren’t so kind to the remaining Tarlys either. Poor Talla… She seems like a sweet girl but being Lady of Horn Hill is a task she is ill suited for. She was a lady who knew her courtesies but had no mind for lordship or politics, even with her mother’s help. She was timid at most times and carried an air of sadness around her, which surprised very few, for everyone knew how and why she became the lady of her house in the first place.

His brother, Humfrey, was going to marry the girl. But things became slightly more complicated when the Citadel declared her brother, Samwell’s, appointment as Grand Maester illegitimate. The
Lannister imp sent them a letter back essentially telling them to bugger off and that Samwell would remain as Grand Maester on the king’s council until his death. That did not bode well for the already strained relationship between the Crown and the Reach.

The Reach was not about to march into battle… yet. But if it came down to it, they would be prepared. Already, houses near the Stormlands were fortifying themselves in case of an attack. He wasn’t sure what was keeping the Reach from openly rebelling. Was it because there was no legitimate king to crown? Or was it because of something else, like the Dorne and their centuries-long rivalry?

The realm was in chaos, and it stemmed not only from the appointment of the Stark king, but from his sister’s declaration for Northern independence. Not long after, the Iron Islands declared themselves completely independent from the Crown as was well. Sensing weakness, the new Prince of Dorne, Prince Mors Martell, found the courage to inflame the feud between Dorne and the Reach by stealing more land from the Mander.

That was where his lord brother, Baelor, was – dealing with that conflict and taking back what is theirs. The Dornish have already reached Hornhill, and it is only a matter of time before they try to take Ashford or perhaps Highgarden. Baelor plans to beat them back to the marches. He is the one saving the Reach, all while the Lord Paramount of the Mander throws lavish banquets where he is served by topless women while his lady no doubt weeps in her chambers. Desmera wouldn’t be angry, she has a gentle and sweet heart, the one who would be incensed with her husband’s behaviour would be her mother, Lady Mina Tyrell.

He didn’t need to be in Highgarden to know she absolutely loathed the sellsword. She had every reason to want him and his imp friend dead and buried, which gave her even more of an incentive to be in Highgarden right now. To prepare for whatever is to come. Or at least, that’s what Jason thought.

He left the window of his chamber and descended the tower into the main hall. The servants busied themselves, preparing for dinner and paid him little attention as he slipped into the kitchens for an apple then strolled into the library, hoping to forget his heartbreak by reading a good story.

However, as he walked between bookcases, his search was interrupted by the sound of two hushed voices.

“But do you trust his word?”

“Why would he lie, Alysanne?”

“Who knows what that eunuch was planning.” There was a moment of silence. “If this is true, Humfrey…”

“I am certain that it is, think of it–”

Jason stepped into view. “What’s true?”

His brother and sister jumped, startled.

“Jason!” Alysanne scolded, feebly punching him in the chest. “You scared us!”

“Do you enjoy eavesdropping on other people’s conversations, brother?” Humfrey asked, annoyed.

“I don’t eavesdrop, brother.” Jason took a bite out of his apple. “But if someone is speaking loud enough in a quiet area, would you fault them for hearing a thing or two?”
“Ugh. Don’t eat with your mouth open, Jason.” Alysanne reprimanded.

“Yes, mother.” He replied sarcastically before looking to his brother. “So… what is this secret you’re discussing, hm? What are you two planning?”

His brother and sister exchanged glances, like a thought dawned on them both at that very moment. Humfrey offered him a sly smile. “Nothing to concern yourself with… yet.”

Jason lifted a brow.

“But,” His brother began. “There is a way you can be of assistance.”

Jason cocked his head. “What would you have me do?”

“A small journey a bit north from here, if you can manage it.”

Jason scoffed. “Manage it? You talk to me as if I’m a small boy, Humfrey.”

“Do I offend you, brother? Perhaps when you start acting like a man I will treat you as such.” He retorted. “Instead of brooding in your room about Lady Desmera and refusing to marry like you’re supposed to—”

“I don’t want to marry!” Jason hotly interrupted.

“Neither do I! Do not forget that the reason why I have to marry Lady Talla Tarly is because you won’t do your duty!”

“Brothers, enough!” Alysanne shouted. She glared at them both. “You’re both acting like little boys.”

She turned to her youngest brother and spoke. “Would you be willing to travel to the North, yes or no?”

Jason stopped glaring at his brother long enough to do a double take at his sister. “The North? You said the journey would be ‘a bit’ north from here, like the Riverlands or Vale, not the fucking North.”

Humfrey smirked. “Actually, it would be further than that. You will be going to the Wall.”

Jason’s mouth dropped. The Wall? “A- Are you sending me to the Night’s Watch because I won’t marry?”

Alysanne rolled her eyes. “Of course not. It’s more a mission than anything. We’ll arrange a ship and crew for you, you’ll be taken care of.”

Jason gave his siblings a suspicious look. “What is this for?” He asked slowly.

Alysanne beckoned him to come closer. “You’ll be going to find someone there. Hopefully, you can convince him to return with you. We,” She briefly glanced at Humfrey, “are certain that the information we have received is true, but if you can get him to confirm it, even better for us.”

“Who is this ‘he’?”

“A long-lost Targaryen prince, brother.”

Jason stared at his siblings… then frowned. “Oh, I get it, it’s a jape. Not a very funny one. Just say
you two want me gone–"

“It’s not a jape. It’s true.” Humfrey said, stone-faced.

Jason blinked. Then looked at his sister, who too, was looking at him with nary a hint of humour on her face. “House Targaryen is extinct.” He stated.

“That is what the crown wants us to believe.” His brother said. “Jon Snow killed Queen Daenerys and was exiled for it, what they failed to mention was that his true name is Aegon Targaryen, and I would wager that he was exiled for his birth as much as his crime.”

“He is the son of Prince Rhaegar Targaryen and Lady Lyanna Stark. He is also legitimate, Jason, they married.” Alysanne added.

Jason shook his head. “Pardon me for finding this completely unbelievable but… how do you know this?”

“The Spider, Lord Varys, sent letters before the Mad Queen burnt him to a crisp. We’re not sure how many he sent, or to who, but the Citadel received one. Our cousin, Archmaester Addam confirmed that he found the proof of Prince Rhaegar and Lady Lyanna’s marriage in an old septon’s diary.”

“Addam had this letter for… how long exactly? Over six years? And we’re only hearing about it now?”

Humfrey sighed. “It didn’t matter all that much then, Jason. Yes, it is a powerful piece of information, but it has turned into a powerful weapon now that chaos reigns. If King Brandon Stark’s rule looked to bring peace and prosperity for all, it would not be irrelevant. If it brought peace for the realm and everyone gathered together, sang songs and held hands, the letter would be burnt or packed away in the archives as only a piece of trivial information.

“But that is not so, is it? The realm is divided once more, we are on the brink of war once more, and we need a figure to sit the throne when we are victorious. One who’s claim cannot be challenged, one who we can all agree on, one who will definitively bring peace, one who will be in our debt when he sits the throne, and one who will cleanse the realm of this ‘Bran the Broken’, his Lannister hand and all of his ilk.” He paused for a moment and gave him a pointed look. “Including the sellsword lord. I’m sure Lady Desmera would be eternally grateful to you for that.”

Jason’s heart tightened in his chest. I could free her.

“Yes, you could.” Humfrey whispered to him. Jason hadn’t realised he had said that out loud.

“T’ll do it.” He decided.

Alysanne grinned. “Excellent. We can arrange a ship to Eastwatch for you and a few companions to accompany you to Castle Black. Though it would be highly suspicious if a Hightower took an unexpected trip to the Wall, you will need a false name and story.”

“I’ll figure that out.” He had read enough books to spin a believable tale.

Anything to get me closer to the woman I love. Jason grinned.

Humfrey stepped forward to place a hand on his younger brother, he looked Jason in the eye and whispered to him. “Do not let us down, brother. He is the most important piece in this game.”

“I won’t.” He replied, then looked at his sister as well. “I won’t.”
“Good.” Humfrey smiled. “I’ll be joining our brother Baelor soon, but first I must ride to Highgarden. I want you gone before then.”

A week later, Jason stood at the prow of his ship as dawn approached, overlooking the waters as the golden sun crept over the horizon, making the waters look like liquid gold. He detested the winter morning wind and hugged his tattered cloak closer to his body. Gone were his velvet doublets and fine fox furs; he was clad in black leather and breeches, and a tattered cloak with rough fur that itched his neck.

He heard his crewmen shout, and he knew they were about to sail away from port. Two men emerged from below deck, bickering. His companions, Deryk and Pots. He was glad Humfrey let him choose his companions, it would make the journey North more bearable. He needed someone to complain about the shit weather to.

“Of all the fucking places for you to go, it has to be the North in the middle of fucking winter…” Deryk sucked his teeth. “The Wall no less, nasty bastard.”

Deryk’s long blond hair whipped in the wind. Pots on the other hand, had sheared his hair short before the journey. All three of them had let their beards grow, hoping to look more rugged than they actually were.

“What the fuck are you looking at, Jason?” Pots asked him, leaning over the rail and squinting his eyes at the water.

Jason smiled. “Garth. My name is Garth Flowers, my mother is a lady from a minor house who died when I was little. I was taken care of by my lady grandmother but when she died, I was forced out of my home by my uncle and found work as a kitchen hand in another castle, but I was caught romancing the lord’s daughter and was given a choice: my cock or the Night’s Watch."

They stared at him, then burst out laughing.

“Seven hells,” Deryk laughed. “Do we have to have stories too?”

Jason sniffed. “No, you both are just common, lowborn thieves.”

“What?” Pots stared at him. “So, you get to be the fancy bastard who grew up in a castle, but we are the lowborn misfits?”

“Exactly.” Jason agreed. “I’m not as crass as you lot are, if I said I was just a lowborn commoner, they would see right through me.”

“None of us are lowborn.” Pots pointed out.

“Just act the way you two do when you’re in a brothel, I’m sure you’ll fit in.” Jason teased.

The three of them laughed as the sails rose and the ship moved out of the dock.

Jason smiled. *Completing my mission brings me one step closer to you, Desmera.*

Though he would be journeying as North as one can go, he was excited to finally be included in his family’s plans and help any way he could.

*Who knows what adventure awaits…*

He gazed up at the sky and took one more look at the looming tower of his home and smiled. His
eyes drifted down towards the dock and rested on a flock of black ravens, silently staring at him. He
stared back and found the sight rather unnerving. They did not move, their beady black eyes seemed
to be staring at him… directly at him.

He shifted, wanting to turn away but finding himself unable to.

Suddenly, they all took flight, and their dark wings ascended into the sky, westward bound.

He let out a small gasp and watched them go.

How peculiar.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all your kind comments and kudos!

Jason Hightower is an OC, the youngest son of Lord Leyton Hightower is Humfrey
Hightower but I would rather just make a new character. Desmera Redwyne is a real
character though.

Something that still ticks me off: it’s obvious D&D just stupidly thought ‘Sam’s dad is
mean to him, and that’s bad, so let’s make him a bad guy who will betray House
Tyrell!’ when I just don’t think that would ever happen in the books. The Tarlys are
loyal to the Tyrells, they would fight for the Tyrells, they wouldn’t betray the Tyrells.
Lord Tarly is an asshole, in the show and books, but I just don’t see him doing that.
Even if the Lannisters managed to offer him something like wardenship, he wouldn’t
take it because the Hightowers and Redwynes, who are extremely powerful and tied to
the Tyrells through marriage, would be up his ass about it.

Anyway.

This chapter was a bit short, but the next one is much longer. Next chapter, an invasion
takes place and the character you’ve been waiting for returns with fire and blood.

Bye!
Daenerys I

Her blood ran scorching through her veins, searing and fiery like lava from the volcanos of Old Valyria.

Her violet eyes were wide, sharp and focused. Her breathing was steady and calm. Her mind raced while her body remained still.

For the first time in years, Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen felt truly alive.

She closed her eyes and envisioned it as she has done so many times before: her enemies vanquished and the three headed dragon flying victoriously over the lands she conquered. No man or woman has achieved what she was, and after her, none ever will.

She is a conqueror, Aegon born again. She is the blood of the dragon, she will take what is hers with fire and blood and do whatever it takes. Once, she was a naïve girl who let love blindly lead her to her demise; now, she is a dragon reborn from the flames of R’hllor, and she is done being merciful to those who do not deserve it.

Drogon impatiently blew steam from his mouth. She lifted her head westward, and lovingly stroked his scales.

“Soon, my dear, we will have our revenge. We will fly back to Westeros and reduce our enemies’ lands to ash. We will start with King’s Landing, then Casterly Rock then Winterfell. Perhaps we’ll burn the entire North then salt the land, and let the Stark bitch be queen of nothing. For a while of course, then you may have her. We’ll make the traitor watch, then we’ll take him high up into the sky… then drop him.” Daenerys smirked. “I wonder if we’ll hear the imp when he makes it to the ground.”

Her smile melted into a venomous snarl. “Then we’ll fly beyond the Wall and find him. He’ll answer for his betrayal. I’ve been thinking of all the different ways we could make him pay… I haven’t decided yet.”

She looked back to the cities in the distance. “But we have time. There’s still so much to do.”

From afar, Volantis looked beautiful. A restless city that shined in the distance with fire and life, but to Daenerys Targaryen, it was simply a stepping stone. A city that will get her ever so closely to building the world she had always envisioned… and her revenge.

The night was dark and cloudy. From where she and Drogon sat, on top of the cliff a sea away, she could make out the shapes of thousands of warships sitting silently on the water a distance away on her left. On her right, in Volantis, the port was alive with activity as soldiers and slaves secured their scorpions and awaited her arrival.

Her foes know she’s close. Drogon was a colossal force that could not be hidden; when he takes flight, people a sea away know. His dark wings block the sun and engulf the ground in darkness wherever he flies. He is as big as The Black Dread and has earned the name The Dark Terror.

She closed her eyes and imagined the Triach in their palaces. Were they cowering in terror, or were they anticipating victory? A mixture of both, or foolishly the latter?
She gave them the opportunity to surrender. A good queen must be fair and offer her subjects the chance to end their folly and submit. But only once. She has already spilt enough innocent blood, she is reluctant to do so again.

Then she remembered the smug look on Nyessos Vhassar’s face when she gave him the opportunity to surrender. “Volantis is the greatest, richest and most powerful city in the world. We are one of the oldest and proudest descendants of Old Valyria, and have been since the Targaryens were a tiny, insignificant house in Valyria. We have thousands of warships manned by the most well-trained soldiers in the world, the walls to our city are thick and impenetrable. You and your unwashed hoards will never walk our streets.” He said.

His blue and purple silk robes shimmered in the hot Volantene sun, his long dark hair flowed straight down his back, his beard was dyed blonde and neatly trimmed, and golden rings sat on every finger, each with a different jewel. Sitting beside him was Malaquo Maegyr, brown eyed and olive skinned, his face was hidden behind a thick dark beard and bushy brows that did little to hide his disdain for the Dragon Queen. And in their shadow was Doniphos Paenymion, a tall, silent, willowy, aged man with Valyrian features, long silver hair like her own, and pale blue eyes that never left her once.

They each sat in their own ornate, satin-clothed open palanquins, on thrones carved from dark wood, with either an elephant or tiger carved on the back rest. They were imbedded with ivory, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, gold, black diamonds and silver. Muscled men held the palanquins above the ground and trailing behind them were a gaggle of servants young and old. None of them lifted their eyes from the ground to meet hers, and all had tattoos on their weary and downtrodden faces. Slaves, she looked upon each of their faces and remembered, I have liberated once, I will do it again.

“Your walls and ships matter little to my dragon.” She replied curtly, her violet eyes aflame with tamed fury.

He smirked. “The Great Daenerys Targaryen. Mother of Dragons and Breaker of Chains. Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea and Queen of Meereen. If you have anymore titles, I apologize for not knowing them all. They matter little now. You are Khaleesi of nothing, the people you liberated are in chains once more, you are no longer Queen of anything, and the rest of your dragons are dead.”

Dany gritted her teeth. She could feel her blood boiling within her, and she wanted nothing more than to see the Volantene Triarch reduced to ash. But she was no longer a hot-headed, naïve little girl. She was smarter, and she knew his time would come. So, she let him speak. She let him dig his own grave.

“You were bested by those simple Westerosi. They slayed your dragons then took everything you had, including your life. Yes, we’ve heard all about your failed invasion and your resurrection. The Red Priests talk about nothing else, it is why we took their tongues. They believe you to be some saviour, but the truth is you are nothing, little girl.

“Now, unless you are here to offer yourself as my bed slave, leave my sight, you are not worthy to be in my presence. Wage war with Volantis, and you will lose. Perhaps once I kill you, I’ll send the people of Westeros your dragon’s skull, and let him know that I, the Triarch Nyessos Vhassar, did what they could not do. Now, begone!”

She stared long and hard at the men. Then burst out laughing.

Nyessos’ smugness was replaced with utter confusion, then anger. “She is as mad as her father.” He said provocatively. But Dany did not care, she found the man entertaining.

“I must say,” she had said between breaths, “I find you highly amusing, you would have made quite
the jester at my court. But alas, you have dug your own grave and now you must lie. The next time we meet, will be the last day you breathe.”

And that day has come.

It had been just over six years since she died in Westeros and Drogon brought her here. Six years since the Red Priests breathed fire into her and gave her life. And six years of constant thinking and planning and growing.

She had worked in the shadows for a while, collecting the shattered pieces of her old life where she could. It had been hard, she thought it would be impossible… but the flame within her never extinguished, not fully. She kept faith in herself. She swore she would never, ever let her fire be smothered again. And like a moth to light, what she had lost found its way back to her.

First, it was her Dothraki. They had set sail to return to Vaes Dothrak, but during their travels, they spotted Drogon flying over the sea and chose followed him to Volantis. She had insisted that they go home and rebuild what was left; she had already led half of them to their deaths, she would not ask them to follow her again.

“The Dothraki will live on.” She had said. “Go and recover, regain your strength and numbers. Words cannot express my gratitude; you followed me, you fought for me and you died for me… but I have nothing now. You have already done more than I can ever ask for, and now I need you to survive. Go home, take a wife and raise children. I can only bring you death.”

She had received them in a simple woollen dress, with not a braid in her hair. She was not a Khaleesi, she was not a queen, not anymore… Her bloodriders silently glanced at one another, then fell to one knee. “You are our Khaleesi, we will follow no one else, from this day until our very last.”

Tears formed in her eyes at the memory. They are my people, even in defeat they will stand by me.

Soon after, it was her brave military commander. She had heard that he and the rest of the Unsullied had set sail from Westeros, but to where, she wasn’t sure. It was only quite later that she discovered that it was to Naath, the birthplace of her precious Missandei, and that they had killed every slaver they found.

Unfortunately, the butterfly sickness was a dastardly plague that killed quickly and mercilessly. Many Unsullied fell victim to it, but by some miracle, some survived. Grey Worm included. Against better judgement, she had flown there herself one night, forgetting the risks. Just to show her men that it was not over. Hope was not lost, not while Daenerys Targaryen still breathed.

And for as long as she continues to breathe, wherever she goes, wherever she lands, whichever land Drogon’s wings shadow, slavery would die. That was a promise she made to herself in dedication to those she had loved and lost. No one will ever have to die in chains again, not on the land she treads.

She was lucky very few saw her that night, and those who did had been sworn to secrecy and kept their word.

She couldn’t make her survival known to the world just yet. Not while she still licked her wounds. She needed to build an army, she needed resources and she needed a base. And arranging it all from the shadows proved to be the most difficult task to overcome.

But she was known for doing the impossible.

She sent what was left of her soldiers to Meereen, with Grey Worm leading them. She had hoped to
collect whatever forces they could muster but was appalled to hear what became of the city she had conquered and governed after she set sail west.

*Chaos* is how Grey Worm described it. She never should have left Daario as regent. In her absence, treacherous roaches swarmed the Great Pyramid, offering him gifts and gold for favours. She understood: A sellsword was offered all the riches and power he could ever want, but only if he undid all the hard work the queen he once served - and who had spurned him - had done. Why wouldn't he do it?

It was a bitter tonic to drink. Her departure resulted in men, women and children being chained once again. When the Unsullied marched back into the city, they held their hands to the sky and shouted ‘Mysha! Mysha!’ It broke her heart.

Incensed, Grey Worm stormed the Great Pyramid and found her old lover in bed with four bed maids – two whom were described as ‘Lyseni’, for they bore quite a striking resemblance to herself – and she might have laughed at the absurdity of it all, if she wasn’t so fixated on the fact that they wore collars around their necks.

Everyone believed she was dead, her army scattered, and her legacy desecrated. The last thing Daario expected was for the Unsullied and Dothraki to march back into the city with the three headed dragon still pinned to their chests. He had always been overly confident, it was what attracted her to him during their brief dalliance. And it was that confidence that led to his downfall. The moment he ordered his men to kill her army in the halls she once ruled, his fate was sealed.

No fighter alive can match the prowess of the Unsullied and the Dothraki, especially a sellsword bastard and his allies, the children of former slave-masters who seemingly grew too ambitious and too bold for their own good. She had heard he begged for mercy in the end… but with one glance at the frightened yet hopeful faces of his enslaved brothers and sisters, she understood why Grey Worm had too little to give. He lined them all up, all of the self-titled ‘New Great Masters of Meereen’, and justice was served.

But that was not the end of it. Her enemies didn’t reinstate slavery on their own, they had help from other slave cities. Some, she was already quite familiar with. And so, she set her eyes on the old cities she had conquered and left behind.

Retaking Yunkai and Astapor took two years, regaining stability among her kingdoms took three.

She, with the help of her advisors, established a new form of government. Where the people would feel represented, and where no elected envoy felt like they were less important than the other. She divided it into different councils; with the People’s Council, then the Meereenese, Astapori or Yunkish Council, and then the Great Council which she presided over. Secretly heading entire kingdoms from the shadows was extremely challenging, and her system had its complications of course, as politics usually does. But there was relative stability and the people were free and happy, which was all she could hope for.

She was proud of herself and what she managed to achieve in those long years. She had grown as a leader, and as a woman. She had time to ponder her mistakes. And she, admittedly, made quiet a few.

Listening to Tyrion was at the top of her list. She wished she had killed him the first time she laid eyes on him in the fighting pits. She was a fool to believe that he would ever fight against his family. Second was fighting for those ungrateful barbarians in the North. She saved their lives, she lost a child for them, she led her own people to their deaths for them, and they repaid her by plotting her downfall.
Third was falling in love with Jon Snow. She would never be foolish enough to open her heart ever again. He was a fool, a dangerous fool who betrayed her after she gave him her love. She thought she was better than that… to be swayed by such trivial emotions. If I didn’t let my emotions get into the way of reasoning, I would be ruling over the Seven Kingdoms right now.

And I wouldn’t have become the very thing I swore to never be: a monster, like my father. In her solitude, she had found the time to be profoundly ashamed of what she did. She didn’t know what came over her in that moment, but it wasn’t her, and it was never the person she wanted to be.

She swore she would be the type of queen who would protect the innocent, and in the end, she wasn’t. It would haunt her until her very last day. I must be better, I must show people that I can be better, atone for the unnecessary hurt I have caused and leave the world better than I found it. She took a deep breath and shut her eyes. The world I want to build will be one that is good.

But she also couldn’t let those responsible for her downfall live. What would her ancestors do? Surely, they would not take their treachery. She decided a long time ago that she was no longer fighting for herself, but for her entire bloodline. House Targaryen has endured worse, and in the end, she is what was left standing. Those who tried to extinguish the great flames of House Targaryen, would find that they are more likely to get burnt instead. Fire and Blood, her house words. And those who stand in her way will feel the wrath of those words soon enough.

For too long, she has been in the shadows. Now was the time for dragons, and for the world to know that Daenerys Targaryen is alive and has returned stronger than before.

She opened her eyes and took one last look at the city in the distance.

It is time. She lowered her helmet over her head.

It had been a long while since she rode Drogon, but sitting on his back felt so natural, it felt like she was back home. Drogon beat his wings, and they took off into the night.

The clouds would provide her with the cover she needed. She flew high until she soared above the clouds, and until the twinkling stars and pale moon were her only companions in the sky. The silver light made the smoky swirls of her Valyrian steel armour shimmer as the dark metal drank the light, and the rubies on her chest gleamed like wet blood.

Only a matter of time now.

She lowered Drogon to get a better view of the waters. It was dark, but in the distance, she could see them anchored in the distance. Her armada was waiting for her command, and she gave it to them by sweeping above them. Her captains called for the anchors to rise and they set sail, onwards to battle.

She heard a horn blow from the port. They know we’re attacking. She directed Drogon back up into the sky. The pale clouds swirled as he beat his wings. What a beautiful night, she smiled, imagining how beautiful the sunrise would look from the highest tower in Volantis. That is how I will celebrate my victory.

She flew higher, further away from the clouds. She tightened her grip on the reins of her saddle and peered over. The height is good enough, she decided. So, she gave Drogon his orders.

“Dracarys.”

Drogon roared, and his breath burned away the silver light of the moon, replacing it with an intense, fiery glow. Satisfied, she pulled on his reins and circled the air, halting his advance, and patiently waited.
Barely a moment later, she heard them coming. She calmly watched as dozens of bolts sliced through the clouds, missing their target. *Fools,* she chuckled.

They continued to fire bolt after bolt, dozens of them soared through the sky with no end in sight. Most of them missed. It was difficult, with Drogon’s massive size, to dodge every single bolt as one was bound to stray too close. But the years have toughened his scales and turned them into steel, and his most sensitive areas have been clothed in matching black Valyrian steel. Daenerys made a great effort to ensure that no one would ever hurt her child again.

She continued this dance: circle the sky and order Drogon to release his flames, then rein him in as she watches them exhausted whatever weapons they have. She had lost count of how many flew past them, but it must have been well past sixty. And now, fewer than five bolts were flying through the air at any given time. They’ve depleted their ammunition, she pleasantly realised.

“I think that’s enough.” She said. “Drogon, dip.”

Her objective wasn’t actually to avoid the bolts, it was to be a diversion. To distract the Volantene soldiers stationed on the walls, and to prevent them from using their bolts on her armada so they could land faster and easier. Because truly, when faced with an armada or a colossal fire-breathing dragon, killing who would be the focus or main objective? It would be the one closely circling above your head. They were bound to turn their focus on her, for most have likely fought foes on ships and would reason it’s better to fight them at the gates where they would have an advantage, but none have ever fought a dragon.

She anticipated this.

The flies had unknowingly entered her web, and they only realised once they glanced up into the black, starless sky and noticed a dark creature descend nose first from the clouds, diving fast and directly above them. They had only a moment to discover that their scorpions were only useful for targets within the angle of the device and not for targets directly above, and then they were bathed in the searing hot flames of her dragon.

One by one, the scorpions burned beneath her, and the panicked cries of her enemies filled the night air. She gritted her teeth at the sound; the screams of your enemy and the screams of an innocent can sound one in the same. But she knew who those screams belonged to, nevertheless, they still disturbed the tranquility she had worked so hard to achieve in her mind, and the ripples caused the bitter memories to surface.

She circled the city and perched Drogon onto a tower. He let out a deafening roar that shook the great city of Volantis. She peered below as people screamed in the streets and scurried away to safety. They fear me, she thought. I would fear me too, if I were them.

Watching them brought painful memories. I have been here before. I have sat atop a great city, I have watched its innocent people cower in fear, and I have unleashed my wrath on those undeserving. She could still hear the bells that rung that day. But I am not the same woman I was then.

Drogon spread his dark wings and lifted into the air. Following the chaotic clashing of steel, she soared to the gates of Volantis where just outside, her army was engaged in a fearsome battle with the Volantene army. The night was alive with the song of chaos as men exchanged steel, bled, cried and screamed in the fiery glow of her fires.

Victory was within her grasp, the time to act was now.
“Dracarys!” Drogon’s fire shined so brightly that for a moment, it was as if day had come. His breath melted the tall walls protecting Volantis, and a thick dust settled from the wall to port. Her men marched into the city, slaughtering those left who stood in their way.

An army of Volantene men emerged in the streets, armed and blocking her army’s way forward. Though they put on a mummer’s show of bravery at the sight of her dragon and army within their walls, Daenerys could sense their fear. There will be no more unnecessary bloodshed tonight, she decided. So, she spoke to them in High Valyrian.

“Those who lay down their swords and bend the knee will be spared and receive my mercy, those who take arms against me will follow their fallen brothers in death. Choose wisely.”

They all silently looked at each other, hands shaking, conflicted and terrified of what could come next.

Then she heard a deep, bitter, grumbling laugh. “You stupid little bitch!”

She turned to her right, and found the dark, hating eyes of none other than Malaquo Maegyr. He stood dressed in dark steels and leathers, with a spear in hand. Behind him marched thousands of men, weapons in hand and with steady, unshaking hands. Her eyes flickered upwards, and she spotted the hundreds of men with bows and crossbows in hand, hidden in the towers surrounding her.

She turned and found an additional thousand soldiers marching towards their rear from both sides on the port, and her ships sat in flames in the bay, from fires that were not her own. The Volantene soldiers held their shields up and kept their spears pointed towards her army, blocking them from any escape. The best her army could do was hold out their own swords, spears and shields and prepare for an attack.

She looked around her again, her eyes on the bowmen. I may be armoured, but I couldn’t possibly survive a storm of arrows without one finding a chink in my armour. And all it can take is just one poisoned tip…

There was nowhere for my army to go. She realised. I could order Drogon to spit fire, but I can only attack one side first. Who should it be, the army ahead or the army to my right? And if I do, they will shower me in poisoned arrows, I’m certain.

She peered down towards the triarch.

“Triarch Malaquo Maegyr,” She forced a smile. “How bold of you to stand so shamelessly in the presence of your queen. Are you here to offer your surrender?”

“Surrender?” He scoffed bitterly. “Volantis will not fall to you, Daenerys Targaryen. We are not like those lesser cities you have destroyed in your path to conquest. Better men have tried, and better men have failed.”

“I suppose I should count myself lucky that I am not a man.”

She sneered at her. “You are a foolish girl who does not know her place, but you will learn it soon enough. I have your men surrounded, your reign is over.”

Beneath her, Drogon growled as smoke drifted from his nostrils. She stared at him, her eyes full of venom. “My reign is over, when I say it is.”

On her left, she heard thousands of feet marching in her direction, all who bore the elephant of the
Paenymion family as a coat of arms. She recognised the man at the forefront, with his long silver hair and pale blue eyes. Malaquo Maegyr – a man who Daenerys thought was incapable of showing any other emotion other than pure disdain and disgust – smiled victoriously…

But his mood swiftly shifted to that of confusion, to disbelief, then finally fury when he noticed that his fellow Triarch’s spears were not pointed to the Dragon Queen.

“Doniphos,” he spat in Valyrian, “what is the meaning of this?”

A mysterious soldier clad in the uniform of Doniphos Paenymion’s army stepped forward and removed his helm, revealing his identity. The Commander of the Unsullied and her Master of War gazed proudly at his queen.

“My Queen, we captured Triarch Nyessos Vhassar as he attempted to flee the city with his paramour, leaving his wife and children behind. He refused to surrender and chose death. His family are being kept in their home under your guard.”

“What have you done?” Malaquo hissed to Doniphos.

“What needed to be done to preserve our city.” He replied calmly.

“Preserve? You have doomed our city!”

“Volantis has long been a festering sore for too long.” He replied in Common Tongue. “The days of corruption, greed and exploitation are over. It must be cleansed, and that is what our queen has come to do. Tell your men to drop their weapons and surrender, Malaquo, the battle is lost. Your men may have the queen’s men surrounded, but I have yours surrounded as well. There has been enough bloodshed tonight, it is time to end this.”

Daenerys had never seen such hatred on a man’s face before, his distorted face looked like it came from a child’s nightmare.

“My men have been within your walls for moons now; learning, planning and silently recruiting the people of Volantis to my cause. They have been roaming your streets, watching your every move and even serving your food. They are in your palace right now, beside your children.” She glowered at him. “Whether your family lives or dies depends on you, Maegyr.”

She turned to the soldiers who awaited his command, cleared her throat and in Valyrian, spoke loud and clearly into the night. “I am Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, the First of Her Name, the Rightful Queen of the Andals and the First Men, Protector of the Seven Kingdoms, the Mother of Dragons, Queen of Meereen, Yunkai and Astapor, the Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, the Unburnt, the Breaker of Chains.

“I have lived, and I have died, and I have been reborn in the fires of R’hllor for one glorious purpose: to bring freedom and prosperity to those who dare to take it. Many of you who stand here today have been told that I am your enemy, and that is a vicious lie spread by those who seek to control you, to keep you in bondage and deny you, your family and your loved ones of the freedom you deserve.”

Malaquo Maegyr raised his voice. “Enough of this, you will be silent!”

She continued. “From this day onwards, you are no longer a slave. No longer will you be forced against your will to live, work and die for a tyrant who seeks to hurt. My rule will be fair and just. I offer you a world where you are free to choose. I have freed slaves from Yunkai, to Astapor, and to Meereen. The men beside me, who fought heroically, were once in bondage, they are not anymore. I
would be honoured if you choose to fight beside me. What I ask of you, the free people of Volantis, is to pledge yourself to me. Your one true queen!”

The night was still.

The night was still for a very long time. Daenerys looked at the armies, they stood still, undecided.

Suddenly, a cry interrupted the silence. “KILL HER!” Malaquo Maegyr pointed to Daenerys, he looked up to the towers, and he looked to his men. “I order you to kill them all! The dragon whore and the traitors! Kill them!”

Oh, you simple fool. I hold your family, and you demand my death? You would seal your fate and theirs?

But no one moved. No arrow soared in her direction. A long, tense second passed… and it was followed by the clang of steel on stone. One by one, his soldiers threw their weapons on the ground, and sunk to their knees.

The city is mine.

“Take the Triarch to the cells. He will be dealt with later.” She told Grey Worm. “And send more guards to each palace. There will be no more bloodshed this evening, including the blood of the nobility. They too will be dealt later.”

She looked to Doniphos Paenymion. “Thank you, Doniphos. I trust you will serve me well?”

He bowed. “I will be her grace’s most loyal servant, if she will have me.”

“Loyal advisor,” she smiled. “Rest assured, you will be greatly rewarded.”

She turned to her new subjects. “Spread the word. Tell each slave of my victory, tell them that their new queen, Daenerys Targaryen, has brought them their freedom. And celebrate, my children, cheer in the streets, drink and eat. It is a new day!”

They did as they were told.

She walked the beautiful streets of Volantis, and the night was alive with cheers and cries. As she passed, men, women and children spread their hands out to touch her, and she let them. She held their hands, kissed their children and wiped away their tears, all while grinning so much her cheeks began to ache.

Taking Volantis was not some small feat, it took a full year of meticulous planning and secret alliances to get it done. The great city of Volantis, fallen to Queen Daenerys Stormborn of Targaryen… word will spread far and wide. No longer will my survival remain a secret in the shadows. Everyone will know that I still breathe, that I seek justice and those who have wronged me shall fear.

The celebrations continued into the morning, and from the highest tower in Volantis, Daenerys watched the sky turn into the most beautiful mix of azure, lavender, fiery orange and gold. The sun peaked through the slowly drifting clouds, and Daenerys found the picture so stunning she was tempted to take Drogon for a ride to experience it intimately. But alas, both dragon and dragonrider needed rest.

Daenerys turned away and walked to the ridiculously large bed in the middle of the room – which she needed to climb, then crawl on top of to reach the middle – and laid her head on the soft,
feathered pillows.

She was happy.

Not because she was victorious in battle, not because she had conquered yet another city, and not because people were toasting her name in every inn throughout the city.

But because when she slept, her dreams were often more joyful than her waking hours.

Her eyes drooped closed, and she found herself in a beautiful garden. She walked past the red door and wandered barefoot on the soft grass, listening to the birds sing and harmonising the sweetest melody she has ever heard.

Her hair was brushed down and her dress was a simple pale shift that brushed past her knees, with lavender flowers embroidered all over the dress. In her dreams, it was always summer, and the weather was always just right – warm, with a slight breeze that swayed the flowers and filled the air with sweetness.

She smelt the flowers, and watched the colourful butterflies flutter their delicate little wings. They made her think of Missandei. She held out her palm and smiled when one with pale blue wings landed on her palm, it walked across her thumb then fluttered away to a bush filled with wild roses.

Here, she will always be free.

She turned away and walked the path, with a clear destination in mind. Please let him be here, please...

And he was. Humming to the tune of the birds, and she didn’t think the sound could get any lovelier.

She was still unsure why she always saw him in her dreams, and at first, she wondered why the Gods would be so cruel as to fill her dreams with a child she could never have. She was sure that this was her punishment for the innocent people she made suffer in King’s Landing. But how could that be so when even after she awoke, the mere thought of him filled her life with sweetness?

He sat beneath the shade of the lemon tree, his curly silver-gold hair framing his sweet, soft face as he stared intently at a blue winter rose in his hands.

He may not be real, I may never bear a child of my own, and I may never get to hold him in my arms when I wake… but in my dreams, I can at least pretend. It stung and warmed her heart at once.

He heard her approach and lifted his head. His eyes were a perfect mixture of her violet and the grey she had tried so hard to forget. He smiled, and it made her heart both sting and flutter.

Gods, you look just like him.

“Daemon…” She breathed, her eyes filling with tears of joy.

“Hello, mother.”

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed this chapter, thanks for the comments and kudos!
In this story, I'm gonna keep it that Bran's power can't stretch all throughout the entire world, just Westeros (because seriously why would it?) In this story he draws his power from the heart trees and ancient Northern magic, the further he leaves Westeros, the weaker his magic becomes. Which makes things a bit more easy for Dany.

Dany is now making a huge play after years of planning and recovering in the shadows, and she's letting the world know she's alive... I'm sure the people in power in Westeros are gonna be suuuuper happy about that :)

Next chapter, we return to Jon and Daemon who make a very interesting discovery during their journey.
“Are we there yet?”

“No.”

Silence.

“Are we there yet now?”

“Aye.”

“Really?”

“No.”

Silence.

“Why?”

Jon huffed. “I don’t know, Daemon. Perhaps if you got off my back and walked yourself, we could get there a lot quicker.”

Daemon thought about it, then tightened his hold around his father’s neck.

“But I’m tired.”

Jon chuckled. “So am I, son.” He looked out at the valley stretched below them. “But we’re close. I know this mountain; the cave is not too far up ahead.”

Jon tightened his hold on the reins of their horses as he led them down the path.

“Did you come here before I was born?” Daemon asked.

Jon nodded. “Yes. I walked almost every day for two whole moons.”

Daemon’s eyes widened. “Two moons?” He groaned. “We’re getting there in two moons?”

“Only if we wander.” Jon answered. “Remain focused, and we can arrive there in one if the weather is kind, or one and a half if it is not.”

Jon and Daemon had been travelling for many weeks before they finally passed the Milkwater and entered the valleys. The Frostfangs are not too far now. But first, we rest.

Jon circled the mountain until he found an opening. There, he found Ghost waiting for them at the entrance.

“Hello Ghost!” Daemon greeted as he slipped off his father’s back and ran to the direwolf. Ghost licked his palm and stood, dwarfing the boy with his size. Daemon wasn’t afraid, he stood on his toes and stretched himself to pet Ghost’s head.

Jon lead the horses to the mouth of the cave and tethered them.
“Help me offload the horses, then prepare the wood we collected on the way here for the fire.” He instructed.

Daemon smiled shyly. “Can I start the fire this time?”

Jon thought about it. “No.”

“Why not?” Daemon whined. “I promise I won’t burn anything down this time.”

“I’m not sure about that…”

“Please?” He begged. “Let me try one more time?”

If I don’t let him, he’ll pout for the rest of the journey. Jon sighed as he unpacked their bags from their saddles. “Fine.”

His son cheered and grabbed the bags out of his hands. It appears Daemon wasn’t expecting them to be as heavy as they were, because he immediately dropped them onto the ground and stared at them with his little forehead scrunched up in deep contemplation. Jon silently watched with a look of amusement. What will you do now, little one?

He frowned and grabbed the bags, grunting as he dragged them through the snow. He didn’t ask him for help, nor did he look back to see if he would help. Besides, Jon had a strong feeling he would simply fuss if he did.

Jon laughed. “You’re as stubborn as your mother.” He whispered when Daemon was out of earshot.

He collected the wood and walked further into the cave.

The weather had been good lately, well, as good as it could get during winter. He had managed to catch three hares earlier that day, and the ice wasn’t as high as when he travelled this way six years ago. He failed to recall how long winter lasted when he was a boy, but it couldn’t have been longer than seven years, could it? Maybe it was, now that he thought of it. Only he and Robb had truly experienced winter in their childhood, Arya and Bran were too young and Sansa, he wasn’t all that sure if she remembered it.

But he was a child then, growing up in a castle with hearths to warm him every night. Now, he was a man grown with a child of his own, wondering if his son would ever see a castle like Winterfell in his lifetime.

In another life, he could have grown up in the biggest, fanciest castle of them all. He would have something both of his mother and father did not, a beautiful castle to call his own and two loving, breathing parents to care for him. But he will have neither, and I am to blame for that.

He set the wood onto the ground and fished around his bag for the flint. Daemon looked at him expectantly as he handed him the rocks.

“What do you remember how to do it? And what not to do?”

Jon could tell it took everything in the boy not to roll his eyes. “Yes father, I won’t burn anything.”

Jon lifted his brow.

“Except the wood!” Daemon quickly added, smiling so wide and innocently Jon could count all his missing teeth. He couldn’t help but smile back.
“Good. I’m going to skin the rabbits.”

As he prepared their supper, Jon’s thoughts drifted to Daemon’s mother again. It was strange to be travelling the same steps he did years ago, back then he was of a much different mind and didn’t care whether he lived or died. He died once, he didn’t fear doing it again.

Now, he feared it. More than anything. But it was not death itself he feared, or what came after; he feared how it could tear him and his son apart. The thought of his son hurt felt like a rusty, iron sword sinking deep into his heart. He wondered if this was what his mother felt like when she died, or his father, or his uncle Lord Stark. He couldn’t bear to leave his son alone in this world. He lived for his son, he wanted to see him grow and find love and marry and perhaps hold a grandchild or two in his arms. He wanted what his mother and father could not have. And besides, he owed it to Daenerys to have her blood live on somehow.

“Look, father! I did it!” Daemon cheered. Jon turned back and saw the small flames licking the pale wood. He smiled, pleased.

“I’m proud of you.”

Daemon beamed.

With some work, Jon skewered the meat and set it over the fire. Together they watched it sizzle and cook, in peaceful silence.

“Father?” Daemon broke the silence.

“Yes?”

“I was wondering… what is life like beyond the Wall?”

Jon quirked his brow. “Hmm… I suppose there are, um… castles and–”

“What do castles look like?” He interrupted, excitedly.

“They are like… towers and halls made of stone. There’s a courtyard, and big walls surrounding it, with fortresses and ramparts and gatehouses and… sometimes there are moats.” He tried to explain.

His son looked at him blankly. “What are… those?”

Jon bit his bottom lip. “I’m not doing a very good job of explaining it… I suppose you’d have to see it to know.”

“Will I?”

“What?”

“Will I see a castle one day? Like Winterfell, where you grew up?”

Jon froze. “Well I… Um… I don’t know but… I… I hope not.”

A look of hurt flashed across his face and Jon’s breath caught in his throat.

“Why?” His voice was suddenly so small.

“I…” Jon looked at him with a pained expression.
“But I want to see one, father. Please?” He whispered softly, but the cave echoed his words loudly in Jon’s ears.

He sighed. “Because no one south from here knows you’re alive, Daemon. And no one can.”

He tilted his head. “Why?”

“Because you are your mother’s son… and you’re mine. A Targaryen. A threat to the realm.”

He looked confused. “I’m a threat?”

“Your bloodline is.” Jon breathed in deep and looked into the fire. “It doesn’t matter who’s king or queen of the realm now, son. It’s all a game of politics south of the wall. People will lie, betray and backstab to get what they want. South of the Wall is a pit of vipers, and I don’t want you involved.”

Daemon sat in silence for a bit, staring at the fire. Jon wondered if he truly understood all that he was saying.

“Bad people?” He finally said.

Jon nodded. “Bad people.”

Daemon thought about it. “Even your family on the other side of the wall?”

Jon’s eyes flickered up to his son. “All we have is each other, remember that.”

Daemon began nodding his head, then paused. “But what about Tormund and his family?”

Jon looked at him unexpectantly. “Tormund? What about Tormund?”

“Don’t we have him, too?”

Jon laughed. “We’re not related by blood, but I suppose he’s like family, hm?”

Daemon nodded in agreement. “Aye, that means we have them too!”

“Aye, it does.” He lifted the steaming rabbit and handed it to Daemon. “Now eat.”

Night descended quickly, and it was time to prepare for bed. The harsh winter winds whistled outside of the cave as heavy snow fell and created blankets of thick snow on the frozen ground.

Daemon had quickly grown bored of just sitting in a cave, watching his father oil his sword, so he had elected to explore the cave. Usually Jon would have said no – it was a cave after all, he was conscious of the potential of falling rocks and dangerously hidden holes – but the boy was bored and restless, if he swore to stay away from trouble, he didn’t see the harm.

“Don’t stray too far, don’t try to squeeze into tight spaces,” he handed him a torch, “and watch where you step. If you get hurt, if you sense trouble, you will call for me. Swear it?”

Daemon smiled. “I swear it.”

Then he was off.

It had been a while since he heard from him. Ghost chose to accompany him in his exploration, so he was left in solitude. Since then, Jon had laid out their furs for the night and tended to the fire that would keep them warm, he had taken stock of the food they had left and sharpened Longclaw. But
keeping busy did not elevate the growing unease the longer Daemon was away from him. *It is time to retire to bed,* Jon decided, as he stood up to go search for the boy.

“Daemon?” He called. And he was met with only silence.

“Daemon?” He called even louder, and yet, still nothing.

A knot formed in his gut, and his heart every so slowly, began to sink further and further.

“DAEMON!” He shouted. If his heart quickened even a pace more, he was sure it would stop. The cave had paths, naturally formed tunnels that led to the entrance if one walked straightforward. There was little to explore… or at least that’s what he thought. There were some minor paths here and there, but they led nowhere, only to dead ends. There were only so many places he could be… and all were within earshot.

*So where could he be?*

“DAEMON?” He shouted, and his breath shallowed as panic bubbled within him. He hastily lit a torch and hurried down the path, shouting down every tunnel or open space he could. His son’s name echoed through every hole, chamber, crevice, crack, inch of hard stone from the wall to the ceiling of the cave… And yet, it was only the echoes, his thumping heart and his shallow breaths he could hear.

*He fell down a hole, he’s stuck, and he’s hurt. Why isn’t he answering me? He’s hurt…* He shook his head. *I must find him… I must...*

He strode to the front of the cave and saw only the horses and no one else. Not even Ghost.

“Daemon? Ghost? Do you hear me?” His call echoed, and no one answered. Worried, he looked out into the cold, winter night. *They couldn’t have left the cave, could they? No, he would never, he must be here somewhere. I need to look more thoroughly.* His eyes worriedly lingered on the falling snow, and he willed himself to turn back into the cave…

And found himself eye to eye with a pair of blood red eyes. Startled, his breath caught in his throat.

“Ghost!” He breathed.

The direwolf turned and ran away. “Wait!” He called.

Jon followed his companion deeper into the cave and was aghast to see turn into a tunnel, then disappear through a large, gaping crack hidden in the corner of the cave wall. Jon furrowed his brow in frustration. ‘*Don’t stray too far, don’t try to squeeze into tight spaces’ I said.*

The crack may have been big enough for a child, but it was still a tight squeeze as Jon lowered himself to fit.

Cautiously, he stood erect and lifted the torch. He wasn’t sure what he was expecting to find, but it certainly wasn’t a long, wide tunnel that stretched on either side, then disappeared into the unknown. He touched the wall and leaned closer to get a better look at the coarse dark stone. *This was carved,* he realised. *But by who?*

“Father?” He heard a voice in the distance.

“Daemon?” He replied. “Where are you?”
“Father, look!” His little voice echoed through the tunnels. “Come and see!”

On his left, Ghost padded away from him and he was left with no choice but to follow obediently. He lifted his torch and squinted in the dark, but still, he could barely see anything three steps ahead of him. The tunnels seem vast and never ending, which combined with the rough, carved feel of the wall, piqued his interest.

As he maneuvered through the tunnel, his eyes caught something in the shadows. His head did a double take when he noticed it, and the sight remained just as surprising the longer he lay eyes on it. His movements faltered as he moved forward; the pale colour on the dark stone commanded him attention.

Shapes and symbols that looked all too familiar, but foreign all the same. The Ancient Runes of the Old Tongue. He may have the blood of the First Men, but his ancestor’s tongue invoked little reaction in him. The runes of the Old Tongue were lost to time, no man could read it now. And besides, he was barely concerned with the appearance of dead languages when he still did not know the whereabouts of his troublesome son.

Though… he couldn’t help but feel like he had stumbled onto an important discovery. Did the First Men write this when they landed in Westeros? Or was it the Children of the Forest? They may have their own tongue, but they are more than well versed in the languages of dead men. Jon’s hand brushed over the markings on his arm. Are these spells too? He wondered.

The walls of the cave curved and a dim light at the end of the tunnel entered his vision. Jon’s steps hastened, and shortly, the light from his torch joined the light at the end of the tunnel, illuminating the large, cavernous space with a fiery hue.

At its centre was a little boy, mouth wide open and staring at the walls in wonder. A moment later, Jon was behind him and he grasped his shouldered tightly, forcing the boy to look him in the eye. Daemon’s face went from childlike wonder to confusion to fear when he looked upon his father’s angry gaze.

“You disobeyed me.” Jon growled. “I told you not to stray too far, and not to squeeze through tight spaces, that includes cracks in the wall, Daemon!”

Daemon’s bottom lip trembled. “B-But I didn’t squeeze, father. I promise!”

“You swore to me you wouldn’t wander too far. I called for you, Daemon, and I didn’t hear anything back.” Jon stared at his wide, moist eyes and gritted his teeth. His throat began to tighten and though no tears fell, he could taste them. “I thought something bad had happened to you... I thought you were hurt.” He whispered angrily.

Daemon avoided his eyes and cast his eyes downwards, apologetically. “I’m sorry.” He whispered. “I won’t do it again.”

“No. You won’t.” He stated. “You are not to leave my side, Daemon, not for the duration of our journey.”

His son continued looking downwards. In the dim light, he saw a tear slip down his cheek. Jon loosened his grip on his son and gave him a more tender squeeze. “You are the only thing that remains of her, Daemon. You are my son, there is nothing I find more precious in this world than you. If something were to happen to you, I don’t even know what I would do.”

His eyes slowly lifted, and he saw the tears in his father’s eyes as well. “I swear it, I won’t do it
again.” He sniffed.

Jon gave him a small reassuring smile. “I believe you won’t.” He pulled him into an embrace. “I only want to keep you safe.”

He felt his arms tighten around his neck. “I know.”

A brief, tender moment later, they separated, and Jon gently wiped the tears off his son’s face. “It’s late, and we have a long journey still ahead. It’s time for bed.”

“No!” Daemon exclaimed. He pulled on his father’s arm. “You have to see something first!”

“What is it that you would have me see? Is it the writing? I’ve already seen the runes—”

“Not the runes, father.” Daemon ran to collect his torch and beckoned him to follow.

Jon patted his thigh once, signalling Ghost to follow as his son walked further into the cave.

Daemon stopped walking then turned around, an excited grin on his face. He pointed upwards, towards a wall. “Look!”

Jon approached and held his torch high. His jaw dropped.

The surface of the wall was flat and covered in intricate drawings and carvings. He recognised the figures represented in the first drawing he saw immediately; tall, thick figures covered in furs with snarling faces, carrying clubs, long spears and axes while towering over smaller figures cowering in their presence… the giants were large and imposing on the rocky canvas. His thoughts drifted to Wun Wun briefly. He died the last of his kind, but in this picture, the giants were plentiful.

They all faced west, and Jon had move to his left to get a better look. In front of them, was a group of what appeared to be little children dressed in muddy browns, reds and green. The Children of the Forest, Jon realised. They stood in a line, heads tilted up and their arms stretched up with their palms skyward.

Above them were dots and more ruins he could not read, curving downwards in spiral motions. Jon examined the letters. The curved lines were written in ruin, and he assumed the dots served to split up the words or phrases. He didn’t know what it said, but there was something strangely familiar about it.

“How strange.” He breathed.

“Aye. Look at that, father.” Daemon moved behind him and shined his torch closer to Jon’s left.

“Isn’t that pretty?”

Jon’s eyes travelled from the bottom of the drawing, to the very top of the cave wall where it ended. It towered over them, and stretched so high Jon had to tilt his head all the way back just to take it in.

The sight took his breath. The pale branches sprouted from the thick white trunk of the tree and spread far and wide, while little ruby red handprints were stamped onto the pale branches. A face, calm and stoic, with red tears streaming over its cheeks watched over them both in the dim light.

He knew what he was looking at. It was the same heart tree that had given his son life.

“The Heart of Winter.” Were the words he was about to say, but the words did not come from him. He turned his head towards his son, who was still looking at the weirwood in wonder. “I’ve seen it
before.”

Jon furrowed his brows. “You were just a babe the last time you were there.”

“I’ve seen it in my dreams.” He answered, turning to Jon. “I’ve sat under the tree before, and I’ve heard them whispering.”

“Whispering whispering?”

“I don’t always know, they don’t speak like we do.”

Jon considered his words. *Is it possible that... that he...?* “Do you… do you see the children as well?”

His face brightened for a second. “Yes, many times. They teach me things.”

“Like what?”

“How to read.”

“Read?”

Daemon nodded his head and pointed to the ruins on the wall.

Jon’s brow rose. “You can read the runes?”

He grimaced, embarrassed. “I’m not good at it.”

Jon placed a hand on his shoulder and crouched to his level. “How long have you been having these kinds of dreams?”

Daemon looked up in thought. “Umm… since I can remember.”

*Since he could remember… and not once did he see it fit to tell me.*

“Why didn’t you say something?”

Daemon lowered his head and shrugged.

Jon looked at him pointedly. “*Daemon...*”

He shrugged again and finally lifted his head. “I don’t know, father. I thought… it didn’t matter. They’re just dreams, anyway.”

Unsatisfied, Jon searched his son’s eyes for the truth of his words.

“What else do you dream about?” He asked.

Daemon hesitated. Jon could tell he wanted to say something but was struggling within himself to do so. He was hiding something, Jon could tell. But ultimately, he decided that he would not push further. Daemon would tell him the truth when he was ready to do so.

“Okay,” he nodded his head. “Keep your secrets, but know that you can tell me anything, Daemon. Anything at all.”

Daemon smiled and nodded, then looked at the runes. “I can’t read them well, only a few words.”
“I’d still like to hear.”

Daemon concentrated on the symbols, then pointed at one of the curved lines of letters.

“That symbol is for ‘giants’, that one says ‘children’ and ‘forest’.” He stared at the writing. “And… that one says ‘ice’ I think.”

His finger pointed to another line of letters. “This one is about someone… who’s cold? It says, ‘cold one’.”

Jon scratched his chin. “Interesting.”

“I think they died.”

“Who?”

“The cold ones.” He leaned closer to the runes and traced them with his finger as he read. “The symbol next to theirs says ‘death’.”

Jon froze. “Wait…” He looked at the spirals once more, and suddenly remembered why he thought it looked strangely familiar.

“What’s wrong?” Daemon asked.

“I’ve seen this symbol before…” Slowly, he walked past the heart tree, and his suspicions were confirmed.

Just as the children of the forest held their heads and arms upwards, so did they. Hundreds of figures with icy pale skin, hair the colour of snow and hauntingly blue eyes stood opposite the children and giants, beside the Heart of Winter. The presence of the spiral symbol quickly made sense.

“White walkers.” Jon breathed.

“Really?” Daemon squeaked as he ran to the painting. He stared at it with his mouth agape, then turned to his father excitedly. “Do they look the same to you, father?”

He scratched his beard. “They were a lot more menacing face to face.”

Daemon chattered excitedly as Jon looked upon the cave wall. There were hundreds of them once, he thought. But less than a dozen marched on Winterfell. What happened to the rest?

He examined each white walker and looked upon each face. One was tall and willowy, one was short and stout, one wore armour while another wore nothing. Hundreds of them, lined up and looking upon the Heart of Winter. But none were familiar. He was looking for one in particular, one with a long icy spear, clad in grey armour and horns atop his head… but he found no such creature.

The Night King, commander of the white walkers and raiser of the dead, was not among them. No, the one leading this pack was someone else entirely.

The leader stood closer to the heart tree with their arms spread out. The creature had delicate features, long white hair flowed behind them in the wind, they were dressed in a long white gown and white furs that trailed behind them. The painting gave him little doubt. The white walker is a woman.

Jon had heard tales of the Night’s Queen before. A white walker who coupled with a Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, who declared himself the Night’s King, and was defeated by Brandon the Breaker during the Age of Heroes.
Was this her? He studied the woman even closer but couldn’t find a definitive answer. She wore no crown, and after closer inspection of the hundreds behind her, he deduced that there were other women among them as well.

It could be her, but when would this have happened? The painting gave little information; besides telling him they were worshipers of the Old Gods. Is it possible that she is the famed Queen, or someone else entirely?

“Father are you listening to me?” Daemon pulled on his sleeve. “I asked who she was!”

“I…” He tilted his head. “I don’t think I know.”

There were hundreds of you once, what happened?

Jon shook his head, it was a lot to think about and frankly, he had other concerns. The white walkers are all gone, what use is it to think on them now? “Come, Daemon. It’s very late, and we must rest.”

He pulled his son close as he led him towards the tunnels. However, he did briefly turn back for a final look.

He had a strange inkling that perhaps, he might have stumbled upon something important. Was it crucial information? Something he should know? He wasn’t sure yet.

But what he did know was that it stirred something strange within him.

That night, he dreamt of skin as pale as the moon and long, silver hair that blew in the wind. The sight was familiar to him, he held it in his arms many times before, another life ago.

But when she turned, he was not met with the familiar violet eyes he was so deeply fond of. Instead, he stared into hard, cold and unforgiving eyes that shined like blue stars.

Chapter End Notes

What could those paintings mean?
What do the runes say?
What’s up with Daemon and his dreams?
What happened to those white walkers?
Hmm… we’ll just have to wait to find out.

Next chapter, a character returns to Westeros to find that much has changed and discovers some horrible truths.

Bye!
The wet, morning air stung her cheeks as she approached the shore. Though she wore a thick fur cloak and fur lined gloves, the winter chill was merciless at Shipbreaker’s Bay. As her men reached the sandy shore, she jumped out of the row boat and into the shallow waters, pushing the boat to the beach.

A bit more inland were small inns and other resting places for weary sailors, so she directed her men to go there while she conducted her business elsewhere. If she had need for them, she would send for them.

Storm’s End was a grey monolith that stretched into the sky and disappeared into the morning fog. Its towers jutted into the sky like dark fists and from the seaside, and she could see not a single window, just grey-black stone.

Arya Stark had never seen it before, and she thought it was quite an impressive sight. *You’ve done well for yourself, bullhead.*

The steps leading to the castle were numerous, but Arya took her time as she strolled upwards to the gate. She enjoyed the calming crashing of the waves and salty air and the wind in her face, it made her feel free.

“Who are you and what is your business here?” A gruff voice muttered as she approached the top of the stairs. There were three of them, two of whom bore the Baratheon sigil on their breasts. The guard who spoke had his hand rested on the pommel of his sword. She eyed him, taking mental note of his attributes. He was shorter than his companions, but she could tell he was stronger than the rest. He would be slow to move, but more powerful with his sword.

She tilted her head up and glared at them all. “My name is Arya Stark, I am an old friend of Lord Baratheon and I wish to see him.”

The men turned to each other.

“Stark? I don’t know any Arya Stark.”

“She’s standing right in front of you, and she is quickly running out of patience.”

Another guard, this one taller and leaner, spoke up. “The Northern Queen has a sister, I’ve heard. But if you are truly a lady or a princess, where are your royal guards?”

“Why would I need a guard?” She smirked as she moved her cloak aside, showing a long dagger at her hip with a dragonbone hilt. Their eyes widened. “I have killed more men then you chinless buffoons, and I won’t hesitate to kill any man who stands in my way. So, continue flapping your jaws, I don’t care, I’ll find a way into this castle one way or the other. Whether I must kill you to do it is your decision entirely. Though, I doubt Lord Baratheon would mind so much, he can be quite forgiving when I’m involved.”

The men stared wordlessly at each other.

The third did not look as surprised as the others, his expression was one of mild annoyance and slight
offense.

“I can escort you to the Lord. But try anything else, and I will not hesitate to drive my dagger into your throat, girl.”

The stocky one looked at him in disbelief. “Corwin, are you sure—”

“Open the gate!” He shouted, ignoring his companion. The gates lifted, and she was led inside.

Arya snorted. She didn’t know whether he was a smart man or a foolish one. Regardless, he piqued her interest. He looked at her like he would rather be doing anything else but dealing with her, yet he walked four paces ahead of her, leading her deeper into the walls of Storm’s End and closer to Gendry.

Corwin was tall, with shoulder length brown hair and a neatly cropped beard. Quite a difference from his companions who looked unkempt. He strode through the halls confidently and quickly, with his head and nose held high. A lord, perhaps? Arya wondered. But he bore no sigil on his breast.

“Are you from the Stormlands?” She asked as they past the halls and entered a walkway. He ignored her. “Are you deaf? I’m talking you.”

“I heard.” He replied. He approached a thick wooden door with a carved stag head and real antlers at its centre, and pounded on the door. A muffled voice muttered a word at the other end and he opened.

“My lord, a guest has arrived for you.”

“Who?” A familiar voice asked. Arya pushed through the door and her grey eyes were on his blue. Did he get taller? She was certain he did. His muscles are definitely bigger, and his hair is longer, and his beard is thicker. He wore black riding leathers and boots, with a black velvet doublet lined with golden silk and stitched with gold thread, and a black fur lined cloak pined to his shoulders by a golden stag pin. A proper lord.

The room was silent, besides the sounds of their breathing. Both waited for the other to break the silence.

“Corwin,” Gendry said at last. “A moment alone, please.”

Gods, even his voice is deeper. And his Flea Bottom accent was only but a trace. His tone now had a lordly finality to it; firmer and formal, it was a voice that commands.

Arya didn’t spare the man another look as he muttered ‘yes, my lord’ and walked out of the room. As soon as she heard the door close, she cracked a smile.

“Look at you,” she began as she took a step forward, “I have known the man in front of me since I was a girl, yet I barely recognise him now.”

Gendry smiled. “I’m not the only one who has changed.”

It was true. She had grown taller and gained a few more scars in her adventures. “Not by much I hope.”

“No,” he shook his head, chuckling. “I think I would recognise you anywhere.”

He took a step forward and enveloped her in a hug, she was all too happy to return it. Her heart
silently fluttered, and her cheeks warmed. Her time away and their awkward parting did not completely quell those little feelings she had for him. Dulled them, maybe, but not crushed.

And he looked good too. She preferred him covered in sweat and soot, basked in the glow of melting steel and fire, but even in lord’s attire, he still managed to invoke a stirring in her groin.

“How are you, Arya?” He asked as he pulled away.

“Good. I’ve had quite the journey these past few years, I’ve seen things you would never believe.”

“Like what?”

“Lands that have crabs the size of small children.”

His eyes widened. “You jest.”

She laughed. “Not at all, and they’ll eat you and store your skulls in their lair if you find yourself unlucky. Also, lands with people who don’t even know the Common Tongue and wear the most bizarre clothing you’ve ever seen, some don’t even wear clothing at all.”

“What strange lands! Is that what is west of Westeros?”

“Strangely enough, west of Westeros is eventually Essos.”

“Truly? How is that possible?”

“I’m unsure myself, but somehow, I set sail west from here and my journey took me back to Braavos within a few years, then I decided to sail back home to see how you lot were doing. I’ve seen so many things, eaten so many strange foods and fought so many strange people. I think some familiarity is needed, but only for a moment, there’s still so much more to explore and discover, I won’t be here long.”

He nodded understandingly. “Well, if you’re looking for familiarity, I’m not sure if you’ll find it here. So much has changed.” He guided her to the chairs by the lit hearth.

“What do you mean ‘so much has changed’? I left here during winter and when I return, it’s still winter. Don’t tell me you’ve fought an entire war while I’ve been gone?”

His gaze lingered on the flames. “No… not yet but I have a feeling we might be nearing one.”

She looked at him. “What do you mean? I thought with Cersei and Daenerys gone, we would finally have peace.”

“You would think, but you would be absolutely wrong.” He handed her a goblet and offered her some wine. She took it. “Not everyone is happy with what transpired six years ago.”

*He talks different. He talks just like a lord.* She shook her head. “Well everyone can fuck off, the realm has suffered enough, why work to plunge the realm into more war?”

“Many lords resist your brother’s rule.”

“Then they are traitors, and justice must be served. If they will not fall in line, I’ll make sure they and their descendants will.” Her hand brushed over her dagger.

Gendry chuckled. “Then you will have to kill a great amount of people, Arya.”
“I already have.”

“You would have to kill the whole of Dorne and the Iron Islands, as well as a few lords in the
Westerlands, many lords in the Reach, some lords in the Riverlands – including your uncle if the
rumours are to be believed – and a couple million smallfolk, give or take.”

Arya sat, stunned. “That many?”

Gendry nodded his head. “That many. Honestly, I now believe it was a mistake listening to Tyrion
that day in the Dragonpit. I didn’t know it at the time, I was just a lowly bastard who was just
elevated to lordship, I thought others knew better than me. But it has been a long, hard road to be the
lord I am now. When I arrived, the minor lords who remained – and were still loyal to King Stannis
– didn’t want to even let me through the gate!”

He chuckled, then continued. “And now, I don’t blame them. They had never heard of me, and those
that had thought I was dead. Everyone was certain I was some pretender, coming to take the
ancestral seat of a house that they believed to be extinct. In addition, I was legitimised by a queen
who was now dead, and my position was being enforced by a king they did not choose. I was in
quite a precarious position. A lord or two even suggested they send my head to King Bran and
declare themselves independent from the crown.”

“How did you get out of that?”

Gendry smiled. “Diplomacy.”

Arya raised a brow.

“I didn’t know what I was doing at the time, I didn’t even know what ‘diplomacy’ was! But a few
lords were open to reinstating a Baratheon as Lord of Storm’s End, and they knew seceding from the
rest of the kingdoms could have its own problems down the road. They were willing to see my claim
as legitimate, if I was prepared to do what they asked.

“They wanted to make me a puppet on their strings, and for a while, I was. I may have been
baseborn and groomed to work as a blacksmith, but that doesn’t make me a fool. When Maester
Albert was assigned to my castle, I would have him tutor me for hours on end, every single day. I
learnt the history of the land, its houses, my ancestry and most importantly, how to read and write.
The lords would mock my ignorance and low birth behind my back, I was determined not to be the
butt of their jokes any longer.”

Arya sipped her wine. “You have changed. A lot.”

“I’ve adapted. I have Maester Albert to thank for that.” He sipped his wine. “For the first time, I’m
finally in control here. There can be some resistance here and there, it’s understandable, but I don’t
think the lords are actively plotting against me. There are still some things I don’t understand, but
Cassandra helps me.”

Arya froze. “Cassandra?”

Gendry hesitated to look at her, focusing only on the fire. Eventually, he slowly turned his head to
look at her with a peculiar look in his eyes. “Yes, Cassandra. My wife and Lady of Storm’s End.”

For a moment, Arya stopped breathing. She was used to feeling numb to any emotions, her training
had taught her that valuable skill. But the news had caught her unawares, so she could only sip her
wine and hope Gendry hadn’t noticed her surprise.
“I didn’t know you married.”

“It’s been four years now. We have a two-year-old son as well, his name is Ormund.”

Oh. “Congratulations.”

“Thank you.”

There was a moment of silence.

“Well…” Arya finally said, looking into the fire. “I’m glad you have the lady you wanted.”

“Arya–”

“I’m happy for you.” She said, turning to him. She didn’t know what emotion to feel, but she refused for jealousy or sadness to be one of them. He had asked her to be his lady, and she said no. The answer hadn’t changed in their years apart.

Gendry stared at her for a long while, unsure of what to say next. But after sipping his wine, he found the words.

“Thank you. I…” He hesitated for a moment. “I was unsure if I wanted to marry after you left–”

“You don’t have to explain yourself, Gendry.” She interrupted.

“I’m not explaining myself, I did nothing wrong.” He replied. He leaned comfortably back into the chair. “As I was saying, I was unsure I wanted to marry after you left. In fact, the thought never crossed my mind again. But at Maester Albert’s insistence, I had to marry for political reasons. A good family from the Stormlands, one who curried enough favour with the rest of the houses that joining ours would be beneficial for us both – they would have a daughter married to a Lord Paramount, and lords would be more willing to accept my rule.

“There was only one daughter who was around my age and met the requirements. Lord Estermont’s daughter, Cassandra. And it was very awkward at first – I was still insecure about my position, and she was less than happy to be married off to some former Flea Bottom blacksmith turned lord – but after a while, we got along quite well.”

Arya listened silently. “Like I said, I’m happy for you.”

“I think you’ll like her.”

Arya looked at him sceptically.

“I do. You know, you’ve always made being a lady sound like the worst possible thing in the world. Cassandra, she… she reminds me of you, a bit.”

She resisted the urge to roll her eyes. “Do tell.”

“Well, she can be quite… different from the more traditional ladies at times. She loves hunting, she has no trouble putting on riding leathers and straddling a horse. She’s a great archer, and she’s very clever. She can be assertive and stubborn, but she can also be so gentle, sweet and kind – which I know isn’t you, stop making that face – and she also helps me rule the Stormlands… I don’t know where I would be without her.”

“She sounds like the most wonderful lady in the realm.”
“She is.” He said, with a smile.

*He loves her,* Arya realised painfully.

Gendry set his empty goblet on the table.

“I hope you’ll join us, food is usually served at this hour in the Great Hall.”

Arya shifted uncomfortably.

“It’s best I go. I meant to only pass by.”

“Oh, come now, Arya. You’ve just arrived in Westeros after six years at sea. Stay for a while, rest, you’re welcome here.”

“I–”

A knock echoed through the lord’s chamber.

“Gendry?” A honeyed voice, high and sweet, sounded from behind the door.

“Come in, Cassie.”

A tall, slender woman with porcelain pale skin, eyes as green as sparkling emeralds and long, curly hair the colour of honey stepped into room. Her dress was made of a green woollen underlayer the colour of spring leaves, a black velvet overlayer with details in gold stitching, and the sleeves of her dress gracefully swept the floor as she moved. Over her shoulders was a thick, fur coat with golden pins on both sides: the Estermont sea-turtle on her left and the Baratheon stag on her right.

*A true lady, fit to be the wife of a lady paramount and the mother of a great house.*

Trailing behind her, hiding beneath her cloak and in the folds of her skirts was a little boy. Black of hair and blue of eye, he looked up at her curiously, and held onto his mother’s gloved hand.

“Arya, let me introduce you.” Gendry stepped forward with a grin. “This is Lady Cassandra Baratheon, the Lady of Storm’s End. Behind her, hidden in her skirts is my son, Ormund. Cassandra, this is Arya Stark.”

She stepped forward, bowing her head slightly in greeting. “It is nice to meet you, Lady Arya. I’ve heard much about you.” She said in a suggestive tone.

Arya was slightly taken aback. “You have?”

She smiled. “My husband and I do not keep secrets, we tell each other everything. I hear you are quite the warrior and adventurer. My apologies for not being there to introduce myself and welcome you as soon as you arrived, getting Ormund ready in the morning can be quite a feat.”

Arya swallowed. She was courteous as she was beautiful. *Gendry is a lucky man.* She bowed her head respectfully. “Thank you for welcoming me into your home, I was only passing through. I intend to travel to King’s Landing to visit my brother, then back home to Winterfell. It’s best I start my travels as soon as I can.”

She tilted her head and frowned. “So soon? But you have just arrived! Please, food is being served in the hall, it would please us if you joined.”

She looked to Gendry, who smiled at her hopefully. *Do I have a choice?* She forced a smile. “Thank
you, I would like something to eat.”

“Wonderful.” Cassandra replied, she turned to Ormund. “Ormund, do you mind escorting our guest to the Great Hall?”

Ormund shrugged. “Okay.”

He walked up to Arya and looked her in the eye. His eyes landed on her dagger, he pointed to it. “Yours?”

“Aye, it is mine.” Arya replied.

“Lemme see.”

Arya slowly pulled her dagger out and laid it across her hands.

“Don’t touch it, Ormund.” Gendry warned as he reached for the handle. “You’re still too young to wield weapons.”

Ormund pouted but did as his father bid him. “Shiny.”

Arya didn’t know why but looking into his familiar blue eyes brought a smile to her face. “Yes, one day you’ll have one of your own.”

He looked at his father, eyes full of hope.

Gendry raised a brow. “Not anytime soon, my boy.” He reached for him and sat him on his hip. “Maybe you should grow to my size first.”

“No.” Ormund shook his little head. “Now!”

“No–”

“Nowwww!” He yelled in his father’s face. In retaliation, Gendry tickled his belly, causing him to break into a fit of uncontrollable giggles.

Cassandra watched her husband and son with a joyful grin. Arya noticed her hand rest on her belly for a moment. The curve was small, but noticeable if you looked long enough.

As she watched the moment unfold, Arya felt a strange sensation that spread from her heart to the pit of her stomach. It was doubt. Did I make the right choice? She wondered as she watched Gendry smile at his son like he was the most precious treasure he possessed. I did, she decided. I wasn’t made to be the lady of some great house and whelp children and be courteous to a bunch of lords and ladies I would rather not talk to. I was made to explore, to fight, to kill and be free… Yet, watching Gendry still stirred feelings in her, feelings she would rather suppress and never think on ever again.

Luckily for her, the moment was interrupted by a knock on the door. A man with greying hair, long grey robes and a chain around his neck stepped through.

“Maester Albert.” Gendry and Cassandra greeted. He bowed his head.

“My lords, my ladies.” He briefly turned his head towards Arya.

“I have received a letter from the king. It is addressed to his sister, Lady Arya.” He handed her the parchment. Bran sent me a letter? How does he know I’m here? She paused, then rolled his eyes.
Ravens, of course.

She held the paper in her hands and turned to the Baratheons. “You all can go ahead if you’d like, I’ll join you after I see what the king has to say.

Gendry nodded. “If you need parchment to reply, just let me, Cassandra or Maester Albert know.”

They walked out of the room, leaving Arya alone in the lord’s chamber.

She broke the seal and unrolled the letter.

Arya,

It is good to see you have made it back.

The situation in the North is dire. There is little food, the Ironborn are raiding Northern land and ships and there are whispers of dissidence amongst the Northern lords. Perhaps it would be best if you travelled North to see Sansa.

You have been gone for so long, it is unlikely that you would have heard the news. Jon has gone missing beyond the Wall. I last saw him venturing out further north alone six years ago, and he has since vanished. So far, all efforts to find him have been unsuccessful.

Arya’s breath stuck in her throat. Jon is missing? Where could he be? Is he… dead? Arya caught herself. No, he can’t be. He can’t be…

And there is something else you should know.

We have just received reports from Essos. The city of Volantis was taken, its slaves were freed, and the masters were imprisoned.

They all say the conqueror rode a large, black dragon with red wings…

Seven hells…

And the rider was clad in dark armour emblazoned with the three headed dragon, as she led her army of Unsullied into the city.

Don’t fucking say it… Arya’s hands scrunched up the corners of the letter as she held it. Please let this be a joke.

Daenerys Targaryen is alive and well, and she is conquering cities yet again.

It appears she is after fire and blood once more. It is only a matter of time before she returns. See to it that you return home as quickly as you can, I believe it would be better if you were to deliver the news to Sansa.

Bran

Arya angrily crumpled up the letter in her hand and banged her fist loudly onto the hard wood of the lord’s desk.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath.
It was time for her to return home.

Chapter End Notes

News has already spread of Dany’s conquest and those who have wronged her are no doubt in a panic.

How does the realm react to the Dragon Queen’s return? You’ll have to wait and see…

Thank you all for the comments and kudos!

Next chapter, Jon and Daemon encounter a very dangerous enemy.
“So, what happened next?”

“I fell down.”

“And then?”

Jon tried to remember. “I don’t remember everything that happened that day, it was a shock. All I remember was falling, then I walked outside, and he was right behind me–”

“And then you fought him!” Daemon interrupted excitedly.

“Aye. I fought him. He was tough to beat, I couldn’t even think about strategizing at a time like that. My only concern was surviving and getting all of the Freefolk to safety.”

“And then you beat him!”

“It was a shock to us both. I never knew Valyrian steel could kill a white walker.”

“And then you saved Hardhome?”

Jon scoffed and shook his head. “No. Hardhome was overrun with wights, I was lucky to get out of there alive.”

Daemon hummed. “But they’re gone now, everything is okay?”

Jon nodded. “Aye. When the Night King shattered, his generals did too and his wights were destroyed. It’s over now, they’re all gone.”

“Good.” Daemon replied.

“Good.” Jon repeated.

They rode together in silence. They journeyed along the frozen Milkwater and through the many ice-covered valleys. It was only a matter of time before they reach the end of the Frostfangs and enter the Land of Always Winter. Most likely in a couple or hours or so.

“But…” Daemon spoke up. “In the picture, there were so many of them.”

“Aye.”

“What happened?”

“I don’t know. But whatever it was happened thousands of years ago. I wouldn’t know.”

“Don’t you know any stories?”

“None that would give me an answer.”

Daemon nodded his head. “I wonder what happened to her.”
“Who?”

“The woman in the picture.”

Jon shrugged. “It’s best not to think about it. The white walkers are evil, Daemon. They kill innocent people, so they can add them to their army of the dead. If they are dead and gone, so be it. The realm is safer because of it.”

As they rode forward, the Milkwater forked. We are close, it won’t be long.

“How long until we get to the Heart of Winter?” asked Daemon.

“I’m not entirely sure.” He looked up, into the sky. “It’s still light, and we’ve been travelling at a very good speed. We will probably make it there at nightfall.”

It didn’t take long to pass the valleys of the Frostfangs and into the massive, open terrain of the Land of Always Winter. It was just the same as when he last saw it; vast cold ground, buried under layers of soft white snow, with mountains and hills buried under mounds of ice.

“It’s so… white.” Daemon commented.

“What did you expect it to look like?”

“Um…” He thought about it. “Less boring. And I wanted to see some wights too.”

Jon turned to him, perplexed. “Why would you want to see that? I just told you the story of how they nearly destroyed the entire realm.”

Daemon shrugged. “I want to fight one, just like you.”

“You’re six—”

“Nearly seven.”

“You don’t know how to fight.”

“I do too!”

“Roughhousing with Toregg is nothing like fighting in battle. You don’t know how to wield a weapon.”

“Because you won’t teach me.” He grumbled.

“Because you’re too young. I only learnt how to wield a weapon at eight or nine years, and even then, my sword was made of wood. You—”

“I have a slingshot!”

Jon stared. “What?”

“I have…” He reached into his bag and pulled out a weapon carved from pale wood with a forked end, and a leather strap between, “a slingshot!”

Jon blinked. “Where did you get that?”

“Munda, Kari and Toregg gave it for me.” Tormund’s children? Of course...
“When did this happen?”

“Before we left.” Daemon replied nonchalantly.

“And why didn’t you tell me?”

Daemon held his breath. “Were you going to take it away?”

“Depends.” Jon glared at it. “That thing could take an eye out, Daemon. I hope you know how to use it.”

Daemon puffed out his chest. “I do.”

Jon huffed. “Well, we’ll see.” He turned and offered him a cheeky smile. “Why don’t you show me?”

Daemon’s lilac eyes lit up like two little stars. “Really?”

“Really.” Jon slowed his horse. “Let’s stop for a bit, water and feed the horses. Then you can show me how skilled you are.”

The trees this far north were sparse, but the few that sprouted were bare, twisted weirwoods. After tethering and tending to the horses, Jon ensured his son was watered and fed himself.

“Okay,” He spoke with a mouth full of salted and dried rabbit meat, “now can I show you?”

“Sure.”

Daemon jumped and sprinted away from the tree. “Come on!”

He grunted. Why does he have so much energy? Why can’t he ever just sit down?

Daemon walked quite a distance, choosing to stop at a little rocky area on top of a hill. Before Jon climbed it, he noticed a peculiar trail on the ground, and gently kicked and spread the snow with his boot. As he suspected, there was a frozen river beneath him.

“Stay close to the hill Daemon,” he warned, “I don’t want you falling into the icy water.”

Like I did once, he suddenly remembered. I climbed out then Uncle Benjen saved my life...

Years later, it was still so easy to fall into melancholy when he remembered all that he had lost. His dreams served as a constant reminder of his past mistakes and tragedies, but what made living so bearable was the will to reconcile with his past, accept the mistakes, embrace the tragedies and focus on the future. And his son was his future. He was the most important thing in his life.

“I found some!” Daemon stood and gleefully showed him the pebbles in his hand. Jon grinned at him. “Now I have to find something to knock over.”

A few larger rocks, some frozen roots, dead weirwood branches and a hare skull were lined up on top of a nearby icy boulder.

“I’m going to stay a few paces back, if you don’t mind. I don’t want to lose my eye.” Jon teased, but he was half serious. He wouldn’t say Daemon was careless or prone to disaster, but... sometimes there was something to fear when he held a weapon in his hands, especially if it’s for the first time. There was a reason why Jon didn’t let him light the fire in their hearths at home...
But then again, Daemon was quick to learn if you gave him the chance. The problem was that he could be inexperienced and overly confident at times. But give him time to learn, he could surprise anyone.

Daemon fit the pebble in the leather strap and pulled. Jon watched closely; Daemon closed one eye and bit his lip, his eye other was trained on the targets ahead of him. He stood sideways, feet apart. His hand was still and steady, and his brows were furrowed in deep concentration.

_I should teach him how to shoot with a bow._ Jon pondered it for a moment. _Six years is still quite young, but Daemon is a fast learner. He is not a little boy sheltered in the walls of a castle with a master of arms to teach him, he’s wild, he hunts with me, he’s clever and—_

The pebble whistled as it shot through the air. Jon blinked, and suddenly one of the rocks lined up shot off the boulder, shattering as it landed.

“I did it!” He boasted. Jon smiled and placed his hand on his son’s shoulder.

“Nice shot!” He praised. Daemon beamed.

“I can do it again.”

“Let’s see.”

He got into position once more.

_I’ll make him a bow._ Jon decided. _And teach him to shoot myself,_ Jon smiled. Nothing would please him more.

A frozen weirwood root flew off the boulder and landed further ahead. Daemon turned to see if his father was watching and was delighted to see him smiling proudly at his achievement.

His delight was short lived, however, because Daemon’s joyful expression was swiftly replaced with one of bewilderment. He looked around, confused.

“Did it just get colder?” Daemon asked. Jon cocked his head.

“No, I…” Then the chill hit him. “Hm, perhaps it did.”

“Maybe a storm is coming?”

Jon looked around, “I didn’t see any signs of an approaching storm.”

“Um… father?”

Jon turned, and before he could ask what was wrong, he saw it.

A cold mist rose from the ground and descended on them, inching closer and closer.

Jon’s heart stopped. He had seen this before, and he thought he would never see it again.

“Daemon!” He yelled, “behind me.”

Daemon ran towards him and clutched his cloak. Jon drew Longclaw.

“Father, what’s happening?”
“I… this can’t be.” He whispered to himself. “This can’t be.”

Then the air stilled. As he held his breath, he could only hear the soft breathing of his son behind him.

Jon eyes dotted all around him; the rising mist was making it harder to see his surroundings, nevertheless, he knew what he was looking for, but there was no sight of the glowing blue eyes he used to fear so much.

“We need to leave,” Jon finally spoke. “Daemon, come–”

The ground shook beneath them. The still air was replaced with a loud grumble and the sound of ice snapping and shattering was ear-deafening as it pierced the silence.

“DAEMON!” Jon shouted, clutching his son’s hand as tightly as he could.

The ground grew and lifted them higher into the air. Jon had little choice, he had to jump. He grabbed Daemon and held him closer, then leapt.

For a moment, he landed on his feet, but the weight of his son in his arms caused him to lose his footing and fall hard onto the ground.

“FATHER!” Daemon shouted over the loud cracking of the ice. “Are you hurt?”

Jon looked up as the ground in front of him rose. It caused an avalanche of snow to roll down towards them. Jon, quickly thinking, pulled Daemon away from the falling ice.

“What is that?” Daemon screamed.

The snow fell away, revealing skin like pale ice with strange markings and ridges, arms as thick as the trunk of a weirwood tree, stretched legs that lifted the mass higher into the sky, white hair that grew thick, a long beard that covered half of its face and chest, and searching blue eyes that shined through the cloudy mist.

It didn’t take long for it to find what it was looking for. When its eyes found Jon’s, it opened its mouth, and let out an ear-bleeding roar that rivalled the sound of cracking ice, an avalanche, a chorus of ten thousand screeching animals and tumultuous waves crashing all at once.

“Run.” He wasn’t sure if he was the one who said it, or if it was Daemon, but Jon leapt to his feet and pulled Daemon with him.

A white walker. A giant ice walker. An ice giant.

Jon couldn’t wrap his head around it, he didn’t have time to, he couldn’t think about anything other than Daemon’s survival.

With the white walker, came heavier snowfall and a thick, icy fog. Jon tightened his hand around Daemon’s as he tried to navigate out of the giant’s path, but it was near impossible. He lost his footing on the ice, and they both tumbled down the short hill and into a bed of snow.

“FATHER, GET UP!” Daemon shouted.

He heard loud stomping and lifted his head to see the shadow of the creature looming above him, its eyes glowing though the white fog, moving closer and closer.

Jon pulled himself up. We need to escape, get to our horses and ride away as fast as we can.
But... which way are the horses? The heavy fog, snow and tumble down the hill made it increasingly difficult to know which way they came from.

Unless...

Jon kicked the snow beneath his boot. They were standing on top the frozen river.

Jon let go of Daemon and held his sword tightly in his hands. “Daemon, I need you to go back to the horses, untether them and bring them as close as you can.”

Daemon stared at him, bewildered. “I don’t know—”

“Trust me. Run south from here until you get to the weirwood tree. Scream if you encounter trouble.” He looked up at the approaching blue eyes, “I’ll distract him.”

Daemon was hesitant to move.

“GO!” He shouted, and Daemon scampered away.

Jon turned his attention to the creature and was stunned.

Silence and stillness, it was as if the giant had disappeared. He lifted his sword, his eyes doting from left to right. Focus, He told himself. Focus. He breathed, cleared his head, and listened attentively to the silence.

The hairs on the back of his neck rose as an icy chill crept to his left, brushing the back of his neck. He lurched forward and rolled, narrowly avoiding the long, thin fingers that shot towards him. Glowing blue eyes hovered above him. The giant sat crouched in front of him.

It opened its mouth, exposing teeth as sharp as knives. He was expecting it to let out another mighty roar, but surprisingly, it merely sighed. And from the giant’s jowls flowed a thick, frosty mist that flooded the tense space.

Jon swallowed nervously.

The mist dispersed rapidly into the clearing, making it impossible to avoid. He couldn’t fight air; all Jon could do was ready himself for a physical attack.

The mist seeped through his furs and stung his flesh. The pain made him gasp and his knees threatened to buckle beneath him. Don’t fall, don’t fall, don’t fall, he repeated to himself as he stood his ground. The cold touched his joints and froze them in place, but Jon willed himself to move. Get to Daemon. Get to Daemon. Get to Daemon. He screamed in agony; though his joints ached with each little movement, he still leapt forward.

The giant reached forward to catch him, and Jon swiftly brought down Longclaw.

His sword sang as it descended, and the air swelled with the song of shattering ice, roaring wind and the deafening cry of a giant in agony.

The intense wind knocked Jon onto his back and left him somewhat winded, but it provided him with an advantage. The frosty mist instantly dissipated, and he wasted little time. He rolled to his feet and charged. His heart beat quicker, his fiery blood thawed his joints and he no longer felt the cold.

His war cry amalgamated with his foe’s, and he engaged. Jon had only succeeded in shattering three of its fingers, and the giant was determined to not let Jon get any closer. Using its other arm, he
swept it across Jon’s path. Jon dipped, and lunged at the monster. It was barely a strategy; he wanted to cripple it, so it wouldn’t follow them as they make their escape. The giant was slow, but Jon was too. His multiple layers of fur limited his movements, and the horses were less likely to move as quickly with their belongings on their backs. The best thing he could do was hurt it enough to give them a good head start, then he would decide on what to do next.

His enemy was on its knees, and Jon’s steel grey were centred on its kneecap. Shatter it, he told himself. Shatter it and run.

As Jon neared, the giant shot its injured hand directly into his path, slapping it onto the snow, and sending the ice flying into the air. Jon skid to a stop, narrowly avoiding being squashed like an insignificant little flea. Alarmed, his grip on his sword slackened as his body shielded itself, luckily, he reflexively caught it in his left hand before it dropped. Unfortunately, the beast succeeded in another way, and Jon cursed when he realised, he had allowed himself to be distracted for a moment too long, allowing the giant’s icy grip envelope him. The ground disappeared beneath his feet as he was lifted in the air.

He attempted to move his sword arm, but it was trapped by the giant’s tight grip. Fuck, fuck fuck!

His left arm too, was being held to his side by the creature’s long fingers. Longclaw dangled from his left hand, useless now. He wasn’t as skilled with his left hand as he was with his right, but even if he managed to shake out of its icy grip, there was no good angle to attack. He was too far from anything vital.

The giant lifted him so close to its face, Jon could see his own panicked expression reflected in its hateful, glowing blue eyes. Daemon. He was all Jon could think about. His face was frozen numb, but he could feel the tears that threatened to fall. He’s waiting for me with the horses, he needs to leave me behind…

The giant squeezed, and all the air in Jon’s lungs left him. He desperately gasped for air but received very little. Jon stared into the pale sky and imagined Daemon, helpless and confused, sad and alone. I did that, I failed to protect him. His heart ached worse than the pain of his bones about to be crushed in.

The lack of air caused delirium. Black dots flew speedily across his vision, some flew too close and too fast over his head. They could take an eye out, he mused deliriously.

He blinked. Wait…

The creature paused and frowned. Slowly, it turned its head.

“LET GO OF HIM, UGLY!” a child yelled. If Jon had any breath left in him, it would have stuck in his throat. Daemon added another pebble to the leather strap, pulled then loosed. The giant grumbled in annoyance, and in its absentmindedness, loosened his grip by a few inches, which was all Jon needed.

He swallowed the crisp air until he gained the strength he needed to finally shake his left arm free. Without a second thought, he sliced through the giant’s thumb. He heard a thunderous cry and fell. He was expecting to land on a bed of snow, but instead his feet impacted hard ice, sending a shock of pain though his left foot.
His jaw clenched in agony.

“FATHER!” He heard Daemon cry. He looked up, and found his son staring at him with wide, frightened eyes.

At first, he was sure he was simply dizzy from the agonising pain and fall, but that was not so. The motions he felt were coming from beneath him. His eyes lifted even higher at the realisation, he was on the white walker. His thigh to be exact. Jon turned his head; the white walker was still crouching, and right ahead of him was the giant’s knee.

He knew what needed to be done.

Ignoring the excruciating pain, he desperately pulled himself forward, hurriedly sat up and with both hands, plunged Longclaw to the hilt. The ice beneath him shattered into tiny shards, he fell into a bed of snow, and his ears rang with a sound he never thought possible; animalistic, agonising, and indescribable, it quaked his very core.

“HORSES!” Jon shouted to Daemon. He nodded his head vigorously and sprinted away.

Jon attempted to stand, but his foot disagreed with any action he put forward by sending shocks of hot, searing pain throughout his leg.

_I need only to get to Daemon and the horses_, he reminded himself as he limped forward, but in a pure stroke of misfortune, he heard a loud groan. He cast his eyes upwards and watched as the giant tilted right before his very eyes and fell with a colossally heavy thud, right across his path. The ground near its head cracked and travelled quite a distance before it split and opened, pushing ice-cold water to its surface, leaving Jon trapped between the giant and the deathly cold water of the river.

The giant still lived and groaned in pain.

_Pain that could churn within him, and turn into anger, then vengeance._

His body forgot the pain as a blazing fire ignited in the pit of his stomach and boiled his blood to scorching levels. _I will not let you hurt me or my son._

One moment he was watching the giant attempt to get up, the next he was beside it. Jon’s cold grey eyes met its shining blue eyes once more, this time, under completely different circumstances. Jon could see his reflection; his eyes were hateful, and his face was contorted in pure anger. For a moment, Jon could have sworn he sensed fear in the monster’s eyes, but he didn’t waste another moment contemplating it. Targeting its exposed neck, he lifted his sword over his shoulder… and swung.

The shards blew into the air as it shattered, but Jon remained unharmed. Like snow, it drifted into the sky then fell all around him. Jon would have fallen to his knees, but he was sure if he did, he would never get back up.

“Daemon…” he whispered. He was tired and needed rest. But he would make sure his son was safe first.

“AHHHHHHHH!”

Jon’s body tensed, and his heart froze solid as the cold, numbing feel of fear entered his body.

“DAEMON!” he screamed. He ran. He felt nothing; not the cold, not the pain, not the relief or
satisfaction of a battle won, only fear.

“DAEMON!” He yelled.

The horses whinnied, and through the mist, he could see them rearing in panic.

Jon charged forward, Longclaw grasped tightly in his fist, ready.

A tall silhouette towered over a small, frightened heap on the ground. It held a spear as tall as itself, made of ice. Its long fingers were clutched around the furs of Daemon’s hood, and he felt indescribably ill.

No, no, no, no…

Jon tried to rush, but though the fear numbed him for the most part, his injury didn’t make him as fast as he wished he could be in this very moment.

“NO!” He screamed as he advanced. The white walker was not a giant, but a threat nevertheless. Jon knew he couldn’t take him on, not in his condition, not like this. But he would try, Gods know he would never go down without a fight. And he would fight for the life of his son any day.

“Get on a horse and ride away as fast as you can.” He instructed his son. “Don’t worry about me.”

Daemon turned to his father and whimpered as he saw him limp. Heart beating fast, Jon raised his sword, the white walker let go of his son and turned his attention to Jon. *I will kill him or die trying, for Daemon’s sake.*

The foes faced each other. The white walker tightened its grip on its longspear, Jon tightened his hold on Longclaw. *This ends now.* Jon lifted his sword and cried out with all of might…

A white blur passed in front of him, and the white walker vanished. Jon blinked, dumbfounded.

He heard a growl, a vicious snarl, and looked down.

Jon was unsure if the sound that escaped Daemon was a cry of joy or fear, in these circumstances, it was difficult to tell. The white walker’s spear flew, and it cried out in its strange tongue, as its arm found itself trapped in the unyielding jaw of a massive direwolf.

A beat later, its cry was cut short when Valyrian steel entered its chest, and it shattered into a million frosty shards.

“Thank you, boy.” Jon half smiled, half winced, as he gave Ghost an affectionate pat on the head. The pain in his foot was swiftly returning, and he didn’t want to spare another second here, not in these cursed lands where another white walker could be dwelling.

He grabbed Daemon, sat him on his horse, then pulled himself onto his.

And as night descended, beneath the familiar dancing lights that snaked across the starry black sky, father, son and direwolf escaped northward, fast and without rest, never stopping even for the briefest of moments to spare a second glance back.

His mood grew as dark and melancholic as the night sky as fear turned into burning anger. All at once, he recounted the events that led to the battle at Winterfell nearly seven years ago. *Had it all been for nothing?*

They are still here, they are not gone… the white walkers are not gone.
His hands shook with fury and frustration, and on his face was a dark, perpetual grimace. His breathing laboured as he found it increasingly difficult to tame the fierce fire growing wildly within him. It had been a long, hard road to finally finding his peace, only for it to be threatened once more.

At the realisation, his gloved hands tightened around the reins of his horse as he angrily clenched his fists and bit back the furious roar that threatened to escape his pursed lips.

_The white walkers still threaten these lands._

_And the realm is dangerously unsafe once more._

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the comments and kudos!

I think this chapter might just be the one that begins the process of converging some of the character's stories together!

Next chapter: Daenerys holds court, plans her future, and discovers something shocking.
Daenerys II

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I don’t punish children for the sins of their father. However, your husband knew what his decision meant for him and his family, and yet he still ordered his men to kill me.”

Daenerys sat on a simple throne high above her subjects. Her steely voice unwavering as she spoke, her commanding voice echoing throughout the Grand Hall.

The room was built for the Triarchs to meet; a magnificent and terribly imposing circular hall that was vast enough for members of the individual parties to congregate. It boasted its riches and opulence with smoky white marble tiles and twisting pillars that stretched so high, Daenerys had to tilt her head all the way back just to see where they ended. The emerald green velvet draperies were pulled to the side, so the crystal glass windows could be thrown open, letting in the warm mid-noon breeze. Tapestries spun with thread of gold and silver, depicting moments in Volantene history she was unfamiliar with hung from wooden panels on the wall.

And far back, deep into the hall above the smoky marble steps, was the dais. Once, there was an elongated table made from dark rich wood; though it was a table fit to sit at least thirty, it had only three chairs placed at its left, right and middle. Now, the dais only sat a Queen on a dark oak throne, studded with rubies and black diamonds, upholstered with scarlet red velvet and a back rest that stretched twice her height, ending with twisting spires.

She wasn’t fond of it, it looked too menacing. Doniphos had ordered a new throne be made, one with sandy light wood with lilac silk, studded with glittering amethysts and pearls, ‘something that would complement your eyes’, he says. But unfortunately, it was still far from ready. She didn’t want her newly independent subjects to cower in her presence, they are not her enemies and she has had her fill of fear, she only wanted their love and respect.

But at a time like this, perhaps the chair was necessary. Especially as she held the fates of her enemy’s family in her hands. She was clothed in her dark armour, with a sash of red velvet draped from her left shoulder to her right hip, held in place by her silver three-headed dragon pin and a studded belt at her waist. On her head was a spiked silver crown, fashioned to look like Drogon’s horns.

She was an imposing figure; she truly felt like Aegon the Conqueror and his sister-wives, Queen Visenya and Queen Rhaenys, all in one.

Her violet eyes were cast downwards to the kneeling figures below her.

Children, she shook her head. Children who could one day rise to kill me to avenge their father.

I gave their father a choice, and he chose his pride over his own seed.

Malaquo Maegyr had been executed at dawn. It was quick and painless, she gave him time to say goodbye to his wife and children, which was more than she should have given to a man who ordered her death.

His wife, Cierra, was the only one who looked her in the eye. She was a tall, willowy woman with olive skin, hazel eyes and long, black hair that reached the small of her back. She was dressed only in a simple russet gown, with not a piece of jewellery in sight.
She thinks if she appears humbler, I will be more merciful.

Just from her posture and the grace she carried herself, Daenerys could tell she was a proud and dignified woman. There was a bitter edge in her voice, but whether it was directed at her new queen or for the actions of her departed husband was yet to be determined.

“You Grace,” she began, “my husband was a hard, short-tempered proud man. He was cruel as he was foolish and aggressive. My son,” she laid her hand on a young trembling boy, “he’s so sweet and sensitive, and because he was nothing like him, my husband would…”

She sighed, pained. But continued, “it is too painful to recount, Your Grace. As a mother, I would weep. My daughter,” she put her hand on a girl – slightly older than the boy – with tear stained cheeks, “he would neglect her. They are nothing like him, they are good. Please, if someone must die for my husband’s sins, let it be me. But please, leave my children be, they are innocent.”

I know that, and neither will I kill you, you are not the one who defied me. Daenerys’ eyes narrowed on the woman. She gives a fantastic murmur’s show. But I gave Maegyr a choice, loudly and publicly, and he defied me. If I do nothing, then they will believe me weak. Daenerys chewed on it. However, Maegyr is dead now, headless in a grave, he is in the past and now we must look to the future.

The world still fears me, she remembered sadly. Perhaps I should have appeared to them in one of my long silver gowns, I must present a softer image if I want their trust.

She looked at the woman’s children, so young and sad, and her thoughts drifted – as they often do – to curly blonde hair and silver-violet eyes that glittered like amethysts. Daenerys offered her a soft smile.

“I understand your fear, Lady Cierra, your children will not be harmed, you have my word. I have had my fill of battles and bloodshed, I would much rather move forward and focus on building a newer, stronger Volantis.” Lady Cierra mustered a small, sympathetic smile that veiled a victorious smirk. Daenerys did away with that quickly with her next words. “So, I wash my hands of it, and leave your fate with the new freed people of Volantis.”

The very people you enslaved.

Daenerys watched as her eyes widened and the hold on her children tightened. She wasn’t expecting that. Nevertheless, she bowed to her queen and spoke through gritted teeth. “If it is your will, thank you for your mercy, my queen.”

Mercy? If you treated your slaves with even a fraction of the cruelty your husband did, I guarantee you, this is hardly a mercy. Not even a thousand caskets of wine and festivities could quench the bloodthirst the freed people of Volantis had acquired somewhat overnight.

As the queen walked back to her chamber, she thought on the nobility of Volantis. Some fled, some died in their attempt, some took a different, smarter route by currying favour with Doniphos Paenymion and some were beaten in the streets by their former slaves. Administering justice was crucial and of the utmost importance, but truthfully, she was tired of the trials and bloodshed. She wanted to move on from it, she had bigger things to worry about.

After her handmaids removed her armour, she climbed into a hot bath. She relaxed as the fragrant steam rose and filled the room, relieving the tension in her muscles. The room was quiet, except for the distant chirping of the songbirds outside her window. She wondered, if she drifted asleep at this moment, would Daemon be there? She hadn’t seen him in a while; she could recall dreaming twice
or thrice the past week, but when she visited the lemon tree, he wasn’t there.

She shook her head and sunk lower into the bath. *He isn’t real, yet I worry for him. A figment of my own imagination… perhaps I truly am mad.*

She reached for the wine beside the bath and took a deep satisfying gulp, savouring the taste. She had never tasted a wine quite like it; it was deliciously sweet, its colour was the palest yellow and it smelt divine, like ripe fruits and freshly bloomed blossoms.

She held the glass in her hand and inhaled. *How lovely.*

She climbed out of the bath and dressed herself in a flowing lilac gown with pearls stitched into the bodice. The gown draped below her shoulders, keeping them bare. She slipped on some sandals and kept her hair brushed down and un-braided. The Volantene sun beat down harshly today, and the air was hot and humid.

She wasn’t expecting to receive anyone, the activities for today had ceased and she was in no mood to feast in the magnificent halls of her new palace today. She only wanted to sit down and work, for tomorrow she planned to meet with her advisors to discuss the future.

Crossing her bedchamber, she entered a room on the other side. It was a beautiful, spacious study, with views of the sparkling blue pools beneath her windows, flowing white drapes swayed in the breeze and ornate vases filled with violets and Volantene sun lilies – with their big, vibrant, yellow petals – filled her with a bittersweet melancholy. It reminded her so much of Viserys and her younger years; he once wove a handful of them in her hair, when they were running from the usurper and his assassins, that was before he turned cruel.

Letters and scrolls littered her desk, most read and many untouched. But none of them snatched her attention, she drifted past her desk to the large table beside it and marvelled at what sat atop it.

A magnificent gift from Doniphos; a miniature model of Volantis. It was breathtaking; every house, palace and hut, every tree, every bush, every hill, bump and mountain… she could see it all. She lowered her head, letting her eyes roam the terrain. It took her breath.

“Khaleesi.” One of her Dothraki guards walked in. “Visitors.”

“Let them in.”

Doniphos Paenymion strode into her study, behind him, was a woman with porcelain skin, downcast and nervous violet eyes and hair straighter, but as silver as hers. He smiled when he saw what she was looking at. Sometimes she forgot that he was twice her age; she rarely saw him smile but when he did, the wrinkles showed his age.

“My queen,” he bowed. “I had hoped you would be pleased with the gift.”

“I am, it’s truly magnificent. It must have taken years to complete, the details are remarkable.” She eyed the girl. *She looks just like me,* Daenerys thought, *if I had stayed the shy, timid little girl I was when I was with Viserys.*

Doniphos looked pleased. “You are to rule us all now, I thought it would help you become acquainted with the land, but then I remembered that you could simply fly over it with your dragon… a realisation I had too late. Nevertheless, I hoped you would like it.”

“I do, very much so. Doniphos, who is this?” She asked. The woman never lifted her eyes from the ground, she simply remained silent and kept her hands clasped in front of her.
Doniphos turned to her and guided her forward. “Your grace, this is Taela Paenymion, a cousin of mine. She is to serve as your handmaiden, if it pleases her grace.”

When she remained silent, he gently nudged her. She briefly looked up, and Daenerys was met with big, doe eyes the colour of amethysts. She fell quickly into a deep curtsy. “Your grace, it would be an honour to serve you.” Her voice was soft and barely above a whisper.

She was extremely shy and timid, and her eyes were big and glossy as if she was about to cry. She fears me. Not since Missandei had Dany allowed herself a handmaiden. Sure, she has maids who tend to her and help her dress, but she never allowed herself to form any bond with them whatsoever. She swore she would never do so again. But she could see this for what it was – Doniphos trying to strengthen their alliance by surrounding her with his family members. She was most likely his little spy.

But looking at her, it was like looking in a strange looking glass. Of what she could have been. She pitied the girl. “Lady Taela,” she replied in a soft voice, she nervously lifted her gaze. “It would please me greatly if you would be my handmaiden.”

She did not smile, but she visibly relaxed with Daenerys’ words. “Thank you, your grace.”

She looked at Doniphos. “Doniphos, did you only come to escort your cousin?”

“Ah, no, your grace. I was hoping to speak with you privately, as well.”

“Then please, take a seat. Taela, some wine for us, please?”

She took a seat as Doniphos seated himself in the chair opposite her desk. Taela walked in and placed a pitcher of wine on the table and set two glasses. She poured some generously into each cup.

“Thank you Taela, that is all.” She mustered a small shy smile then scurried off into Dany’s bedchamber.

“Now,” she began, lifted her wine glass, “what business do you have with me?”

“I wanted to talk to you about the future.”

“The future?”

“Yes, your grace. The future of Volantis… and just in the general sense perhaps.” He waved his hand vaguely in the air. “I would like to gain a better understanding of your plans and what is to come.”

“I understand.” She quirked her brow at him. “What has made you so curious of my plans, Doniphos?”

He paused and stared. Daenerys knew that look, like a trapped animal looking for a way out. Daenerys could sense he was finding the words to escape a situation he thought he had entangled himself in.

“I… I would simply like to know how I could serve you better, your grace. I live to serve my queen, it is my one and only desire. To bring about the world you imagine.”

She was yet to take a sip from her wine, she wouldn’t until he did. She looked at the glass in front of Doniphos and beckoned him to take it. Varys had tried to poison her once, several years later, she was still cautious. Understanding, Doniphos take the wine and sipped it.
“Those are flowery words, Doniphos. But they are simply a shell, hollow and without much meaning to me. I have been queen for many years; advisors have come and gone, some died bravely in my service and some betrayed me. I have dealt what I have thought to be justice to those deserving and those who were not. I have dealt with such tragedy, it is still a wonder how I am still here. I started with nothing, sweated and laboured for years to gain everything I have, only for those close to me to take it away. It has been a long journey rebuilding what others have tried to destroy. I have not even seen thirty name days, yet it is feels like I have lived multiple lifetimes.

I am not some green child who lives for flattery. Flowery words do nothing for me. You say what you think I want to hear. In my experience, people speak in sweet tongues to hide the poison beneath. Are you hiding any poison, Doniphos?”

“Absolutely not, your grace.”

“Is that a lie?”

“No, your grace.”

“Will you ever lie to me?”

“No, your grace.”

A lie. It was hard to believe he would never lie to her, men lie as easily as a bird takes flight. The only person she could wholeheartedly trust was Grey Worm; the Unsullied and her bloodriders as well, but Grey Worm above all.

But if the world she wanted to build had any chance of materialising, she needed advisors who would be willing to look her in the eye and tell her the truth. Daenerys looked at him earnestly and offered a small smile.

“Then relax and speak freely, Dophinos. What would you like to know?”

He breathed. “What is your plan for Volantis? Besides freeing the slaves, what do you intend to do with our city?”

“Besides ending slavery?” She thought about it for a moment. “For the longest, that was my one core goal. But now, by goal is also to maintain peace and prosperity in my kingdoms. Volantis doesn’t need to trade people to earn money, Doniphos. There’s always another way to make gold, that doesn’t involve the degradation of your fellow men and women.”

Something shined in Doniphos’ eyes. “I’ve thought the same thing, I was hoping you did as well. Everyone else thought differently, of course. They didn’t want to hear any of it.” He leaned forward, resting his chin on his fist as he looked away in deep thought. This was the most relaxed she had ever seen him. “But it would be difficult, the nobility of Volantis are not willing to let others thrive off a profitable trade simply because one thinks it morally wrong.”

“Then I shall do away with them and give their lands and titles to those who see things my way.” She stated plainly, taking a sip of her wine. “Nobles tend to think they are invincible or irreplaceable, that is far from true.”

“It is, and you have showed them that already. They are complacent for now, but they won’t stay like that for long.”

Daenerys finished her wine and set the glass down. “I should do away with them all. I want to build a better Volantis, and how can I do that when there are too many stubbornly stuck in the past?”
He shrugged. “I remember asking myself that years ago.”

Daenerys leaned backwards in her chair.

“Conquering is easier than governing. When I retook Meereen, Yunkai and Astapor, I ran into a problem. In essence, I thought the best thing to do with the cities I conquered was to treat them the same; same type of governance, same rules, same laws... just the same. But culturally, they aren’t the same, are they? No... what works for one is not necessarily the best for another.

There are things we all hold dear, and for many, it is a sense of identity. Your home, your life, your family, your neighbours and your values. They all determine how you think of yourself and others. You can be set in your ways, and rarely does one want to change. Rarely is anyone willing to venture into the ambiguity of the unknown when they have known the comfort of familiarity.”

Daenerys stood and walked towards the open window, she felt the warmth of the sun on her skin and breathed in the fresh air. Below her, she could see people walking about. Basking in the sunlight. She turned to her advisor.

“But change is inevitable, whether you like it or not. And you either adapt, or you get left behind. I believe the people of Volantis will adapt, and those who resist will perish trying. People are meant to be free to make their own choices, keeping them in a perpetual state of bondage is unmaintainable. Regardless of what some may think, it is not the nature of men.”

Doniphos thought on her words. “I agree, your grace. But where are you going with this? What does this have to do with the future of Volantis?”

“I may be the Queen of Meereen, Yunkai, Astapor and Volantis, but I recognise their differences and respect it. If you were worried that I would bring ‘foreigners’ into Volantis and change it, you’re mistaken.”

“I never believed you would.”

“Perhaps not, but that’s what your fellow nobles think. They think of me as an invader who brings barbarians into their city.”

Doniphos couldn’t even challenge her on that. She had heard the whispers.

“They see Dothraki and Unsullied and they think I’m here to turn Volantis into Vaes Dothrak or Meereen.” She stepped towards him. “I don’t. That is not how I wish to build my empire.”

Doniphos looked at her inquisitively. “And how do you wish to build your empire?”

“Simple.” She replied. “Trade.”

He tilted his head. “Trade? Just trade?”

She shrugged. “I control four cities now, four densely populated cities with much to offer. If I strengthen the ties between them, they can only get stronger. Yunkai is rich with jewels, gold and textiles. Meereen has wheat, olives, wool, copper, salt and wine. Astapor has an abundance of fish, many of which are considered a delicacy, and rare pearls the colour of gold and copper, as well as cotton plants, sheep and goats as well. I have also managed to secure trading deals with merchants from the Summer Isles. I have turned my cities, my kingdoms, into the centre for Eastern trade, they are prospering like never before... which is very good for collecting taxes, might I add.

And I’m sure the merchants in my other cities will be excited to trade for Volantene wine, your sweet
red and this peculiar new white one, as well as your silks and spices. This will be beneficial for us all. There are other stubborn cities who would rather trade slaves, but if they want to be included within our trade, within my empire, they must agree to my terms. And my terms are very simple.”

“End slavery.”

She nodded. “End slavery.”

“This just might make you be the richest woman in the world.”

She gave him a small shrug. “I suppose.”

Doniphos took a sip of wine. “There is power in having that much coin.”

“And you already knew that. Isn’t this what you wanted to hear? You say you’ve thought about other ways to make coin outside the slave trade, was your idea that different to mine?”

She chuckled to himself, a low, soft sound. “No, not entirely. I just thought it would be impossible, that it would remain just a dream.”

She gave him a sly smile. “I tend to make the impossible, possible.”

She eyed the former Triarch. Doniphos is a proud Volantene man who only wants to see his city prosper, there was little doubt in her mind that he desired and fully intended to make Volantis the hub of this new trading system. At the mere thought, his eyes shined like the golden coins that would soon be lining his pockets.

But rather unexpectedly, his forehead creased, and he gave his queen an inquisitive and curious look. He opened his mouth, hesitated, then closed it once more.

Dany lifted her brow. “Is there something you would like to say, Doniphos?”

He cleared his throat. “Yes, I suppose. I am simply curious… do you intend to leave here, to return to Westeros one day?”

Dany stiffened, she gritted her teeth. “There is nothing left for me there.”

He lifted a pale brow and though his face remained stoic, his eyes betrayed an emotion that quite frankly, startled her.

“Is that sympathy?”

“I understand why you would want to go back, your grace; your enemies, those instrumental to your downfall, they still live, breathe and rule in their cushy halls. The Targaryens are a proud and ancient house, and their house words are truly a reflection of their values: ‘Fire and Blood’, vengeance and power… It is how they conquered Westeros hundreds of years ago.”

Dany glared coldly at him. “I don’t need a history lesson on my own house, Doniphos.”

He bowed his head. “I apologise, your grace. I only wonder… do you wish to return to Westeros and take what is yours?”

“No.” She lied. “My place is here.”

Doniphos knew she was lying, yet he gave her a pleased smile and bowed his head. “Thank you for your honesty, your grace.”

She dismissed him right after, suddenly she felt like she needed to be alone.
She drifted into her bedchamber, where Taela stood as she moved in.

“More wine.” She ordered and walked to her balcony. The sun was setting, turning the blue-sky orange and gold. She leaned over, watching the shadows of the trees sway in the light breeze and two women in flowing silk garments stroll below, arm in arm, detached from worries, giggling amongst themselves.

It reminded her of Missandei. It reminded her of a time much simpler than this. She wished that could be her. Free from worry and the weight of the world on her shoulders. But she was a queen and that was what she was meant to be, because without her crown and Drogon, she often felt like she had nothing else. Lately, more often than not, she wished the house with the red door and the lemon tree existed outside of her dreams.

It was easy to plant a tree and paint a door, but that would never bring the peace and happiness it represented.

She closed her eyes and imagined it. The summer sun on her face, blue cloudless skies, the green grass, butterflies, the smell of flowers, the soft breeze, soft curly hair that looks like her own, a son, a home, love… things she could never have.

*Why do I feel this way?* She looked up into the sky. *I’m supposed to feel like I have everything. I have achieved the impossible, I returned from the dead, I built an empire bigger and richer than anything my forebears achieved, then why do I still feel so confused and hollow?*

She knew why… She has received no closure. Westeros was an angry, burning itch she couldn’t reach, and in all honesty, to her immense aggravation, she wasn’t sure if she should try.

But she wants to, gods know how much she wants to.

She wants to fly Drogon there. She wants to level her enemies and her castles to the ground. She wouldn’t hurt the innocent people of Westeros, she feared doing so again, but she would kill her enemies, those who hurt her, then destroy their castles and build something new, until future generations forget there was ever anything there to begin with.

But what would she do after that? *No matter how badly I want to be Queen of the Seven Kingdoms, reclaim my family’s throne, avenge those who have wronged me and rule from the realm I was born in… I will not find any love in Westeros, it will never be my home no matter how badly I want it to be, not anymore… The people there would never let it be, it is foolish to think they would welcome me after what I did.*

*‘They can live in my new world or die in their old one.’* Was that what she had once said? She could scarcely remember. Regardless of the glaring truth, she still had child-like dreams of building a new Westeros, from the ashes of those old castles would be gleaming cities where everyone would be fed, children would be happy and there wouldn’t be a single beggar in the streets. People would sing and laugh and dance and never, ever feel the suffering she endured.

That was her plan many years ago… but it went up in flames the moment she ordered Drogon to burn King’s Landing.

She still couldn’t believe she had done that… what had she become? It pained her, but she still remembered those sad grey eyes so vividly, they were full of tears when he plunged his knife into her heart. She knew him, she knew his heart, deep down she knew he thought he was doing the right thing after seeing the carnage she had brought upon the city… it didn’t make it sting any less, and it definitely didn’t quell the bitterness that had manifested over the years. She was still so angry at him,
at his betrayal…

She squeezed her eyes shut to stop the tears, but they flowed regardless.

Her feelings for him were still so complex, and she hated herself for it. Like a passionate dance within her; around and around they go, fury and sorrow would step this way then that way, but who was leading who in this torturous dance? One minute she knows, then the next she doesn’t. But on and on they dance to an aggravatingly repetitive song that will never end. They never tire, only she does, but she’s powerless to stop it.

She had convinced herself long ago that she never wanted to see him again, but the hard truth was that her heart told a different tale. But if she saw him, what would she do? Would I cry? Would I order Drogon to eat him alive? Does he still hate me? Will he hate me even more after I take vengeance on his family? He killed me to protect his family, will he try to do the same again? Daenerys didn’t want to know the answer. And yet…

She angrily laced her fingers through her hair, tightened her fists and pulled. She didn’t hate him… or at least not completely, she only hated that even after all these years, he had this effect on her. She wished she never met him, she wished she could completely forget about him, she wished he were dead. Not because of some vengeful reason, but because it hurt knowing that he was out there somewhere, a sea away, continuing his life as if they never met, while she was here attempting the very same thing, but failing pathetically.

Heat bubbled within her like lava, a fiery fury.

This is all she ever felt now. If not anger and fury, then sadness or melancholy. She wished it wasn’t so… she wished she could be content and happy, that’s all she ever wanted. Truly it was never power she craved, it was a home and to be loved. Things well out of her reach, things she will never grasp no matter how hard she tries.

She took deep breaths to steady her emotions. The sun had set, and she looked up into the night sky. She noticed something flying over the moon. Drogon, she realised. She watched her only remaining child glide through the starry sky; like a powerful gust of wind from beneath Drogon’s wing, melancholy snuffed the burning fire within her.

What will become of you when I grow old and die? She wondered. Dragons live long lives, both Balerion and Vhagar outlived their riders by many years, then found new ones. But I am the very last Targaryen, the last to bear the name and hold the torch of a legacy spanning centuries, I am alone, and I will never bear children, no one to pass this torch. As I die alone, so will you.

“Your grace?” Daenerys turned. Taela stood shyly in the door leading to her bedchamber, she stared at her feet. “Umm… supper is ready in the feasting hall. Many I escort you?”

Daenerys looked once more at the stars. She was glad Taela didn’t look up, she didn’t want her to see the tears in her eyes. “No,” her voice sounded scratchy, “I’m tired, I would rather go to bed.”

She crawled into bed and hugged her pillow tight, praying that he would be waiting for her in her dreams.

And to her great relief and happiness, he was. She ran to him, placed dozens of kisses on his cheeks and forehead and joyfully offered to teach him some more words in High Valyrian. Typically, he would be excited, but today, he looked so terribly troubled.

“Daemon, what’s wrong?” She asked him.
“Nothing.” He replied quietly.

She tilted her head. “Well, obviously it’s something. You’re unusually quiet.”

“I can’t talk about it.”

“Why not?”

“Because if I do, you’ll get sad like you always do.”

She was confused. “What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean!” He snapped. Dany quelled her surprise well. He has never spoken to me this way before. She opened her mouth to speak, but then he turned to her and it took everything in Dany not to gasp. He looked different today. He didn’t have the same happy glow he always has, he looked pale, wild and tired. Her heart tightened in her chest.

She gently put her hands on his shoulders. Though she spoke in soft tones, she couldn’t hide the urgency in her voice. “Daemon, what is wrong?”

He hesitated, refusing to look her in the eye. His bottom lip quivered. “I’m… I think… I’m afraid.”


He ignored her question, choosing to stare at his fidgeting hands. “Acorn says I need to be brave and I pretend I am but… It’s getting hard.”

“Acorn? Who’s Acorn?”

He finally looked at her. “She’s my friend. Just like Twig and Red Leaf.”

Dany tilted her head, wondering why the names sounded strangely familiar. “Ah...” she sighed, suddenly remembering. He had mentioned them once. “The children of the… woods?”

“Children of the forest.”

“Right… I remember you mentioned they guard a tree?”

“Yes, the Heart of Winter. It’s where I was born, it gave me life. That’s where I am, I’m sleeping on its roots.”

Sleeping on its roots? Dany eyed the lemon tree beside her. What is he talking about? Daemon saw her looking and let out an exasperated sigh.

“It’s not the same tree!” He yelled, pointing at the tree. He stood up and began pacing.

Just as exasperated as he, Dany threw her hands up. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Daemon! Come, sit on my lap and we’ll play games and I’ll sing to you. You’d like that, wouldn’t you? You always do.”

He turned to her, his pale brows furrowed. He hesitantly nodded his head. “I want to… but I’m worried.”

“Worried about what? Tell me so I can help.”

“You can’t help me.”
“Why not?”

“I…” Dany had never seen him so helpless, his words just started tumbling out of him. “I can’t tell you much because then you get sad and I don’t want you to be unhappy! You always get sad when I talk about him, just like he always gets sad when I talk about you. And I just don’t want to make any of you upset!” He looked on the verge of tears.

She reached for him and enveloped him in a hug, trying to comfort him. She was still utterly clueless on why he was so distressed, but she would try her best to make things better. *Why is he so upset? Why is he afraid of making me sad? Who is he talking about—oh.* Suddenly, she realised who he was talking about, and she released him to look Daemon in the eye. “Daemon?” she called softly, “are you talking about… your father?”

His eyes widened, then he slowly nodded. “Aye.”

*Jon…* Her heart tightened slightly in her chest and suddenly it was hard to swallow. She could feel the tears nearing, and she felt the familiar bitter sting that visited her heart every time he crossed her mind.

“There, you see!” Daemon yelled, pushing himself out of her arms and looking utterly devastated. “I made you sad!”

Dany shook her head. “No, you haven’t made me sad, Daemon. It’s not you.”

He took a deep breathe. “Is it father?”

She looked away. “Yes, Daemon, it is. It’s just… the memory is still very painful for me.”

“What happened?” He whispered.

It felt like a cold fist had closed painfully hard on her heart. She shut her eyes, she couldn’t look at him, she didn’t want him to know. She didn’t know why she was so afraid; he wasn’t real, he was just a part of her dream, but she couldn’t bear it if he looked at her differently. This was her sanctuary, her happiness, the only place she felt joy… and he was the reason why. If he began treating her differently… it would break her heart.

“I can’t… you’ll hate me.”

Daemon held her hands in his. “I could never, mama.”

Dany held back a sob. “I did something very bad… I hurt a lot of people. I killed a lot of people, who were undeserving. I swore to always protect those who cannot protect themselves, and then I didn’t. Something came over me, and so I hurt them. And I will never forgive myself for it.” She wiped away her tears and looked her son in the eye. “That is why your father killed me.”

A range of emotions crossed his face. First it was shock, then confusion, then denial then finally, absolute devastation.

“Father, he…?” He couldn’t finish the sentence. “No… but father… he would never… he…”

Tears trickled down his cheeks and landed on their entwined hands.

“Father…” He brokenly whispered, “he… he wouldn’t, he… why would he do such a bad thing?”

“Daemon.” She laid a gentle hand on his wet cheek. “Things were… complicated then. He felt like
he had no choice, and it didn’t help that he had bad people telling him it was the right thing to do.”

A strange look of recognition crossed over his face. “Bad people…” He whispered to himself. “Father says there are bad people beyond the Wall.”

Daenerys shook her head, then a laugh entwined with a sob escaped her lips. “I wish I knew what you were talking about. I really do…” She took in a shaky breath. “But most of all I wish you were real… I wish you were alive and with me. I wish… we were a family. The three of us… you, me and him, together and happy.”

“I wish that too, mother.” Fresh tears rolled one his cheek. He leaned forward and buried his head in her bosom, and Daenerys held onto him tight. “I wish you were alive and with father and I.”

She chuckled. “I am alive, Daemon. And you…” She took in a sharp breath and spoke bitterly. “You are a creation of my imagination, nothing more.”

He lifted his head and gave her a bewildered look. “I’m alive, mother. You’re the one who’s not real! Father says you died before I was born.”

“Daemon,” she said patiently, “a mother cannot birth a child if she’s dead.”

Daemon suddenly blushed. “I wasn’t born that way! Father begged the Old Gods to bring you back, but instead, they gave him me.”

Her heart skipped a beat. “Jon– I mean, your father begged his gods to bring me back?”

Daemon nodded his head. “It didn’t work. But they gave me life instead.”

_Because I am already living._ Her eyes widened, her breathing shallowed. _Could it be…? Is what he’s saying true? No… Don’t be ridiculous, Dany. You only wish it to be true, these are simply comforting lies._ And yet, it didn’t stop her heart from racing. She looked at her son and something within her just told her that maybe… just maybe…

They stared wordlessly at each other as the realisation dawned on them both. She clutched her son tightly in her hands.

“Daemon?”

“Yes?”

“Are you sure you are alive? Or are you just telling me something I want to hear?”

He blinked. “I am alive, mother. Are you?”

“Yes. Yes, I am. I was brought back to life by a Red Priestess… the same as your father once was. But… if what you say is true, I need to know, Daemon, where–”

Daemon’s head suddenly turned backwards, as if someone had called his name. He gasped and turned back.

“Mother, where are you?” Daemon interrupted urgently.

Daenerys blinked. “I was going to ask you the same thing.”

“Please, you have to tell me!” He urgently turned again and stood. “He’s waking me.”
The summer sun began to shine brighter, covering the entire garden in a blinding, golden glow that disorientated her. She shielded her eyes.

“Who? Who’s waking you?”

“Daemon?” A familiar voice echoed through the garden.

Hearing his voice froze her heart. She knew it so well, several long years later. She remembered how gruff it was, his tone, his Northern accent… it stung her heart. Because the last time she heard it, he had whispered his devotion to her… before plunging his knife into her heart. She could barely breathe, she couldn’t. She tried to, but it felt like a hand had closed over her throat.

“Jon?” Her voice sounded strangled, but with great effort, she managed to release the whisper beneath her breath. She couldn’t see him, but she could hear him.

Daemon shook her. “Mother, where are you?”

She barely heard him, she was still looking around. Searching for him. “JON?” She called.

“Mother,” Daemon begged. “Please!”

“V… V…” She tore her eyes away from her surroundings for a moment and stared deeply into those sweet, violet eyes. “Volantis.”

Daemon breathed. “Vol-an-tis…” He repeated to himself, tasting the new, foreign name on his tongue.

She held onto him tightly, unwilling to let him go. “Where are you? Let me come to you!”

Daemon’s eyes widened, panicked. “No! It’s too dangerous here, mother. You have to stay safe.”

He stepped away from her.

No, no, no…

“Don’t go.” She begged, choking on tears. “Please?”

“I’ll see you again.”

Soon, I pray. Soon.

And perhaps I will finally get to hold you in my arms outside of my dreams.

He disappeared in a blinding flash of light, and Daenerys opened her eyes. The sun was rising, filling her bedchamber with soft, cool light.

She struggled to breathe, her cheeks were wet, and her hands trembled.

But her heart sung and glowed with a feeling she had long since forgotten.

Hope.
Thanks for the comments and kudos!

This was a long ass chapter to write, but I would do anything for Her Satanic Majesty who, unlike Jon, never failed geography (no I will never stop talking about how stupid that script is). But unlike show!Jon, my Jon can actually read a map (okay now I’ll stop).

So, yay! Dany and Daemon now know that both are alive, and Daemon knows where she is! But it also means Daemon knows that Jon killed Dany, which is the one thing Jon fears the most, so… they’re gonna have to have a tense chat about that later.

Poor Daemon! It’s like when two parents are fighting and don’t want to talk about each other, so you have to be careful because you don’t want to set them off. Daemon is just a kid who knows something bad happened and desperately wants to know what, but also doesn’t want to upset his parents or make anyone else sad. But now he knows, or at least knows more than he did before, and probably regrets that now.

Side note: I actually kind of based the Volantene wine Daenerys loves on the Muscat of Alexandria, which is a sweet, white wine grape (that Cleopatra probably drank, fun fact). I’m not even sure this type of grape could grow in Volantis but… it does now lmao.

Next chapter: Arya returns to Winterfell, and discovers things are worse than she initially thought.
Things had changed since she was last here.

Winterfell had stopped feeling like a home a while ago to Arya, too much had changed since it had. Several years ago, she had foolishly thought if she returned home, she would *feel* at home, but really, it had been a silly, childish wish.

Looking at the ancient seat of Northern power, her ancestral home, you would be forgiven for thinking that all was well. Since she left, the damage had been repaired; new towers and buildings had been added, and there were more people scurrying around, going about their daily duties. But Arya could sense that something strange lay beneath the glamour.

There were new battlements and fortifications added since her departure. Unmanned crossbows lined the walls. Out of all the people she saw walking about, few were simple commonfolk. There were soldiers, *too many soldiers*, guarding and within the walls. She hadn’t seen the castle this manned since Daenerys Targaryen was here.

*Has Sansa already heard the news?* She wondered. Beside her were four Stark guards, escorting her through the gates. She assumed Bran had sent Sansa a letter as well, telling her that she was coming. They were waiting for her at White Harbour when she arrived.

*Four is a bit excessive,* she thought, *what is going on?* She never asked her guards, and they were already tight-lipped about why their queen thought it necessary to send them all the way to fetch her. Arya exhaled, watching the pale mist disappear in front of her. If she was going to get the truth, the full truth, she would wait until she saw Sansa.

“Your grace?” A guard spoke. Arya looked around, expecting to see Sansa approaching her. It took a while to realise that he was in fact speaking to her. They had also called her that when they first met in White Harbour, yet it was hard to get used to. “Allow us to escort you to the Queen’s Chamber.”

She dismissed him. “No need. I know where it is.”

She climbed off her horse and strolled through the halls she was raised in. She peered closely at the walls; she could tell where the old stone finished and where the new stone began. *Familiar,* she mused, *but different.*

But as she continued to walk from hall to hall, room to room, she discovered that a lot more had been changed, no doubt to suit Sansa’s tastes. There were some changes in the new design of the castle; thick, patterned blue drapes covered windows that would usually be left bare, glimmering candlesticks made of silver were fixed into the walls and lined on each table she passed, in some rooms there were new crystal windows installed with designs and patterns she couldn’t imagine her father, Lord Stark, ever approving, there were new carpets, and vibrant tapestries she couldn’t imagine being anything but exorbitantly costly.

*Did she decorate the crypts too?* Arya snorted. It was exactly what she expected from her sister, she always liked pretty things.

It wasn’t her taste, but she was at least glad to see Winterfell had recovered after the battle almost
seven years ago. After her detour, she approached the Queen’s Chamber and knocked.

“Come in.” A soft, familiar voice called.

She opened, and there she was, sitting at her desk. She hadn’t looked up yet, she was bent over dozens of scrolls on her desk, reading one with a frown on her face.

For a moment, it felt like Arya was seven years old again, and she had walked in on her mother reading her letters. *She looks exactly like her.* Sansa’s auburn hair was longer and braided just like her mothers, she wore an overlayer of blue velvet lined with fine white rabbit hair, stitched with silver and gold threading, and with sleeves so long they almost brushed the floor. Her underlayer was a dress made of silver samite with floral patterns made of gold and yellow beading.

Dangling from her neck was a long silver pendant engraved with a snarling direwolf, and atop her head sat a silver crown, an ornate circlet surrounded by bursting flowers that reminded her of snowflakes, embedded with a ring of glittering sapphires.

“The crown is a bit excessive, don’t you think?” She asked, breaking the silence. Sansa’s head lifted, her eyes widened, and grin spread across her face.

“Not at all, it is fit for a queen.” She replied cheekily as she crossed the room to swallow her younger sister in a warm embrace.

Arya looked again at the papers on her desk. “I hope I’m not interrupting.”

Sansa’s eyes momentarily flickered to the letters, and she avoided Arya’s gaze, a tell-tale sign that she was about to lie. She shook her head and offered a smile. “No, not at all. Come, sit. I want to know how you are and about your travels.”

Sansa guided her to the hearth, and they sat. Arya stretched her cold hands towards it, relieved at its warmth.

“We’ll have plenty of time for that. I want to know how you are doing? How is queenship?”

Sansa looked away. “It’s great, absolutely wonderful. I feel like… I’m finally in control, and I’m where I’m meant to be.”

*You’ve always been a terrible liar, Sansa.* “I’m happy to hear that all is well, then.”

“It is… all is well.”

A long silence stretched between the two. Arya simply watched her sister, one brow arched, her dissatisfaction plain on her face. Sansa ignored her, choosing instead to stare into the hearth and listening to the crackling of the wood.

“Sansa…” Arya warned, “tell the truth, what is going on?”

“Nothing—”

“Don’t tell me it’s nothing.” She interrupted. “Bran told me there was trouble here, what is going on?”

She scoffed and rolled her eyes. *Bran. If he is so concerned for me, he would be helping me.”

“Helping you? With what?”
She remained tight-lipped, choosing to stare intently into the fires instead. Before Arya could press her, she stood from her chair and silently stalked to a table nearby. She poured wine into a goblet, until it was filled to the rim, and halved the cup in one gulp. She turned to Arya.

“Wine?”

Arya shook her head. Sansa filled her glass again.

“A lot has changed since you left.” She finally said after a moment of quiet.

“So I’ve heard.”

Sansa glanced at Arya, a strange look in her eyes. “What have you heard?”

“Not much.” Besides Daenerys Targaryen being alive, but we’ll get to that. “Some unrest here, some rebellion there… I hear most of the realm is against Bran’s rule.”

She chuckled, sitting down. “Yes. That’s true.” She took a sip of wine. “Did you hear Uncle Edmure is trying to crown himself King of the Trident?”

Arya rolled her eyes. “I heard he and a few lords were stirring trouble, I didn’t know the extent. How ridiculous.”

“I thought so too… but most of the Riverlands don’t seem to think so. I didn’t think they particularly liked Uncle all that much, he’s not like Grandfather or the Blackfish… I was sure they would scoff at any attempt to crown him, but it appears I was wrong.”

“So that’s it?” Arya asked, somewhat in disbelief. “He’s the King of the Trident?”

Sansa shrugged. “There’s talk, I hear. Uncle hasn’t outright declared the Riverlands independent, but he and the lords of the Riverlands seem to be keen on the idea.”

Arya watched the flames in the hearth. “I should pay him a visit.”

Sansa raised a brow. “And do what? Threaten him?”

“If that’s what it takes to get him in line.”

“He’s family, Arya.”

“So?”

“So?” Sansa set her cup on the table. “We shouldn’t be antagonising our family, he could be a potential ally one day.” She sat back and played with a loose threat on her dress. “And besides,” she continued softly, “it wouldn’t be a good idea to threaten a neighbouring realm when we are so weak right now.”

Arya’s head perked up at her words. “Weak? The North is weak?”

Sansa closed her eyes and exhaled. “There’s a famine.”

“A famine?” She asked, bewildered. “I haven’t seen anyone starving.”

“No… you wouldn’t have.” She spoke as if she was commenting on the weather. “I specifically instructed the guards that I sent to escort you not to show you. There aren’t many villages from White Harbour to here, and they have all been abandoned. Didn’t you wonder why?”
Sansa sighed, picking up her wine. “It wasn’t always like this. Things were going very well at the beginning of my reign. I borrowed money from the Iron Bank of Braavos, I rebuilt Winterfell, I refilled our grain stores… things were going very well.”

“And then?”

“And then… things started to fall apart. I was buying grain from the Reach, but since Bronn took over, he’s nearly tripled the cost of grain. The North doesn’t have that much money Arya, or at least, not as much as the Westerlands or the Reach. I was already borrowing so much money from the Iron Bank, continuing to buy from the Reach was just too costly.

“It didn’t look like Winter was ending anytime soon and our stores were dwindling already within three years. The snows were so harsh, it was almost impossible to hunt or fish. So, I tried to buy food from elsewhere. There’s grain in Essos, so I thought I could buy from there. And it was costly as well, but by then Bronn had made grain even more expensive so it was a better alternative. And it could have worked… it not for them.”


“The Ironborn.” She sneered. It looked like someone had just fed her a spoonful of salt and lemon. “Queen Yara Greyjoy. Within a year or two, her and her people were back to pillaging, reaving and raiding, and they set their eyes on the North.”

She rubbed her face tiredly. She sighed, then continued. “It wasn’t enough that they took Bear Island, Moat Cailin, Flint’s Finger, Barrowtown and Deepwood Motte, but they have been purposely stalking the waters for ships carrying food for the North.”

Arya released a breath she hadn’t realised she was holding. “They have stolen Northern land, that is an act of war!”

“It is, I declared war on them.”

“And?”

“And what?” she replied bitterly. “The North just doesn’t have the defences to fight them, Arya. It’s barely been a decade since The War of the Five Kings, we haven’t recovered. Not to mention, we were nearly devastated by an army of wights. Karhold, the Dreadfort and Last Hearth… they still don’t have a lord. The Ironborn tried to take them, they sailed all the way just to do so, but I managed to convince Lord Arryn to send his own ships to stop them. But they’re still there, stalking the seas, waiting to starve us out.”

Arya was relieved. “Lord Arryn is still helping the North.”

“No.” She said grumpily. “Our cousin has his own wars to fight. The Mountain Clans have grown bold the past few years, I no longer have the Knights of the Vale. They have gone home to protect their lands.”

So, we’re alone and starving, fighting an enemy with an armada and a well-fed militia…

“Why are they doing this?” she wondered to herself.

“Wood, mostly. And food. The Iron Islands don’t have much useful resources, Arya. That’s why
they reave and pillage. And since taking Bear Island and Deepwood Motte, they’ve been cutting as much wood as they can.”

“But what is Lord Glover doing about this?”

“He’s dead, Arya. He’s been dead for years. I’m just upset I didn’t get to behead myself, especially after he abandoned us before the battle. I had called him to answer for his treachery, but on his way to Winterfell, he was struck dead. An assassin, most like. I have my suspicions… the Ironborn were eyeing Deepwood Motte for many moons, they knew killing him would weaken their defences. In fact, it made taking the castle so much easier, and now they hold his wife and children prisoner yet again.” She tilted the rest of her wine into her mouth, then reached for the flagon to pour herself more. “But that hasn’t stopped the other Northern lords from looking at me with suspicion.”

Arya frowned. “They think you killed him?”

She nodded slowly. “They also think Bran had a hand in it.” She mockingly leaned forward, as if to tell her a secret. “People swear they saw a flock of ravens take flight after he was murdered.”

Arya shook her head in disbelief. “What reason would Bran have to kill Lord Glover.”

“I think none. It makes more sense for it to be a cutthroat belonging to Yara Greyjoy, or even a stranger with a grievance against Lord Glover. But reason will not change the Northern lords or the smallfolk’s minds… they don’t entirely like me all that much anymore.”

Arya sat back in her chair. “Because of a famine? That’s not your fault!”

Sansa opened her mouth to speak, then closed it. She wouldn’t meet Arya’s gaze.

“Sansa…” Arya said slowly. “What aren’t you telling me?”

Sansa slowly turned to her. “We are at war, Arya. At a time like this, defending the seat of Northern power is the most important thing. The Ironborn are just beyond the Wolfswood, they are closing in and they can march on Winterfell anytime if they choose.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

She drank again. “I need to make sure my soldiers are strong enough to defend Winterfell. Maintaining Northern independence is my priority, if Winterfell is taken then everything is lost.” She took a breath. “Even if it means… diverting most of the food stores to those who can defend it.”

Arya froze. Suddenly, she wasn’t sure she was talking to the same person anymore.

“Sansa?” Her voice was low, just above a whisper. “Please tell me you aren’t–”

“Those who can fight in my army are well fed Arya.”

“And those who can’t?” Arya raised her voice. “The sick? The elderly? The children? The mothers? What happens to them?”

She knew how Arya would react, but she held her ground. Sansa’s face remained stoic and impassive. “You remember the stories Old Nan used to tell us about winter. How snow would fall one hundred feet deep? How darkness would descend over the land and block the sun for years at a time? How children would be born and die in darkness, never knowing summer or spring? How direwolves, the most fearsome hunters in all the land, would grow gaunt and starve?”
Sansa paused, and looked away from her sister, but her face never express regret. “The old, the young and the sick… They were going to die anyway.”

Arya, who had trained for years to control her emotions and never betray her feelings, could barely hide her disgust. “What would father say if he heard you now?”

Sansa’s stare hardened on Arya. “Father is dead, Arya. What remains of him is me, and I will do anything to ensure that the North survives and remains in Stark hands. I must do what my predecessors have failed to do.”

Arya stood and walked to the window. She looked out, watching the white snow fall and create a blanket of snow below her. *I understand why she would do this, but it is still a bitter tonic to swallow.* “You’ve changed.” She breathed.

“I haven’t.” Sansa countered. She stood from her chair and towered over Arya. “My main concern has always been maintaining control of the North, Arya. I will do anything for it to remain that way. This is my kingdom, my lands, my people. I will do whatever it takes to keep them mine.”

Arya continued to stare outside her window, this time, her eyes shifted upwards towards the sky. “For how long?”

“What?”

Arya turned. “For how long will the North remain yours, Sansa?”

For a moment Sansa was stunned, then she narrowed her eyes suspiciously at her little sister. *She thinks I mean to steal her crown, me, her sister…*

“What is that supposed to mean?” Sansa responded coldly.

Arya turned fully, to face her sister as she revealed why she had travelled all this way to Winterfell. “Daenerys Targaryen is alive.”

Sansa blinked, staring blankly at Arya. Then her head shook in disbelief.

“That’s not funny, Arya. Don’t jape like that.”

“It’s not a joke. Daenerys Targaryen *is* alive, she was brought back to life by a red priest—”

“No—”

“She has been alive for a while—”

“Arya, stop—”

“And she’s been conquering cities in Essos. Bran believes that she will set her eyes west once more. Only this time, with a vengeance.”

Sansa backed away and fell into her seat. Her eyes were wide and her already pale skin, turned paler. She whispered to herself, words Arya couldn’t comprehend from a distance. Finally, Sansa looked up at her.

“This can’t be… this cannot be…” Her fists clenched around the skirts of her dress. “I can’t fight off Daenerys *and* the Ironborn. She’s going to kill me… she’s going to burn us all!”
“Well… Maybe not?” Arya offered. Sansa’s head snapped in her direction.

“Why wouldn’t she kill me? She knows I told Tyrion about Jon! She knows what I did!”

Arya approached Sansa. “I’ve been thinking that maybe… if someone could convince her not to…?”

Sansa looked bewildered. “Who could do that?”

But as soon as the words left her mouth, Sansa realised. And she shot Arya a look suggesting what she said was utterly nonsense and complete stupidity.

“If there is a list of people Daenerys wants dead, the man who betrayed and killed her would be at the very top of the list, Arya.” She responded.

“I know, but–”

“But nothing! Jon can’t help us, and besides, he’s lost beyond the Wall. He’s most likely dead.”

“Don’t say that.” Arya warned.

“It’s the truth, Arya.”

_But I don’t want it to be._ “Well… have you looked for him?”

Sansa rolled her eyes. “Of course I’ve looked for him. When Bran sent a raven years ago, I sent men to go find him. They were told that Jon abandoned the Wall with the wildlings and never returned. They wrote that he’s probably living in some wildling village somewhere and said they would venture out to look for him, but they never returned.”

“What happened to them?”

Sansa shrugged. “It’s winter, Arya. Around that time there were snowstorms that would last weeks at a time, it’s surprising they even managed to get to the Wall in the first place.”

Arya looked outside the window. “Did you send anyone else? After the storms cleared?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I wasn’t going to risk more men dying to go find Jon, I already have few as it is.”

Arya turned to her sister, a grim look on her face. “He’s our brother.”

“Our cousin, technically.”

Arya couldn’t stop herself, she marched over to Sansa and slapped her hands on the armrests of her chair, pinning her in. _“Our brother, Sansa. What is the matter with you? Just a moment ago you were talking about how we should care about and never antagonise our family!”_

Sansa pushed her away. “I still care for Jon. But he’s still lost beyond the Wall, no one has seen him in years, what good is he to us now?”

Before Arya could retort, Sansa stood and walked to her desk. She shuffled around until she found the paper she was looking for.
“Days ago, I received this. It’s from my spies in White Harbour. Lord Manderly hosted a few of his fellow Northern lords and do you know what happened? Treason. They spoke openly about rebelling against me so they could put Jon back on the throne. They are conspiring against me.”

Sansa handed the paper to Arya to read. She looked up at her sister. “If they are guilty of treason then they should die a traitor’s death. But if you would rather not waste your men on them, I could do it myself and make it look like an accident, end this rebellion before it gets any further. Simple.”

“No, not simple, Arya. Far from simple.” She snatched the letter from her hand. “The lords of Westeros don’t trust me or Bran. They constantly feel like they are being watched, like they are being spied on, like their own words and thoughts aren’t even safe in the comfort of their own halls… and yes, I am spying on my lords, but that is beside the point.

“What I’m saying is that there is already distrust. They know Bran has powers none of us can comprehend. They already think I killed Lord Glover when I didn’t. If Northern lords start dropping dead, they’ll think I had a hand in it, and that will only make things remarkably worse. Not every issue can be settled with threats and blood, Arya.”

“Mine usually can.”

“And I’m sure the North can breathe a great sigh of relief that you are not its queen.” Sansa sat at her desk and looked at the mountain of letters on her desk. Arya wasn’t sure if she should be offended by Sansa’s words, she was sure she wasn’t being malicious.

“Can we go back to talking about Jon again?”

“I would rather not.” She rubbed her temples. “I’ve been thinking about him a lot lately. I just… I don’t understand. Why him? It’s something I’ve thought about for years, ever since he was crowned King in the North. Why him? He doesn’t have the Stark name, he’s not even father’s son… even when he was just a bastard, a stain on father’s name, they prefer him to me, Lord Eddard Stark’s trueborn daughter.

“Even after he made foolish mistakes, even after he gave the North away for love… they still love and respect him. They were still willing to follow him into battle. It was because of me that the Starks won Winterfell back, it is because of me that the North remains an independent realm… yet, no matter what I do… they will always prefer him.”

Arya shuffled her feet uncomfortably. She didn’t know what to say. “Ignore them, Sansa. They just haven’t realised how great you could be–”

“They’ve had seven years to do that. If they won’t see it now, I doubt they ever will. The best I can do is carry on, continue to defend Winterfell, fight the Ironborn and hope the Northern lords can forget their distrust of me long enough to focus on beating them back… But if Jon were here… that would make things considerably harder to do.”

“Is that why you haven’t been looking for him?”

Sansa’s silence was all the confirmation she needed.

“Well…” Arya began, turning away from her sister, “none of this matters if Daenerys is on her way. Whether you think it’s helpful or not, I think it’s still worth something having Jon by our side. At the very least, he should know what’s happening. I’ll begin my journey to Castle Black at sunrise.”

“Arya, wait!” Sansa called excitedly, her eyes suddenly wide and her face hopeful. “There’s a way to end this before Daenerys even gets the chance to set foot in Westeros.”
Arya turned. “Do you have a plan?”

“I can’t believe you haven’t thought about it yourself.”

“Let me guess, you want me to change faces so I can get close to her and slit her throat?”

Sansa paused. “Well… yes. Why haven’t you already?”

Arya sighed. “Bran told me to come to Winterfell first, and besides, I wanted to find Jon—”

“Jon will be waiting for you when you return.” Sansa stood and approached her, laying her hands on Arya’s shoulders. “Arya, this is your chance to protect us, to protect your family. Me, Bran and Jon. Do you really think Daenerys will let him live? Let any of us live? You have a chance to end this before it gets any further.”

Arya’s grey eyes lingered on Sansa’s blue. She remembered how it felt, running terrified through the streets of King’s Landing all those years ago, she remembered the destruction, the carnage, the smell of burning flesh, the pain, the heat, the fire… She was absolutely certain that if Daenerys had the chance to inflict the same damage on Winterfell, she would. And she would happily watch everyone within its walls burn.

Arya nodded her head slowly, her mind made up. “I will protect my family, at any cost.”

Sansa smiled, pleased. “Thank you.”

At sunrise, she travelled up the hill, alone and on horseback. She turned back and looked at Winterfell one more time, as the pale blue light fell upon the dark towers and basked it in a cool glow. It looked so beautiful at this hour.

She turned her head slightly to the left, the path that would have led her to The Wall. To Jon. A road she had decided not to take.

Instead, she urged her horse on a different road. One that would lead her towards Essos…

For she had a queen to kill.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the comments and kudos!

Next chapter: The Northern lords aren’t the only nobles speaking of rebellion. We go to a different POV, as we explore what else is happening in the Reach and we see how other Westerosi lords are reacting to Daenerys’ resurrection.
The soft, melancholic tune wafted, sad and sweet, from her bedchamber window and into the gardens below.

The winter roses soothed her tumultuous soul; its petals filled her world with beauty and its fragrance calmed her when her delicate heart was being tossed carelessly by those around her.

She plucked the strings of her harp and as the flowers her audience, played the saddest song they have ever heard.

Often times she felt guilty. She had no right to be so sad. Desmera Redwyne, with her slender figure, auburn hair that fell to her waist in soft rings, porcelain skin, sweet freckled face and big brown eyes, she was known as the fairest lady in the Reach. She was the daughter of an old, proud house. Her family was one of the richest in the lands. She was married to the Warden of the South… a Lord Paramount… she was the Lady of Highgarden…

A tear fell from her check and landed on her silk dress. She continued playing, she just couldn’t stop.

Desmera was only known as the most beautiful lady in the Reach because her much more beautiful cousin, Queen Margaery was dead. How she missed her so… If she were here, she would wipe away her tears, hold her cheek in the palm of her hand, look upon her with those sweet, doe eyes and say, ‘don’t cry love, everything will be just alright’.

But she wasn’t here. And nothing, not a single thing, was alright.

The realm was at war once more. House Tyrell is gone. And she completely, and utterly, with a passion that burned hotter than the fires in the Seven Hells… hated her husband.

How did this all happen? She found herself asking often. She would wonder every time she awoke for the day, and when she laid her head down at night. She would wonder as she watched her husband drunkenly grope a serving maid and sit a whore on his lap in front of her, then command she lay in his bed to take ‘what is his’. She would wonder when she hysterically cried to her mother, and she would offer nothing but her sympathy and advice on how to ‘go away inside’ as she called it.

Admittedly, she gotten quite good at it. ‘Going away inside’. Especially when her sellsword husband took her to bed, and then would rage when her moonblood visited each passing moon.

“It’s the stress, Desmera has always been a nervous child.” Mother told him. “She needs time alone, to rest and calm herself.”

That was what she told him last evening, and by morning he was gone. He had used the gold coin of Highgarden to build a disgracefully lavish pillow house called The Garden of Pleasure. To her relief, Mother had managed to convince him to build it quite a distance from Highgarden, so that was where he spent most of his time. A castle fit for a man who loves gold as much as he loves whores, he once boasted. Truly that castle was his and his alone. A sanctuary to waste away his gold unperturbed and bed hundreds of willing whores.

It was not meant to be this way… this is not what I wanted, it is not what I envisioned for my life… In
her youth, all she wanted was to marry a good noble man, have many children and a big garden, full of flowers and trees, to chase them through. She would sing them songs then watch them play as she sipped sweet wine beside the man she loved as he read her poetry and serenaded her with loving words and kisses.

But that would never come to be. No, that was merely a dream, and she was destined to live a nightmare.

Her fingers stilled, she no longer had the heart to play.

“A depressing song, Desmera. I prefer my songs much happier in tone.” A soft voice spoke behind her. She gasped and turned. To her relief, she was met with two lovingly familiar faces.

“Horas, Hobber!” She ran to her brothers and threw herself between them. “You’ve returned!”

“We have, yes, but not for long.” Horas replied. “We are only here for a week or two, then we return to battle.”

Her heart cracked, just a splinter. “Must you?”

“I’m afraid so.” Hobber spoke. “The Dornish grow bolder, but the tides have turned. We are winning every battle, we’ve even taken back Horn Hill, so it looks like we might just win this war.”

“Good news!” Desmera smiled. She gestured to the chairs by the balcony. “Sit, you must be so tired.”

Horas waved her away. “We won’t be long here, sister. We have business elsewhere, but first, we came here to see how you faired.”

Business? “What is this business?”

Hobber approached her and laid a soothing hand on her head. “Don’t worry your head about it, sweet sister.”

_They treat me like a child still. I am a proper lady wife now!_

“Oh, don’t pout. We don’t think you’re simple, it is only that the less you know, the better your position.”

She puffed out her chest. “You don’t have to protect me. I can help if you would include me! Mother is involved, why can’t I be?”

“For that exact reason. With one sentence you have implicated your own mother; do not forget, the walls have ears; the ravens hide and listen.”

Her eyes widened and she quickly covered her mouth. “I– I didn’t mean to…” She looked around. “There are no ravens here, I had my maid check before you arrived. We are alone, I promise!”

“Good, remain vigilant.”

She lowered her head and sniffed. _Stupid! Look what you’ve done! You can’t help now!_

Hobber placed a gentle hand on her back. “We know you would like a bigger role, Des. But believe us when we say you are already a big help. Play the part of his obedient wife, and he will suspect less. Continue to tell us all that you hear. And…” He looked lost in thought for a moment. “Do you drink the tea Mother gives you?”
She blinked at him. “The tea? Yes, always. I don’t like it, Hobber. It’s bitter.”

Both he and Horas exchanged pleased glances. “Continue to do what Mother says, Des. Your freedom could come soon.”

*What does that have to do with tea?*

“Allright…” She replied unsurely. “I trust you both.”

“And we trust you… remember; be careful with what you say, learn to say much without saying much at all.”

“What does that mean?”

“You’ll figure it out.” Horas piped. “You’re smarter than us both!”

She chuckled. “I know you are only flattering me. But I thank you for your kindness.” She looked at her brothers and offered them a serene smile. “Sometimes I am in desperate need of more of it, unconditional kindness, I mean.”

After their talk, they descended her tower and she played her role. She greeted the guests and weary solders, played the courteous host and apologised for her husband’s absence. That, she could tell, was not appreciated. Not for any fault of hers, though.

“Lord Bronn should be leading our troops, my lady. Not in some whorehouse, handing out the Reach’s fortune to lowborn whores.” Lord Arthur Ambrose seethed. She agreed wholeheartedly, but it would have been unseemly to be heard disgracing her lord husband’s name to his bannermen. All she could do was feign impassiveness and remain polite.

“May the Warrior strike him… and his heart with the valiant bravery you continue to grace us with, my lord.”

Lord Arthur Ambrose gave her a tender look. “One day he will get what he deserves, and I pray to the Maiden and the Mother, so will you.” He offered her a kind smile and kissed her ring.

Desmera returned the smile. She always liked Lord Ambrose. He was wed to Lady Alysanne Hightower, and she was always so remarkably kind to her. *Because she thought I would be her good-sister one day…* Desmera had to catch herself. There was no use revisiting old heartbreaks, it would do her no good.

After the men were fed, they retreated to a tower separate from the main halls of the castle. She was not allowed anywhere near the room where they congregated, no matter her authority as Lady of Highgarden. She may bear the title, but it was her mother who ran the castle in truth. Lady Mina Tyrell… sister to Lord Mace Tyrell and daughter to the Queen of Thorns. She was born in Highgarden, raised in Highgarden and now had to witness as it was given away by a Lannister to a filthy sellsword. The deepest disrespect to her own house and her family’s legacy.

Only Desmera knew the extent of her venom for the Lannister Hand and his sellsword, and even the Stark king. She never knew her mother had that kind of side, *a hateful side…* Sometimes she truly reminded her of Grandmother Olenna.

And it was for that reason why she understood why she was married to the sellsword. Her mother would never stand to let another rule the castle her ancestors did. Even if it meant ruling the castle though her daughter and having her endure marriage to the buffoon. In a way, it kept Highgarden and its riches in Tyrell hands, even if they only lived on in blood and not in name.
So, it made perfect sense to her why her mother would be in the room, in the thick of the plans... but she still wanted to be there. And she couldn’t, so she busied herself by preparing for the feast later that night. But as she moved throughout her halls and prepared for supper, her unrelenting curiosity grew until it could no longer be sated by mindless activity.

When night descended and the meeting still hadn’t adjourned, she could no longer resist. She excused herself to her bedchamber and said she needed to lie down. She instructed the maids that under no circumstances should anyone disturb her rest. When she was sure she was alone, she shed her winter overlayer and furs, and left.

A century ago, the tower was built by a Tyrell lord with the intent of sneaking in his favourite mistresses. In recent history, it was frequently used by three little children to play Rats-and-Cats and Find the Treasure. *Margaery would burst into a fit of giggles if she could see me now and Loras would tease her mercilessly, but in good humour.*

She felt like a little girl again. She knew the twists and turns, the hallways and narrow spaces, the secret doors and vents... She may be a Redwyne, but she spent as much time here as any other Tyrell.

As she neared the tower, she heard chatter and stopped.

*Guards,* she realised. Panicked, she lifted her shirts and ran – or at least attempted to in winter underlayers, which looked more like skipping than running – and took cover behind a row of rose bushes.

As it was winter, night fell quicker these days. But even in the darkness, she knew her brother from the outline of his figure and the tone of his voice. Those Horas and Hobber were identical, she knew them well enough to tell the difference. It was in the little things they did. Hobber is always more relaxed and tended to lean backwards when he stood, while resting his hand on the hilt of his sword, whereas Horas tended to stand straight with his thumbs looped through his belt.

Horas was talking to a man by the main gate. For a moment, his head turned in her direction and she froze in place, praying to the Gods above that he did not see her. But he didn’t. The man he was talking to retreated into the tower, and he continued to stand guard. She sighed in relief and continued her journey.

Using the servant’s entrance, she entered the tower and snuck in the shadows, ducking behind curtains where necessary until she found the secret door she was looking for. It was both narrow and small, and she had to hunch over and gather her shirts in her hands which, because of her thick winter dresses, would prove to be exceptionally difficult. Especially since there was no light in the space, and she had to feel her way through.

“...Is this truly a hinderance?”

Desmera the soft voices in the distance and snuck faster.

“Yes! How could it be anything but?”

She walked until she could hear the voices well enough and pressed her ear against the wood.

“She’s a madwoman, as mad as her father! She killed hundreds of innocent people in King’s Landing!”

“She did, but who’s to say Lord Tyrion didn’t push her to it? He’s an evil, conniving little demon!”
“Do you hear yourself Ser Tanton? It would be absolute madness to trust she wouldn’t do what she did to King’s Landing to the rest of the realm!”

“Humfrey, calm yourself. I think we all know what Daenerys Targaryen’s resurrection means for Westeros. She will return.”

It took everything in Desmera not to gasp loudly. Daenerys Targaryen is alive? She was resurrected? How does that happen?

She pressed closer to the wall. From what she gathered, Lord Ambrose was talking to his good-brother, Lord Humfrey Hightower.

“This could derail our entire plan.” Humfrey told him.

“What plan?” Lord Ambrose replied, somewhat mockingly. “Getting Aegon Targaryen and convincing him to take a throne he so clearly does not want? Have you forgotten he and the Raven King were raised as brothers?”

“His brother saw it fit to have him exiled, I cannot imagine there are fond feelings between the two.” He replied.

Lord Ambrose scoffed. “You know nothing of the Starks. They are as foolish as they think they are honourable.”

“Well it doesn’t matter, Jason has already been sent North to retrieve him.”

Desmera’s heart froze, thawed and began beating so rapidly she feared the occupants behind the wall would hear. Jason? Jason is in the North?

“It will be a fruitless endeavour.”

“I beg to differ, he’ll succeed. He’s determined.” Humfrey pushed back. Before Lord Ambrose could retort, he added a sentence that stopped Desmera’s heart. “I told him if he succeeds, Desmera will be free from the sellsword. He wants nothing more, he still holds a flame for her. So, he will do what it takes, even if it means killing, lying or sailing half way across the world for whatever reason. He will get Jon Snow to us, and as long as we have him, we’ll see what we can do.”

Desmera could hardly breathe. He still cares for me, he still loves me, even after all this time, he will risk his life just so I can be free…

She squeezed her eyes shut and grinned so hard her cheeks hurt. Her heart was above the clouds, souring with doves. Seven help him! Father above defend him, Mother above protect him, Warrior give him courage, Smith give him strength, Crone give him wisdom, Maiden may you lead my love back to me and Stranger, stay away! He is not yet yours to have!

“Even so…” this was her mother’s stern voice now. “We have to be prepared if your plan does not work.” She was silent for a moment. “My mother believed in Queen Daenerys, and I trust her judgement, even in death. Though she was no longer living to see what followed… If there is anyone who can rightly cleanse the land of the Lannister imp and is ilk, it is Daenerys Targaryen. It is only a matter of time before she returns, and I fully intend to not be on the receiving end of her ire for whatever reason.

“Lannisters, Starks, whoever… Those are her enemies, not us. Let her destroy them while we reap the benefits. But only if she has calmed herself since her attack on King’s Landing. I– Do not interrupt me, Arthur, allow to me to explain. I, as well as everyone else in this room, know we
should be careful of our next step.”

She paused for a moment, and Desmera could imagine her mother’s face as she captivates the crowd. Stern, her forehead creased as she frowns in deep thought, her left arm crossed over her belly and her right fist below her chin. She could see it, even without seeing it.

“I say, we send envoys to Volantis. Disguised, let them see if she is stable or not. If not, well… perhaps we can slip something in her drink and end her madness before it reaches our shores. Then we use Jon Snow as our pawn. If she seems stable, we offer her an alliance and bring her to Westeros. As a peace offering, we offer her the man who murdered her if Jason is successful in his mission. I’m sure she’ll be grateful to deal punishment to all who betrayed and conspired against her, and to those who gave her the opportunity.”

The occupants of the room murmured amongst themselves, and then Lord Ambrose spoke. “Those are decent plans, but what if none of them work?”

“It will be harder to overthrow the Stark King on our own, but we will succeed eventually. We have the power of The Citadel behind us, as well as The Faith Militant. And of course,” her mother paused, “our brave heroes, the Brotherhood without Banners.”

Who?

The room broke into a chorus of excited murmurs and quickly quieted down. Oh, how I wish I could see what is happening!

A man spoke, with a deep and rough voice, and likely highborn. She did not recognise it.

“Lords and ladies of the Reach, I am sure you are as tired as I am of the Starks and Lannisters. For too long, Brandon Stark has kept his winged spies among us, invading our homes and listening to our every word. As if it was not enough that they handed over the greatest, richest, most fertile lands in Westeros to a vulgar, devious and power-hungry sellsword, they barred us from the Great Council in which they elected this stranger to kingship and refused our call for help when the Dornish marched on our land.”

The congregation passionately agreed. The man continued. “They actively provoke the Reach at every turn. Since the time of Aegon the Conqueror, Grand Maesters have been chosen by our Citadel, and the new crown thinks to insult tradition by electing their own? They think us powerless, beneath them, unworthy to be included in the goings-on of the realm. But they are mistaken, in fact, they have made the most egregious error. Undermining us will be their downfall, and we will return their slights twenty-fold.”

“Ser Symon,” Lord Ambrose called, scepticism heavy in his voice. “I do believe I’m familiar with your fellowship. It was led by Lord Beric Dondarrion long ago, yes? And his Red Priest? Excuse my confusion, but I thought the brotherhood had died with him.”

“Lord Beric may be dead, but his legacy and spirit live on in our work.”

“And what work is that? What could an outlaw group have to offer us?”

The knight was silent for a moment, and Desmera imagined he had a pleased smile on his face. Lord Ambrose has always been so easy to provoke.

“An outlaw group, hm? My lord, those days are in the past. A better word would be an ‘army’. An army that grows larger with each passing day. Smallfolk, solders and nobles from all over Westeros travel far and wide to join our cause. From the Riverlands, the Vale, the Reach, the Westerlands and
especially the Crownlands. I don’t mean to sound boastful, my lord, but my ‘outlaw group’ is over thrice the size of your own army.”

*Lord Ambrose won’t like that.*

He huffed. “Well I suppose if I included women, children, the elderly and the meek I would have an army big enough to impress you, ser. But I do not have the time nor the patience to pursue such a senseless endeavour, perhaps you’ve failed to notice, but we are in the midst of a war.”

“Ah yes. A war the Reach has been losing up until recently. Tell me, my lord, what changed the tide in your favour? I believe it is because you suddenly discovered where the Dornish set their traps, where they’ve been moving, how they have been tactfully deceiving your scouts with false information…” Ser Symon paused, then chuckled. “Oh, I’m mistaken… it was not you or any of your men who discovered it! It was the *women, children, the elderly and the meek*, good honest village folk, *my army*, who are the real reason behind why the Dornish have stopped advancing.”

“*Ser, you will watch yourself—*”

“*BOTH OF YOU WILL WATCH YOURSELVES!*” Her mother replied angrily, and loud enough to even startle Desmera. “I implore you to postpone your idiotic feud for a later day. We are discussing a war, not measuring cocks.”

The men were silent. Desmera, scandalised, had to cover her mouth to stop herself from giggling. She had never heard her mother say anything so vulgar!

Her mother sighed. She needed to collect herself.

“Now,” she said calmly. “Ser Symon, please, inform us on how you plan to assist us. What will you be doing with your men?”

“What can’t I do?” He replied cheekily, but quickly cleared his throat and replied solemnly. *Mother must have given him a look.* “My lady, we train them in archery. How to carve a bow, make their own arrows and how to shoot moving targets. Not only does it provide some much-needed food for the winter, but by killing the ravens, we reclaim a part of our freedom.”

Lord Ambrose scoffed. “So, you shoot ravens? That’s all you do? Any one of my men can do that.”

“Can your men deliver messages swifter than any raven? Don’t pretend like you haven’t thought of that, my lord. The king can control ravens, even our written words are not our own.”

A new voice spoke, one familiar to Desmera. “And how do you circumvent such an issue, ser?” Hobber asked.

“A few effective ways. The commonfolk cannot read or write, and it would take too much precious time to teach them the Common Tongue. I broached the issue with a maester at the Citadel, and he created something new for them to use. A new tongue of sorts.”

*A new tongue?* Desmera’s jaw fell. *How would one even create that?*

“Languages do not appear out of the air, Ser Symon.” Hobber replied in disbelief, but the amazement was palpable in his tone.

“It is not one you speak, it is only meant to be read and understood. It is made of rudimentary drawings and symbols that can be replicated even by the simplest of men. At this very moment, only few know how to read it with ease, but those few are spread throughout the realm, my lords. We
cannot fly ravens, but that doesn’t mean our messages cannot be passed from one to another. All you need to know is that we have made it significantly harder for our enemies to know our every move, but easier to know theirs.”

The room murmured.

“What is it exactly you are planning?” Hobber enquired.

“Tensions grow in King’s Landing. Seeds of discord have been planted and the fruit of rebellion are ripe. There will be an uprising soon, but I do not trust the commonfolk of King’s Landing to do it effectively, they will need our coordination to do so, so it’s best we begin moving now while they least suspect it.”

“And you believe it will work?” Lord Ambrose asked the knight. “How will you all even get into King’s Landing?”

“My lord, we are already in King’s Landing. We carry no banners, many of us wear no sigil. How is one Gold Cloak supposed to tell the difference between a member of our own and a simple peasant seeking shelter in the capital? We will strike King’s Landing soon, and if all goes according to plan, at the very least, we will have complete control over the city gates and ports, caging the lion and the raven within a city that is within our control.”

Her mother hummed. “Making it easier to remove the Stark King.” She thought for a moment. “When that happens, we’ll send reinforcements. Tyrion Lannister will undoubtedly call his sellsword for help.”

“And we will be sure to arrive, but if they are expecting any assistance from us, they’ll find none.” Lord Ambrose replied.

“And if the sellsword decides to accompany you?” Ser Symon asked.

“Then that will be the end of him. We have let him live for far too long.”

“Even so,” Humfrey Hightower interjected, “what’s stopping the Westerlands from marching to the city and creating a blockade? Or the Stormlands?”

Lady Tyrell hummed to herself. “The Westerlands don’t love Tyrion Lannister either, and as of recent, he is no longer the only Lannister in Westeros. Joy Lannister may have been born a bastard, but she’s better liked I hear. And the Stormlands… Lady Estermont is a friend, and her daughter is the Lady of Storm’s End. Let’s see what we can make of that.”

Humfrey sighed. “All of this is still uncertain. And it will do us no good when the North marches against us, or the Riverlands, or the Vale. The king’s sister is the Queen in the North, his uncle is Lord Paramount of the Trident and his cousin is Warden of the East. If he requests their help, they will answer his call.”

“The North has the Ironborn to contend with, the Knights of the Vale are engaged in a bitter, bloody feud with the Mountain Clans and the Riverlands… well… are we sure his uncle would answer the call? As he tries to fashion himself a king?” Her mother pointed out.

The room mumbled amongst themselves.

“Even more the reason to bring Daenerys Targaryen to our shores or place a crown on Jon Snow’s head! Now is the right time to strike, there will be no better opportunity!”
“My lady is right.” Ser Symon agreed. “The kingdoms are divided once more, and where there is chaos, you will find opportunity. Victory is within our grasp, we need only take it.”

The room chorused once more. Desmera pressed her ear harder on the wood.

“It grows late, and we cannot draw suspicion by staying here another moment.” Her mother concluded. She was pleased, Desmera could tell. “Ser Symon, we wish you good fortune for the wars to come.”

“Thank you, my lady. Same to you.”

“My lords let us sup in the Great Hall, and toast to a future free from Stark and Lannister rule! And free from rotten sellswords who seek to destroy the greatest land in Westeros.”

The room erupted in cheers and agreements.

*It is time I go.*

Desmera crawled out of her hiding spot and fled the tower as the secret meeting came to a close. She, once again, narrowly avoided being spotted by Horas, and once or twice stumbled into a bush and onto the ground, as well as into some tree branches, but she continued running, never stopping until the door to her bedchamber was closed behind her back.

She could barely breathe! She had not run like that since she was just a girl.

She collapsed on her bed and shut her eyes. *I need to rest… just for a little while…*

The door to her chamber door suddenly swung open. Her mother entered and looked her in the eye. At the sight of her daughter, her hand touched her chest and her eyes filled with worry.

“Oh, my dear! I tried to find you in the Great Hall but I was told you were ill!”

Desmera sat up. “Yes mother, I am feeling slightly ill.” She lied.

Her mother put her hand on her forehead. “My poor child, you’re feverish! Your face is so red, you’re sweating buckets and you’re struggling to breathe! Wait here, I will call the maester and he will fix you a tonic and ice bath.”

Desmera panicked. “Mother, no!” Her hand caught her mother’s wrist, preventing her from leaving. Her mother’s eyes widened in surprise. Desmera forced a wide grin. “I– I– I’m okay, really mother. I just need a little time to rest.”

“Oh?”

“Yes mother, I’ll see you soon.”

Her mother gave her a small smile and sat on her bed. She lovingly petted her daughter’s head, running her fingers through her auburn curls. She chuckled softly.

“My dear, you look like you’ve been running.”

Desmera’s body froze solid faster than a drop of water in a snowstorm. “Uh… mother! That’s ridiculous! HAHAHAHA!” She forced a lurid laugh, like she had just told the funniest jape the realm has ever heard. “W– Why would I be running anywhere? How unladylike!”

Her mother laughed. “Oh dear, how ridiculous indeed.”
She lifted her hand and showed her the twig that she just fished out of her hair.

Desmera stared at it through wide eyes, speechless. Her eyes shifted to her mothers, which had changed from worry to a knowing look.

“Some advice dear: Firstly, if something compels you in the future to frolic outside like a madwoman and listen in on conversations not meant for your ears, may I advise that you try avoid being spotted by anyone. Horas got a kick out of watching you try duck beneath a rose bush, but I doubt any other guard would. Secondly, try not to wear such thick skirts when you do so, you’ll find that you will trip less frequently...”

Lady Tyrell looked down and Desmera followed her gaze. To her horror, there were multiple large patches of brown staining the lilac silk of her skirt. *How did I not notice?*

“And thirdly,” her mother picked a leaf from her hair, “learn to lie better, my child.”

Desmera remained silent. She honestly couldn’t think of a word to say.

Her mother stood and gave her a small smirk. Desmera was relieved to see she was somewhat amused by her behaviour, but she was still horrified at how terribly she had performed. “Clean yourself, dear. This is unbecoming of a Lady of Highgarden.” Lady Tyrell walked to the door and turned one last time. “And be quick. I will see you in the hall.”

Desmera stared at her mother, mouth agape. When the door shut closed, with a dramatic sigh, she fell back onto her bed and covered her eyes with her forearm.

At this very moment, she wanted nothing more than to be included in something much bigger for once. To fight for the Reach any way she could. For her family to trust her not to ruin anything.

*I'm not stupid, I just need to be better.*

Being sneaky and deceitful was not her nature, it has never been. But if being helpful to her family’s cause meant she should be, she would learn to be the very best at it.

She was determined to help her family and the Reach, in any way she could and by any means necessary.

Chapter End Notes

*Thank you for all the comments and kudos!*

*Next chapter: We journey to the Wall where Jason is met with disappointment, but also finds himself a whole step closer to finding the man he’s looking for.*

*(And I promise you I'm not trying to torture you by making you wait to see what's going on with Jon/Daemon LOL! Soon my loves, soon!)*
“Fucking bloody hell! What happened here?”

Pots and Deryk stared at the gaping hole in the legendary wall of ice. A structure they thought so impenetrable, so impregnable, it was the most complex construction ever known to man. It was mythicised that the Northers could have only build it with the help of ancient magic long forgotten in this world…

And now it had a huge fucking hole in it.

Jason surveyed the area. His eyes wondered over the strange stakes piercing through the snow like dark knives. He approached one and laid a glove hand on it.

*Wood,* he realised. *And by the looks of it, a broken beam.* He realised what this meant.

He stumbled backwards, stunned, but also slightly horrified. The hairs on the back of his neck rose, and the air grew thicker as he breathed. His brown eyes, wide and alert, darted at each stone and splintered beam protruding from the snow like bizarre wildflowers.

*These were once ancient towers… castles… fortresses than have been here for hundreds of years.* He turned to The Wall, and the devastatingly chilling truth descended over him like a dark cloud in the midst of a winter storm. *It’s true, the stories are all true…*

There was nothing left of Eastwatch. Only snow, a gaping hole in the once impenetrable wall and a graveyard for the castle that once stood.

“We won’t find anyone here!” He shouted at his companions. “We need to head to Castle Black!”

Jason was relieved that the weather had been calm since their arrival. There was a biting wind and light snowfall, but it was bearable, and they made good pace to their destination. If they rode fast enough, they might not need to camp in the wilderness for the night.

“So…” Jason began, as the three companions rode their horses’ side by side. “The stories are true? About the Long Night?”

Pots snorted. “I still don’t believe it.”

“How could you not?” Jason asked him. “Did you see that massive hole in The Wall? Only something powerful, *something magical,* can do such a thing.”

He shrugged. “An army of the dead? Come now, Jason, I know you love your stories, but even you cannot believe such tales as truth?”

“The Citadel has a book on it—”

“*Maester Samwell* wrote a book on it, and can we trust Samwell Tarly? He may be a Reachman, but he belongs to the Raven King and the Lannister Imp, not the Reach.”

Jason huffed. “You cannot deny that there was some sort of battle at Winterfell, though. Who were they battling if not an army of the dead?”
“I don’t trust the Northerners, if I’m being quite honest.” Deryk commented. “Perhaps there was a battle there, but I have a hard time believing the army was made of dead creatures and ice monsters.”

Pots agreed. Jason scoffed.

“And what would change your mind, hm?” He prodded. “Seeing one up close?”

“Yes.” Deryk affirmed. “I will not deny its existence when I have the proof. But I would be a fool if I fully believed it. Jason, do you truly believe that seven years ago, while we joyfully toasted to our futures, drank and ate until we had our full, chased girls and gleefully showered every whore with good tits and a fat arse with gold, we were this close to certain death? That the realm was at the edge of a dagger, this close to its silencing cut? And none of us knew?” He gave him a look. “Be reasonable. I find it highly suspicious that at some point the world was nearly at its end, but no one except the Northerners knew. This… mystical bad man made of ice, the bringer of death who was about to wipe us all out from this world… was vanquished in one night?”

Pots hooted. “What type of foe is that? If he was so terribly powerful, why would he be felled in just one night? Sounds like Northerners are shit at telling stories.” He paused for a moment and looked to the grey sky in contemplation. “Or perhaps it did happen… and it was the Northerners fault.”

Jason looked at him puzzled. “What do you mean?”

Pots looked around, his dark blue eyes scanning the bare, black trees in the distance. “The North is full of dark magic. Look no further than the Raven King, he is a boy who can see and hear through birds. Birds! If the dead ever rose from their graves, I would wager a dark spell was responsible. The Starks are not to be trusted, the whole bloody lot.”

A shiver crawled up Jason’s spine as he remembered the black, beady eyes that silently watched him set sail from his home. Does the Stark King already know our intentions?

“I still think it’s horseshit.” Deryk dismissed. “It’s a story, and a damned bloody stupid one. The North maintain this story, that the impossible happened, but I did not see it. The dead did not rise from their graves in the South, I saw nothing that would even signify a threat.”

“But Winterfell—”

“Perhaps there was a battle there, Jason.” Deryk interrupted. “Just that the Northerners aren’t telling the full truth. We know you like your books and stories but get your head out of the clouds and think about this for a moment. Nothing makes sense.”

“Perhaps you are right. Nothing does make sense, yet the strange and non-sensical continue to happen.”

Deryk and Pots turned their heads in his direction, all traces of humour and scepticism on their faces flew away, into the drifting winter wind.

“We cannot be fully sure.” Deryk said plainly. “We only know what we’ve heard.”

“People make rumours all the time.” Pots added.

Jason shook his head. “From Tyrosh, to Pentos, to Braavos… they’re all saying the same thing. It must be true.”

Daenerys Targaryen is alive.
Jason sighed. He dismissed the rumour the first time he heard it. He was sceptical the second time he was told. But when they reached their third city port in Essos, and the whispers grew louder, and her name and titles were recurrently whispered beneath the breath of each man, woman and child they encountered, he couldn’t escape it.

And he knew that his family’s plans had gotten significantly more complicated than before.

Should I continue this journey? Should I turn back? He kept himself awake all night, pacing the floor of his cabin with those questions, but come day, he was certain it was better to remain on course. At the very least, Daenerys Targaryen was a backup plan if Jon Snow proved difficult.

They reached Castle Black just as the sun was setting. As they approached, a horn sounded, and the black gate lifted to let them in.

The courtyard to the famed castle was sparse with Brothers of the Black. Some walking about turned their heads in curiosity, eyeing the three men as they rode their horses to the courtyard’s centre. A few men gathered nearby, muttering amongst themselves. He pointed to one and spoke with a clear and commanding voice.

“You!” One of the men looked startled and, confused, pointed to himself. “Yes, you! Where is the Lord Commander? I must speak with him.”

The men turned to look at each other. The one who Jason called upon faced him at last.

“Gone.” He simply said.

Gone?

“What do you mean gone? Gone where?”

“He went to the brothel.”

It took everything in Jason to not show his surprise. Was Jon Snow so degenerate that he would abandon his post, his exile, for the fleeting comfort of ale and whores? He may have the blood of dragons, but this was not the behaviour of the rightful heir! Is a man as debauched as he even fit for a crown? Was this journey for nothing? I must tell Humpfrey and Alysanne, they must know coming here was a mistake…

He sighed, annoyance painfully clear on his face. “Does Lord Commander Snow do this often?”

To his astonishment, they all looked at each other in pure bewilderment.

“Jon Snow is not our Lord Commander. Not anymore, hasn’t been for years.”

He released a small gasp. “Seven hells, are you telling me he’s been dead all these years?”

“We don’t know if he lives or not, we just know he ain’t here. He left seven years ago, leading the wildlings back north.”

Jason looked up, his eyes taking in the magnificently tall wall of pale ice. “Beyond the Wall?”

The man nodded. Oh, bloody hells.

“So…” Pots leaned towards him, speaking in hushed tones. “What do we do?”

Jason… didn’t know. Or he did know, he just didn’t want to do it.
“Er– have any of you tried looking for him? Do you know where he went?”

The man shrugged. “No, but you wouldn’t be the first to come galloping in here looking for Jon Snow.”

“Oh?”

“Years ago, a couple of men from Winterfell came looking for him. We told them what we told you, then they tried lookin’ for him beyond the Wall, during the thick of a winter storm. They never came back.”

They never came back. Those words buzzed in his mind like a hornet’s nest.

I should turn back, he decided. Go back home, there is no sense looking for him in that vast wasteland. I will never find him, and I might just die trying. Absolutely not, I must turn back and–

“Where do you think he could have gone?” Deryk interrupted his thoughts. Jason’s head snapped towards him and gave him a hard look that screamed ‘are you mad?’

Jason returned the glare and whispered harshly. “Do you truly believe I’ll let you give up after we travelled all this way? We will be seeing this through, whether you like it or not.”

Jason turned to Pots, hoping for some much-needed help from his dear friend. Pots looked lost within himself, looking at the Wall with a distant look in his eyes. “I’ve always wondered what’s beyond the Wall.” He said dreamily.

Jason, sensing the inevitable, forced himself to turn to the Brother of the Night’s Watch and grimly asked him of Jon Snow’s whereabouts.

The man looked baffled that he would even ask him that question. “How the bloody fuck am I supposed to know that?”

Jason sighed, exasperated. I’m going to have to search the whole bloody North for this bloody heir!

“I might know.” Another man said. He was sitting near a fire, drinking straight from a flagon of ale. His head was bald, but half his face was obscured by a dark beard that reached his chest, and by the slurring of the voice, he couldn’t be fully sober. “But why do you want to know, boy? You wanna kill him?”

“Kill him?” Jason shook his head. “Absolutely not!”

“Then what ya’ want with him? You see, we have great respect for him here, so we’ve left him be. Tell us why a bunch of Southerners are here looking for him. Who are ya’, boy?”

Jason climbed off horse and his companions followed. A larger group of brothers gathered to watch them.

Strangely, he had not thought of a reason why he would be looking for Jon Snow. He assumed when he arrived, he would meet with Jon Snow immediately.

He cleared his throat. “My name is Garth Flowers, and these are my companions… Emmet and Ralf. We have travelled from… the Reach in search of Jon Snow because…” he paused, trying desperately to think of a reason, “because… we have heard a startling report that concerns him.”

“A startling report,” the man sneered mockingly, “what fucking report? And who sent ya’? What
business does a southerner have with Jon Snow?”

His answer struck him like lightning. Ignoring his second question, he straightened his back and spoke with an air of confidence. “Daenerys Targaryen is alive.”

His announcement earned him a startled silence, then the loud muttering of the men. *They don’t believe me…*

“IT is true.” He shouted over their voices. “I know it may sound impossible because she was once dead, but–”

“A red witch did it.” The man with the long beard finished. Jason was expecting him to look at him like he had gone mad, but that was not the look he gave. His eyes were wide and steely. There was nary a hint of scepticism or disbelief in his dark eyes.

“You…” Jason breathed, “you’ve heard?”

“We haven’t.” The man replied. “It is just a story we are all too familiar with.” “He looked to his other brothers for a moment, then back at Jason. “You’re sure she lives?”

“I am.” He said with finality.

“Where’s she, then?”

“Volantis, last I heard.”

The men muttered amongst themselves. But silenced when the man stood. He was exceptionally tall and thick, enough to eclipse each of the three Reachmen.

“And once ya’ tell him this, then what?”

Jason was stunned to silence. *Then what?*

“I… I think that will be for him to decide.”

The man glared at him, too long for Jason’s comfort. His hand twitched, ready to reach for his sword. But the man, after a tense moment, grunted then spoke. “Hardhome.”

Jason blinked. “Pardon me?”

“I said Hardhome. You hard of hearing, boy?”

“N-no, I just don’t know what a hardhome is.”

The man scowled impatiently at him. *Am I testing his patience somehow? I merely asked a question…*

“Hardhome is the largest wildling village beyond the Wall. Or at least it was. I don’t know if he’s hidin’ there or what, nobody is, but there aren’t a lot of places they could’ve gone. I’ve seen my share of wildling villages before, those pathetic hovels… they’re too far inland and there’s barely enough access to fresh water and meat for the winter…”

Jason arched his brow. “What are you saying?”

“I’m saying… that if the wildlings wanted to rebuild, they’d choose a place that’s near the water, that they can better defend, a place they can fish, a place that won’t take much time to rebuild. They
would go back to Hardhome."

*Hardhome...* He couldn’t recall ever seeing it on a map, but then again, he never looked that far north. “Where is it?”

“Ya’ get there by travelling through the Haunted Forest, or by ship from Eastwatch.”

*Back to Eastwatch?* Jason considered it. It would mean another day’s journey back to his ship, but he wasn’t keen on entering any forest with the word ‘haunted’ in its name either.

“I can travel by ship, but…” Jason looked up towards the darkening sky. Already the air had chilled significantly as the cold winter night crept above them.

The man remained silent, staring intently at Jason. That was obviously a prompt, but clearly, he was not in a hospitable mood.

After a rather awkward pause, Jason swallowed his attempt at courtesy and outright asked the man. “Can we stay here for the night?”

After a long moment, long enough to convince Jason that he might say no, he agreed with only one nonchalantly toned word. “Aye.” And turned to walk away, but Jason, ever the lord’s son, would not let him leave without maintaining some semblance of the values his father taught him. Perhaps this uncouth gruff nature was common in the North, but in the South, it was courteous to give your appreciations.

“My many thanks, er… my apologises, I didn’t get your name?”

“You didn’t ask.” He took a very long swing from his flagon. “But it’s Haryn, Lord Commander Haryn.”

*Lord Commander?* Jason blinked at the man. “Those men said their Lord Commander was in a brothel!”

“Aye, that’s what I tell em’ to say.”

“Why is that?”

“Because it amuses me.” He replied slyly. “Now run along, cocksuckers, I want you all gone by morn. We don’t have enough food to feed the likes of ya’.”

As soon as the sky turned from black to grey, the three set off from Castle Black. They barely got a good rest’s sleep, for the castle itself proved to be in dire need of care and gold. Jason had asked Lord Commander Haryn why it was so, and he discovered that the Wall hadn’t received its due taxes in years.

“The Walkers are gone, we’ve made peace with the wildlings, what’s the use of the Night’s Watch? It’s a prison for the degenerates and exiled. There is little glory to find here; we guard nothing and have no purpose. You come here to be forgotten, to freeze ya’ balls off, then ya’ die. The King and his Hand won’t sent anything, and neither will the Queen in the North. We just survive.”

Jason remembered him turning towards him and giving him a stern look. “And remember that. These are desperate men trying to survive. You best keep your belongings close and one eye open while ya’ sleep. Ya’ may have a bastard’s name, but ya’ have the smell of gold on ye.”

Needless to say, he kept his sword unsheathed and close to his hand that night, and had no qualms
leaving at first light. And as luck had it, the air may have been crisp, but the snow was light and easier to trek. They made it back to Eastwatch by mid-day.

From there, it was simply a task of sailing close enough to the shore until he encountered what he was looking for. And he did.

Through the fine winter mist, he saw them from a distance. Little homes covered in snow, with dark smoke drifting from chimneys and people walking about, clad in heavy furs. From the dock, he could see small fishing boats and fishermen throwing nets into the deep icy waters.

As they sailed closer, he caught the people’s attention. One by one, they began curiously gathering and pointing to Jason’s ship as he approached.

Jason shivered. It was colder this far North. Every breath he took fogged his vision. He restrained from hugging his cloak closer to his body and looking at the wildlings in their strange layering of leather and furs and hoods, he understood why they would dress as they do.

He, Pots, Deryk and two oarsmen climbed into a rowing boat and approached the village. The scene was a silent, eerie one, as men, women and children gathered around them in the hundreds, silently watching them. He swallowed the lump in his throat. Beneath his leather gloves, he felt the palms of his hands sweat.

He had never met a wildling and presumed he never would, much less hundreds of them in a wildling village so far from home. A lord’s son from the Reach in the thick of a crowd of wildlings, deep in the North, trying to find a secret prince who he hopes to make his king… it was a story for the books and sounded fictitious even to him, even now as she stood ankle deep in snow, shivering, and surrounded by hundreds of curious eyes.

Jason felt a pressure in his lower back. Deryk nudged him forward and gestured for him to speak. But he didn’t quite know what to say. At Castle Black, he felt confident enough to order the men to tell him where their Lord Commander was, but this was different. *I am different. They are different.*

None of them looked upon him kindly, in fact, they looked at him like he was some invader. If he were his oldest brother, Baelor, he would, without a care, confidently shout over them in his loud, commanding voice and order Jon Snow to step forward. But he wasn’t Lord Baelor of House Hightower, he was just Jason Hightower, the youngest Hightower who has never had to speak to a large congregations of people, much less an audience of wildlings numbered in the hundreds if not over a thousand. He had never felt so out of place.

But he would do the best he could. He cleared his throat to speak and prayed to the Seven that he sounded as confident as he wished he was.

“I am looking for Jon Snow!” He shouted into the crowd. There was little reaction, and the only response he received as the echo of his voice. He spoke again. “It is rather urgent, I must speak with him immediately!”

Still, nothing. Jason scanned the crowd, hoping to catch a glimpse of a man who looked remotely like a secret Targaryen prince. He did see a few men with blonde hair sticking out of their hoods, but Jon Snow was reported to be dark of hair. And there must have been plenty of men who fit the description.

“What do you want with him?” A man spoke up. Jason turned to the source and found a big man with hair and a beard as fiery as hot embers, walking towards him. He wore a cloak of what looked like bear fur, and behind him were children, with hair just like his own, staring inquisitively at him.
“I come delivering urgent news for him.”

The man narrowed his eyes at him. “And they couldn’t send a man of the Night’s Watch? Or a raven?”

“This news is far too serious and private to be delivered by bird, or a ranger. I can assure you.” He replied confidently.

The man stared deeply into his eyes, leaving Jason uneasy under his intense gaze, and yet he found it hard to tear away from those frighteningly steely, blue eyes of his.

After a moment, he turned. And over his shoulder, he uttered two words. “Follow me.”

Leaving the oarsmen to guard the boat, Jason, Pots and Deryk followed the burly man to a house. Before they entered, he asked – or more so, demanded – they surrender any weapons they had. He did, as was customary for any unfamiliar party to do when entering one’s home. He felt naked without it, and from the looks on his companions’ faces, they were not too pleased either.

Inside, a hearth warmed the room and bathed in an orange glow. A woman was in there, knelt over on a blanket, sewing. She lifted her head and her eyes widened, alarmed at the entrance of three strangers, but calmed when she saw the man.

“Sit.” The man ordered.

But there are no chairs… He wanted to say, but then the man sat down, onto the floor, opposite them on the other side of the hearth. Naturally, he followed his actions.

The woman walked over and sat beside the man. That was when he noticed the snoring baby strapped to her chest, hidden beneath a tied-up blanket and nestled between layers of fur. The child too, had orange hair.

“Who are you?” The man asked, his tone was low, direct and stern. His blue eyes bore into his brown, making Jason feel even more uneasy. It was as if he could see right through him and his charade. Can he tell? He wondered. But regardless, he maintained the farce.

“My name is Garth Flowers, these are my companions, Emmet,” he gestured to Deryk, “and Ralf.” He pointed to Pots. “We have travelled from the Reach–”

“The Reach? You’re Southerners, aren’t ya,?”

“Yes. And we have travelled North to deliver a message to Jon Snow. We were told we would find him here.”

“Who told you that?”

“The Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch. Is he here?”

“What do you want with him?” He spoke of him in the present, so indeed he still lives, and he is likely close by…

“As I’ve said, to tell him urgent news.”

“What is this news? Is it about his family?”

“It is for his ears alone.”
“Then you can jump back into your boat and fuck off. I’m not telling you where he is.”

Jason huffed, irritated. “It is crucial that he hears this!”

“Then you will tell me first and I’ll decided if it’s crucial or not.”

“What is your relation to Jon Snow? Are you family?”

“Aye we’re family.” The man nodded. “Not by blood, but he’s my brother.”

_Truly, who is this man?_

“Can I have your name? It seems fair, we’ve given you ours.” _Kind of…_

The man leaned backwards. Jason had tried to be light-hearted, but the man still held a firm look on his face, and for a moment, Jason feared he offended his brawny host.

The man pointed to himself and introduced himself. “Tormund Giantsbane, and this is my lovely wife, Dagny.”

“I am pleased to meet you, Tormund Giantsbane, Dagny…” He smiled at them both, only Dagny returned any semblance of a smile. “I know you do not trust me, but I truly mean no harm to any of you or your loved ones. I speak the truth when I say that I was sent to speak with Jon Snow personally. And I must, it is urgent and of the upmost importance.”

Tormund tilted his head. “Who sent you?”

“The lord I serve in the Reach.”

“And what must you tell Jon?”

Jason hesitated, prompting Tormund to cross his arms and look at him somewhat smugly.

“I mean it. Tell me now, and _perhaps_ I will see if I can help you.”

_This is maddening!_ Jason internally fumed. He just wanted to speak with Jon Snow directly. _Is he here or not? What is the purpose of this mummer’s show? We should be sailing to the Reach by now, a Targaryen prince by his side. Not still in the North, freezing our balls off, playing some game!_

Jason took a deep breath. He would continue to play this charade, anything to get closer to his goal.

“Daenerys Targaryen lives.”

Tormund froze. The smug look was swept from his face and his blue eyes widened as he uncrossed his arms and leaned forward.

“Lies.” He whispered.

“It is true—”

“_LIES!_”

_“IT IS TRUTH!”_ He returned. He stared the wilding down, his gave unwavering. “She was brought back to life by a red priestess in Volantis, or so the whispers say.”
At the mention of a red priestess, his jaw fell. Quickly, he composed himself and tore his gaze away from the young Reachmen and into the fire of the hearth. He was silent, so silent that his wife held onto his arm and asked if he was well.

Tormund looked to Jason once more. “You swear it? You swear this is truth?”

“I swear it. I have no proof, but we travelled to Essos on route here, and in every city and port, this is all they speak of. She has conquered another city with her dragon. Some believe she will turn her attention back to Westeros.”

He could see it in his eyes, the thoughts racing through those wide blue eyes. He believed his ‘brother’ was in danger, he could read his emotions like a book.

After a long, silent moment. He spoke, his gruff voice softer than before. “He isn’t here.”

Jason thought he might have misheard. “Pardon me?”

“I said he isn’t here. He went out, deep into the North many moons ago. We don’t know when they’ll return.”

They?

Tormund stood up and towered over them all. “I can tell you the path he took, but you’ll have to find him yourself.”

Jason’s heart jumped. “Find him…” He said repeated, alarmed. “We- We cannot do that! We do not know these lands, and we are in the midst of a long, cold winter. Can you not go and fetch him and bring him here?”

They never came back. He remembered those words. It was the fate of those who last tried to search for Jon Snow in the cold, harsh, unforgiving North in the thick of winter.

“I cannot leave my people, they need me here to lead them.” Tormund stated, but an affirming look crossed over his face. “Do as I say, and there’s a chance you won’t die out there.”

His companions leaned closer to him, the alarm palpable on both of their faces. “We’re not going further North, are we? We’ll die!” Pots hissed in his ear.

Deryk grabbed his shoulder and, in a hushed tone, whispered. “I know I said we should see this through until the end, but I never envisioned ‘the end’ being perishing beyond the Wall, and our corpses – if we’re lucky – being found once summer decides to bloody show. I refuse for this to be how I die, let’s just return home.”

Jason didn’t know what to do. We could very well die! But… he would also die of embarrassment if he returned to his family empty handed. He could see Humphrey’s sneering face now, the disappointment on Alyssanne’s face and the dissatisfaction on Baelor’s…

No…

A sudden wave of determination and confidence he never knew he had washed over the Hightower. It spoke to him, and it urged him to go boldly into the snow-filled unknown. He stood and looked Tormund in the eye.

I will not fail.
“I will find him, just tell me where to go from here.”

Chapter End Notes

Hello!

Thank you for all the comments and kudos!

While writing this, I realised that if you think about it, there’s really no real reason why the South would fully believe what happened in the North actually happened. If I was Dornish or from the Reach I would be like “BS! I didn’t see a thing! Don’t believe it! Buh-bye!” Because really, no one else was at that Dragon Pit meeting to see the wight, and no southron house (except the Vale i guess?) fought the battle at Winterfell. I wouldn't believe it happened tbh.

Also, while writing this I found it kinda funny how Jason is like “Jon Snow?? At a brothel!! I’m scandalised!!” When on their way to Castle Black he and his friends reminisced about their time in brothels. Lol he’s kinda uppity (as most southerners are lbr). I think if he ever had to defend his hypocrisy, he would shrug and say “well *I* am not meant to be a king so… leave me alone”

Next chapter: Jon takes a journey without going anywhere at all, and when he returns, must have a difficult conversation with his son.
“NOTHING! IT WAS ALL FOR NOTHING!”

To say Jon Snow was livid would be an understatement. His eyes burnt with fury, his hands were closed in fists and when they weren’t, they angrily tugged at his dark dishevelled hair, he paced – or limped, as his injury was still recovering – around the sacred godswood of the Heart of Winter, and it was the consensus between his captive audience that his fiery rage could melt every flake of snow this side of the North and would, for the first time in history, bring summer to the Land of Always Winter.

Again, to say Jon Snow was livid would be an understatement.

But who was the recipient of this fury?

The children of the forest sat idly around him, watching him rant and scream, never interrupting.

“What was the point of it all?” Jon asked, but his question wasn’t directed to them, or anyone in particular. He imagined he looked quite mad screaming into the air and shaking his fists, but the tension and fury had been bubbling like a cauldron in his gut since they made their escape, and as soon as he stepped into the sanctuary that was the Heart of Winter, it began to bubble over uncontrollably.

“He is dead! The Night King is dead, killing him should have killed every single one of those fuckers!” He paused for a moment, just breathing heavily and looking distantly at the falling flow in the distance with a frown upon his brow. For the first time in hours, the godswood was silent.

“What was the point of it all?” He finally breathed.

He sunk to his knees and sat. He placed his head between his knees and laced his fingers though his tangled hair.

“Viserion died for nothing. My men died for nothing. Dany’s men died for nothing. Edd died for nothing. Ser Jorah died for nothing. Theon died for nothing. Lady Lyanna…” He couldn’t name them all, there were just too many, and it pained him.

A small hand touched his shoulder. He looked up and saw Twig, her sympathetic eyes found his.

“She is right, Jon knew. But he couldn’t help but feel so downtrodden. He thought it was all over, he thought he would never have to fight a foe like this again. His time at the Wall had only taken six years of his life, but it felt twice as long because every day would be a fight. He fought with Ser Allister, Bowen Marsh and Janos Slynt, and he fought with Mance Rayder and the rest of the
freefolk, but looking back, none compared to his most vicious foe, the Night King and his army.

And it wasn’t just his time at the Night’s Watch. It has been like this his whole life. Being raised in Winterfell, he fought the pitiful glances his ‘bastardy’ brought upon him and how it made him feel, he fought the daily stares of hatred Lady Stark would throw his way, he fought against Theon and his nasty japes, and even after he left and returned to Winterfell, he had to continue fighting, this time for his home. In the chaos, he had managed to find a small pocket of peace, and there he held the love he and Daenerys shared, the most precious thing he had, and he squandered it like a fool.

He felt undeserving of such a treasure, and a life of continued suffering suited him. And then… and then the Gods blessed him. Daemon was his peace, Daemon was the one thing he had left that gave him the peace and love he was certain he would never receive again. He no longer had to fight, he could finally live a good life with a son that he absolutely adored.

And that peace was being threatened once again.

He closed his eyes and he could still see it so vividly. Daemon laying in the snow in the icy grip of a white walker, pure fear in his big wide eyes. Dread seized his heart in an iron grip, and he feared he would never wrench it free.

He was a father, and this was not a new feeling. He felt it not too long ago when Daemon strayed too far from him in the cave, he felt it whenever he would play with Tormund’s children and would notice him running too close to the freezing water, he felt it whenever he heard a strange sound rustling in the bushes whenever his son was nearby. This dread played with his heart; it would tug it lightly, softly stoke it and gently move it from hand to hand, but now… now this was a different feeling. It was suffocating and heavy, and it put him on edge.

He didn’t fear the white walkers, but he feared what they could do to his son.

“I thought I wouldn’t have to fight again.” He finally said to the child. She nodded understandingly.

“We didn’t think so either, but a lesson has been learnt here. It is dangerous to assume in a world so full of uncertainties.” She looked past Jon for a moment. “But what is certain, is that your son is terrified. You need to be stronger than this, Jon Snow. For him.”

Jon looked behind him, and his heart sank. Daemon sat between the roots of the heart tree, curled into a little ball, shielding himself from the world within Ghost’s fur. His skin was pale, and his eyes were wide, unfocused, dark and bloodshot.

None of them had slept since they arrived, and he didn’t have to imagine the state he was currently in. Daemon has never seen him like this. In fact, he doubted Daemon had ever seen him so furious and anxious with the world. If it worried him, Daemon, who understood so little about what he was transpiring, felt it tenfold. Guilt washed over him, and he felt ashamed. He should have been comforting Daemon this entire time, not screaming his frustrations to the Gods.

He silently approached his boy. Daemon remained distant.

He knelt beside him and Ghost. Ghost stirred, allowing Jon to lift his son and lay his head on his chest. Daemon’s pale hands slowly lifted and felt the furs on Jon’s body, before tightening their grip. Jon didn’t need to hold his head close to his chest, Daemon buried his face in it all on his own. Jon could feel him shaking, and tears formed in his eyes.

*Gods, what have I done?*

He gently shushed him and lovingly stroked his blonde curls.
“It will be okay, Daemon. It will be okay.”

He sniffed.

“I am just overreacting, truly. It is just…” He paused. What can I say to him? How can I explain it? He pondered his next words. “It made me angry, seeing you in danger like that. Because I thought that partly, it was my fault. I should have gotten to you quicker, I never should have let you go alone and get the horses… You are the most important thing I have, my most precious gift.”

Daemon sniffed and shifted his head.

“W– what about Ghost?” He asked softly.

Jon looked at his furry companion. “I’m not following…”

Daemon lifted his head and looked him in the eye. “Isn’t Ghost important to you too? Isn’t he a gift too?”

The question blindsided him, leaving him dumbfounded. One moment, his son is in the throes of sadness and unable to look him in the eye, and then the next… Jon chuckled, then that chuckle grew to a laugh so boisterous it echoed throughout the godswood. It made Daemon grin and earned a whine from Ghost.

“Aye.” He reached for Ghost’s head and rubbed, earning enthusiastic licks from him. “Ghost is very special to me.”

He pet Ghost’s snout. “He’s special to me too!”

“He knows, look at him!” Ghost playfully nipped at Daemon, but his mouth was so large that he ate his entire hand. Daemon squealed with joy.

Acorn giggled at them, Twig looked on with an amused smile and Red Leaf… well she simply stared blankly at them, but her wide red eyes communicated that the entire scene was curious to her.

When they finally calmed, Twig silently approached them. Though she had a smile on her face, her tight lip told Jon that there was something pressing on her mind.

“When I am happy to see you that you are both in a lighter mood, I must tell you that there is still work to be done.”


“The white walkers. It is why we summoned you after all. They should all be dead, yet they are not. We need you to discover why.”

Now? He looked down at his injured foot. The swelling had gone down since they arrived, courtesy of the children. After Daemon and he arrived, they had covered his injury in some strange, foul smelling salve and bandaged it with leaves. The pain had dulled slightly, and he reckoned that it would hurt considerably less if he stopped pacing about.

But it wasn’t only that. They were exhausted. They were hungry. They had not rested once since their arrival. For hours, both father and son were dealing with their own chaotic emotions to even consider relaxing.

Twig could read the type of thoughts piling in his mind, his frown couldn’t hide it.
“We will give you food to eat first, then you will rest. But we require you to do something quite complicated, Jon Snow.”

She didn’t explain any further. The children brought them a bowl of seed paste and sap. Daemon, to Jon’s bafflement, ate it without hesitation. He was the one who had eaten before, it had been seven years and he knew it didn’t taste as badly as it looked, and yet… He sighed, and with a grimace, tilted his bowl into his mouth.

Jon could feel Twig hovering beside him. She was eager for him to finish, but she wouldn’t tell him why.

“Can you stop creeping behind me? It’s disturbing.” He commented lightly.

Twing blinked her big eyes.

“I am not creeping.”

“You snuck up on me where I could not see you, all without me hearing you. That’s creeping.”

She shook her head. “If you cannot hear me approach, I think that means you need better ears, Jon Snow.”

He hummed. “So, what is this that you want me to do? Does it involve leaving here?”

She thought about it. “No… and yes.”

“Could I have an answer that is not vague, perhaps?”

“I am not sure how to explain it to a man who has never experienced such a thing.” She began. She pondered her next words. “I suppose it will be like a deep sleep, but you will leave your body.”

Jon stared blankly at her. “I will… leave my body?” He asked her slowly, trying to make sense of her words. I wish she wouldn’t be so cryptic.

“Are you a warg?”

“Like Bran? No. I cannot change skins like he can.”

“Warging is not just about changing skins, Jon Snow. It is about the close bond you have with your familiar and sharing an unbreakable connection between the minds.” She looked towards Ghost. “Are there times you see through his eyes?”

Ghost turned his head, and Jon stared into those familiar blood red eyes of his. “Aye.” He whispered. “When I sleep.”

Twig nodded understandingly. “There are times where you can leave your body without moving at all, warging is only one instance but there are others.” She stood and offered him her little hand. He took it.

She led him to the pond beside the heart tree. The dark waters were eerily still, and he could see his reflection perfectly, like he was staring into a looking glass. He scowled. I look like a lout.

“What do you see?” She asked.

“Myself. And you. And the red leaves above us.”
“And what can’t you see?”

He raised his brow and turned to her. “Everything else expect the three things I mentioned before.”

“If you want to be literal, that would be correct. But look at the water again. You cannot see what is below the surface…” She knelt before the pond and slowly submerged her hand. It was as if her hand completely disappeared below the dark water, even as she moved the water around.

Jon did as she did, but this time, he cupped the water in his hands. The strange water was still dark and opaque in his hand, completely obscuring the view of his palms. “What odd water is this?”

“The roots of the Heart of Winter extend even below the waters.” She turned to him. “Its magic is entwined with every drop of water you see.”

Jon frowned. “What does that have to do with me?”

“We will be drowning you in it.”

A cold chill shot through his body and turned it to ice. Wh... what did she say? His head slowly, ever so slowly, turned to the little creature beside him. She was smiling at him, but it was not a sadistic smile... it was a small, soft smile that made her big round eyes twinkle, and that startled Jon more than any twisted expression could.

A long silence stretched between the two of them as Jon waited for her to say she was merely japing. Those words would never come.

“Come again?” He finally asked.

“I said we will drown you in the water. But do not worry, you will not die.”

“Drowning means to die, Twig. That’s what the word means. It means death by water.”

She tilted her head to the side, like she was the one confused by this interaction. “The Gods will not let you die, Jon Snow. As long as you know how to float.”

Realisation quickly dawned on Jon, causing him to breathe a great sigh of relief, and even chuckle to himself. “Ah! I see... you meant swim, not drown. Those are two very different things, Twig.”

She shook her head. “No. You will not be swimming, Jon Snow. You will be submerged in there,” she pointed to the water, “unconscious, and for many hours.”

His jaw dropped. He glared at the little murderous cretin.

“ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR BLOODY MIND?”

“Lower your voice.” She said, placing a finger of his lips. “There is no need to shout. I am next to you, I can hear you very well.”

“Then hear this: I will not let you murder me!”

“Murder?” She repeated, scandalized. “There will be no murder here! The Gods will keep you alive!” She stood, barely taller than Jon as he sat crouched before the water. She put her hands on her hips and stared at him assertively. “Put your trust in them Jon Snow, they favour you, and they gave you your son. The least you can do is have faith.”

The least you can do is have faith. Jon’s eyes drifted to his son, he sat beside Acorn and Red Leaf
beneath the heart tree, absentmindedly stroking a slumbering Ghost as they chatted to him. The
conversation halted when he let out a big yawn. His eyelids were drooping, and his head was
struggling to stay upright.

“He needs to rest.” He said to himself.

“He will. You need to as well. When you submerge yourself, you will fall into a deep sleep. But
your mind will be transported elsewhere, and you will see things, whether it be in the past or
present.”

“Where will I go?”

She shrugged. “That will be up to you. Now please, we must hurry.”

“Wait, wait…” Jon began, “I must know: why me? Why can’t any of you do it?”

She looked dumbfounded. “You’ve fought them already.” She replied, like it was obvious.

“I have, but that means nothing in this situation. I will not be fighting them while I’m in the pond.
Couldn’t you relay whatever information you’ve gathered to me?”

“It must be you, Jon Snow. You’re much more familiar with the white walkers than us; we rarely
travel outside the confines of this godswood anymore. Who knows, you might spot something and
make a connection that we would otherwise miss.” Her eyes floated away from his and focused on
nothing in particular. “And besides… its quite a harrowing experience. None of us wanted to do it.”

Jon opened his mouth to protest, but she placed her finger over his mouth again. “But that does not
change the fact that I am right. It is still better that you do it.”

Jon shut his eyes briefly and sighed, defeated.

“Okay fine… let’s get this over with.” He grumbled.

Twig grinned and clasped her hands. “Good! Please, hurry and undress yourself!”

It took a moment for Jon to process what she had said.

“What?”

“Yes!”

“No!”

“Yes!”

“You never said I would have to be stripped to my bare arse!”

“Would you prefer to get your furs wet?”

“No, but…”

“Jon Snow, please!” She begged. “We are wasting precious time!”

He threw his arms up. “I know! I know… just… let me put Daemon to bed first. Then you can try to
kill me after.”
“You’re not going to—”

He waved her off.

Acorn had already brought a woven mat for him to sleep on when Jon arrived. Daemon yawned as Jon crouched beside him. He looks terrible, Jon thought. He needs to rest.

Daemon turned to his father and offered him a closed smile that seemed a little too forced.

“Aye?” He asked, concern palpable in his tone.

“Aye!” He chippered and nodded his head enthusiastically. “I’m tired, that’s all.”

Aye, I believe that. But I doubt all is still fine with you. Daemon opened his mouth to say more but decided against it. His fists clenched and unclenched repeatedly, he tried to hide it from him, but Jon could see. He only ever did that when he was anxious.

Jon leaned over him and planted a long, lingering kiss on his son’s forehead. They sat there in comfortable silence, simply listening to each other breathe and enjoying each other’s presence. When the moment passed, Jon calmly whispered in his ear. “Everything will be fine, Daemon. We will talk when you wake.”

Daemon nodded tiredly, and Jon laid him down. His head rested on Ghost’s hind leg, and his silver-violet eyes fluttered closed. He never left his side until he heard his soft snores.

Acorn, who had been sitting nearby and watching the two spoke in a hushed tone. “He’s still so scared.”

Jon couldn’t tear his eyes away from him. I am too.

He felt her presence before he could see her. “It is time.” Twig whispered to him, and he nodded.

He stripped down completely and looked over into the water. Twig, Red Leaf and Acorn stood beside him.

“So… what am I supposed to do?”

“Do not struggle. Don’t try to kick and swim.”

“No, I mean… what am I supposed to do? What am I looking for?”

“The white walkers, and what they are planning. Remain focused on your goal, do not let your mind stray or else you will lose your way. Remember that, and you will find them.” Twig replied. She placed a hand on his bare shoulder. “I think my words need repeating, Jon Snow. Do not stray from your course. It will be easy to but resist or else you will be lost.”

Jon glanced at her, then stared at his reflection in the water. “You said this would take hours…”

“Aye, it will. But it won’t feel like hours. It will move as fast as a dream, by the time you wake, perhaps Daemon will be waking from his slumber as well. But not if you hurry, you’re wasting enough time as it is!”

He groaned as he placed his legs into the water. He tossed a look over his shoulder to the three children. All of whom looked at him reassuringly.

Remain focused. Do not lose your way.
Jon boldly jumped into the water, completely submerging himself, and felt sensations he had never felt before.

The water was not cold. The water was not warm either. It was… it felt like nothing. Like he was floating in a sea of absolute nothingness. He remembered not to kick or swim, he simply let go. And the water cradled him like a babe, floating him in its embrace.

He opened his eyes. I can see. Below him was darkness, but above him was light. He thought it strange; how from the outside the water was opaque but from inside… he could see the morning sunlight streaming through the swaying red leaves of the Heart of Winter. He could see Twig, Red Leaf and Acorn moving their heads and talking amongst themselves. I can see them, but they cannot see me.

His eyes focused on the swaying red leaves… they were so soothing, he wished he could hear them too. But he couldn’t hear anything. He couldn’t feel anything either. The only sensation he felt was his chest rising and falling with each steady breath he took.

He had no time to think how queer it was that he was able to breathe underwater, because as his grey eyes slowly closed, the darkness welcomed him warmly and gently, like an embrace from a dear old friend.

But he was not enshrouded in darkness for long.

First, he heard the chirping of the birds and then the streaming of the nearby river. His eyes slowly opened, and a warm light trickled into his sight. Above him, the green trees towered, and its leaves swayed in the gentle breeze.

He looked downwards, and to his relief, saw he was fully clothed. Leather boots, dark grey cotton trousers, a white undershirt, a black leather doublet and a long, light cloak. It was the type of Northern garb he would wear in his youth during summer.

He looked backwards and was greeted with the sigh of home. Am I in the Wolfswood? He walked closer and found Winterfell as he last saw it before he left to join the Night’s Watch. There was no damage, no remnants or markers of the atrocities it’s walls saw when the realm was plunged into war. It was as if he never left, as if he had dreamt everything that had happened and was finally awake.

His heart clenched and his eyes misted. This was the Winterfell he missed and loved, the Winterfell he yearned for, and it was the Winterfell he would never see again. This was the Winterfell that felt like home to him, the Winterfell with Lord Stark, Robb, little Arya, Bran and Rickon, and Sansa. And it was the Winterfell that had been destroyed forever.

Smoke lifted from its chimneys and smallfolk travelled in and out. It was bustling with activity, and he was tempted to enter. But as he stepped closer, he heard something strange coming from behind him.

The sound of plucking strings, a melodious voice, the most beautiful song he had ever heard. He turned his head, unsure on where to go. The song was curious and tugged at him like a puppet on an invisible string. It enticed him, beckoned him, further and further away from his home.

The further he walked, the more he realised he wasn’t familiar with his surroundings. I am lost, he thought. With each step, the sun shined brighter and the flowers smelt sweeter. He knew he was no longer in the North. He turned around, and the path he had just walked mere moments ago had vanished. He was in a green field, and ahead of him sat an inn with a carriage and horses.
The song grew louder.

In front of the inn sat two men, conversing comfortably like old friends, unperturbed by the song. Jon would have thought they were just regular men, until he saw their cloaks. They were as white as freshly laid snow.

*Kingsguard*, he realised. He approached and waited for them to acknowledge his presence. They never did. It was as if they could not see him. Jon’s eyes widened, *because they cannot see me*...

He didn’t recognise any of them, nor did he know what they were talking about.

One of the men leaned comfortably beside the door of the inn. He was tall, tanned and good looking. But what caught his eye were his dark eyes, his dark purple eyes. Jon’s eyes lowered to his belt and to the hilt of his sword. Its pommel had a rising sun.

*Dawn*. Jon’s jaw fell and he staggered backward in utter shock.

The man in front of him was the Sword of the Morning himself, the legendary swordsman and kingsguard, Ser Arthur Dayne.

Jon could scarcely breathe, he could only stare, struck by the dead man.

Ser Arthur Dayne laughed heartedly at a jape from the other man. “I doubt it will come to that, Oz. Ser Gerold is scouting as we speak, they’ll never find us here.”

*Oz*? Jon covered his mouth. *Ser Oswell Whent*?

His entire body froze. *Ser Arthur Dayne, Ser Oswell Whent, Ser Gerold Hightower… I have heard this tale before…*

The high harp filled the air around them with a sweet song, and the melodious voice froze the blood in Jon’s veins. It was coming from the second storey of the inn and filtered through the open window. He did not move. He *could not* move. He knew what this meant. He knew who was playing, and who he was playing to.

He could hardly breathe. And his hands would not cease their shaking.

He shut his eyes and listened as the song slowed to a stop. The air stilled, and he could only hear his anxious, laboured breathing.

“That is such a beautiful song, Rhaegar.” A soft feminine voice praised, and Jon’s heart nearly burst out of his chest.

He didn’t recall moving his body, in fact, he was sure he didn’t. But when his eyes fluttered open, he found himself in an unfamiliar room with two people sitting by the window, oblivious to his presence.

His back was still turned to them. He felt the tears roll down his cheeks. He wasn’t ready yet.

“I’m glad you think so. It is as beautiful as its muse, Lya.” The man replied lovingly.

She giggled. “He’s moving. I think he likes it too!”

*He*?

“Our child…” Rhaegar whispered tenderly. “I can’t wait to hold him in my arms.”
Something changed in him then. He turned around to look at them and lost his breath. His entire life, he always wondered what his mother looked like. Whenever he dreamed of her, he imagined her as a highborn woman, soft spoken and kind with a tender smile, and the most beautiful woman to ever live.

Words could not begin to describe the feelings he felt as he finally laid eyes on her.

*The statue in the crypt does not do her justice, not even the tiniest bit.*

Her dark hair was braided into a long braid, and she had woven it with wild flowers. Behind her left hear was a blue winter rose. Her smile radiated sunshine and her grey eyes, so much like his own, twinkled with joy. Her hands were affectionately rubbing her swollen belly, and Jon’s knees nearly failed him right then and there.

His eyes moved to his father, and he didn’t know what to think. It was strange seeing his true father. For the longest time, he thought he was the bastard son of the Lord of Winterfell, and that Prince Rhaegar Targaryen was the villain who stole and raped his ‘Aunt Lyanna’, and now he knew both of those were lies.

He stepped closer and marvelled at how the sun shining through the window turned his silver hair into gold. His violet eyes were filled with unbridled bliss, his hands caressed his mother’s belly as he whispered sweet words in High Valyrian. Jon didn’t even know what he was saying, but he felt the love in his words.

That was what knocked him to his knees. He sat directly in front of them, watching the scene unfold.

He couldn’t help it, he reached out to touch his mother’s hand. He laid his hand on hers but felt nothing. Neither did his mother. *They can’t see me, they can’t hear me, and they can’t feel me… I am truly a ghost here.*

His mother’s eyes glanced out of the window, and she stared longingly for a moment.

“What is the matter, love?” Rhaegar asked, grasping her hands.

She shrugged and offered him a reassuring smile. “Oh nothing, I’m just a bit worried that Brandon is going to do something stupid. I sent a raven to Riverrun, I hope he got my letter. But even then, he can be so hot-headed.”

Jon cringed. Oh, she was still so oblivious to what was happening to the realm.

“Hm, well this is all the confirmation I need. Hot-headedness is a common Stark trait. I better begin praying it skips my son.”

Lyanna jabbed her finger at him playfully and he caught her hand in his. He rubbed it calmly and looked her reassuringly in the eye.

“Everything will be fine, love. I’m sure your brother would never do something as ridiculous as confront my father. He has probably received your letter and is in the process of cursing you to the Gods.”

“I would love to see that.” Lyanna giggled. “I truly hope all is well, though.”

“I do too. I’ve been thinking about my mother. I worry about her, she has had her struggles with childbearing before. But she looked well the last I saw her.” Rhaegar absentmindedly plucked at the strings of his harp. “I hope the child is born healthy, I would like another sibling, especially for
Viserys. I would like to play with him as much as he wants, but I can’t always… he needs someone much closer to his age.”

“Do you want a little brother or a little sister this time?”

Rhaegar didn’t need to think about it. “A sister, of course. And her and our son will not be too far in age. Perhaps…” He paused his plucking for a moment and peaked at her through his lashes. “they will marry.”

Jon’s eyes widened.

“Rhaegar!” Lyanna lightly slapped his arm. “They aren’t even born yet and you’re already planning marriages!”

Rhaegar laughed. “Alright, perhaps I am getting ahead of myself. But I cannot help it. I like to believe that things happen for a reason, Lya.” He leaned forward to caress her belly again. “I think our son will have a great purpose in the world. He is a part of something bigger, something bigger than all of us. He will do great things. He is the song of ice and fire. Such blood is too rare, history will remember him.”

You would be mistaken, father. He clenched his teeth, and his heart tightened into a knot. Anger and despair sparred within him, both evenly matched. Both of you died for nothing.

Both of you died for nothing.

“He will have the loyalty of a wolf and the fierceness of a dragon. We will teach him to do what’s right and to fight for those who cannot fight for themselves. I can feel it, Lya, he will be a great warrior someday… he will make history.”

Lyanna grinned brightly at him and held her stomach. “I know that too.”

I have heard enough.

Jon stood and looked upon his mother and father for the last time. Like a spring flower after the winter snow, something warm bloomed within his chest at the sight. They looked so happy.

I was wanted. My mother and father loved each other.

He wished his younger self knew what he knew at this moment, that his dream was truth all along. But he also wished he never knew, that he remained ignorant his entire life. The hurt would ache less.

With pain in his heart, he turned away. Why was I brought here to see this? What benefit do I gain from witnessing this? How will it help me fight the white walkers? And the realisation quickly settled.

I lost focus. I lost my way.

He closed his eyes and breathed.

He wasn’t sure how he would return to the course he had once set, but he knew he had the key to do so. Remain focused, she said.

He pictured them, with their icy skin, pale hair and shining blue eyes.

And he pictured the North, the true North. With its snow-capped hills and leagues of ice that
stretched further than the eye could see. He exhaled and pictured the pale mist swirling from his
breath and into the crisp air like smoke from a dragon’s mouth. He could hear the howling wind as it
bowed to the unyielding mountains.

He could hear it…

He could literally hear it.

His eyes snapped open, and he felt a strange gust of wind push past him.

He was no longer in some little room in some Southern inn. He was back North, the true North,
deeper in the Land of Always Winter.

Deep in a desolate territory completely unfamiliar to him.

And so very alone.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the comments and kudos! It means so much!

Sorry this took so long, the chapter ended up being so long that I needed to split it then
edit it to leave parts out.

But don’t worry, I won’t make you wait long to see what happens next!

So, next chapter: Part 2 of Jon’s journey, and what happens between he and Daemon
when he returns.

See you then!
He was knee deep in snow, yet the cold never touched him. He scooped the snow in his hands and held it in his palms. It did not melt. It was like he was present, but also not at all. It felt as though he was… he was a ghost.

Jon had no difficulty wading through the snow, the ice yielded to his movements and left no footprints. He did not know where he was going, but he just knew it had to be forward. For he felt that if he looked back, he would become lost again.

He tried to find a marker, anything that gave him a clue as to his own whereabouts. He grey eyes swept the terrain, back and forth, back and forth, like a slow swinging pendulum. He managed to spot a few odd things along the way: a mountain with a cave opening that looked like a yawning giant, a glittering, frozen waterfall and an unlucky hare that fell into the river and found itself frozen solid within its ice.

Nothing identifiable. *I must be further north than I thought, further than any man has ever journeyed.*

He walked and walked and walked. Aimlessly but with purpose. He didn’t know where to go or how to get there, but he knew he had to make it somehow. Past the frozen rivers and the grey, snow covered mountains that jutted out of the ground, sharp and pointed like a wolf’s tooth. There was no sign of life around him, not even a weirwood. It was Jon alone.

His environment grew cloudier, and soon, he could no longer see the mountains ahead. Their tips disappeared into the misty, grey sky. His vision ahead was a wall of dense pale fog. And he walked through, confronting the ambiguity of what lied ahead and allowing it to envelope him like the white mist he waded through.

And he found nothingness. He didn’t know where he was, or which direction he was currently heading. He stopped to revaluate his surroundings and found only heavy, grey fog. At this point, he could have walked blindfolded and his circumstances wouldn’t have changed a bit.

Alas, there was something inside of him that told him to move onwards, and so he did.

It was then that he noticed something peculiar. Ahead of him, the light grew brighter, like he was exiting a dark tunnel. He strode closer to the light and reached out a hand as if to catch it.

But there was nothing to catch at its end.

No… but there was definitely something to see, and it left him aghast.

Jon’s breath left his body at the sight, he had never seen anything like it.

An archway made of stone, carved with the spiral symbol he knew all too well at its centre.

And beyond that, was something he could barely comprehend. The valley snaked far ahead, and the snow-covered mountains on either side held numerous gaping holes of various sizes carved from the stone. Jon stood at the mouth of the valley, dwarfed by its size. There was only one path ahead of him, and he set his foot forward.
He cast his eyes upwards. *What are those holes?* The hairs on the back of his neck rose. *What are in those holes?*

Gusts of wind travelled from the end of the valley and through the mysterious openings in the caves and back out, producing a harrowing harmony that sounded like a chorus of scream, cry and song. Jon was familiar with the whistle of the wind, but never like this.

He never stopped walking, not until he reached the end of the valley, and found that his search had come to an end.

He wasn’t sure if he was supposed to be relieved or absolutely mortified. He decided the latter.

In an open space, hundreds if not thousands of white walkers gathered into a crowd, their backs turned to him. He was reluctant to venture further, but then he remembered that they could not see, hear or touch him, and grew braver.

He manoeuvred through the crowd, wondering what they were gathered for.

Suddenly, Jon heard a loud and peculiar sound. Like ice breaking, snow crunching, frost shattering, and the roll of a distant avalanche all at once. It was grating to hear, and it sent a chill up Jon’s spine, shocking him to attention. Alert and panicked, he twisted his head around, trying to find the source.

From a cave opening, he saw movement. A figure sauntering out.

And that was when his eyes found her.

Tall, slender, as pale as freshly lain snow and hair that flowed so long it brushed past her knees. She was lovely to the eye, a cold, harsh, unsettling beauty. And her eyes, like two glittering sapphires in the moonlight. She wore a gown of bleached animal hide and white fur, and atop her head was an icy crystal crown that glittered as dazzlingly as diamonds.

*The white walker from the cave painting.* She approached the crowd of white walkers with her head held high and a confident, regal attitude he had only seen once before. She was not his late lover, but he could see parts of her in the way she moved. She stared into the crowd below her and opened her mouth.

*That sound again,* Jon covered his ears. *This is how they talk...* Jon had only ever heard the white walkers scream, but this was not some fearsome battle cry, this was a language on its own.

She spoke for some time, and whatever she said elicited rapturous responses from the crowd, much to the dismay of Jon’s ears. *I don’t even understand what she is saying, what was the point of me coming here?* She then turned away from the crowd and vanished from Jon’s sight.

Thinking she had returned to the cave, Jon pushed forward to try find her.

But then she returned, and this time, with a long spear that froze Jon with dread. He knew that spear, he saw one just like it pierce Viserion’s neck. She lifted it up into the air, gasping it for all the crowd to see. She shouted, and the entire crowd followed.

Jon gritted his teeth and furiously tightened his fists. He knew what this meant.

He kept his eyes on the white walker, this *Night Queen,* and cursed her beneath his breath. He knew a battle cry when he heard one, he had heard it too many times before. She was itching for a battle, *a war...* and he didn’t need to guess with whom.
He shut his eyes and imagined himself closer. When he opened his eyes, no longer was he at the bottom looking up. No, he was behind her. He envisioned her marching her army through the Wall, he envisioned her ordering her men to kill every man, woman and child they find to add them to her army of wights, and he envisioned her successfully completing what her predecessor sought and failed to do.

His right hand twitched, yearning for Longclaw. *If I could touch and feel, I would end this now. Before it ever has to resort to bloodshed.*

He walked around to face her. He said before he didn’t want to fight, but he would be damned if he let her and her army get close to his loved ones again. He would find her one day, and end this all, once and for all.

Her head turned to his direction and their eyes met. A peculiar look crossed her face, leaving Jon puzzled.

*It’s like she’s looking directly at me…*

Her eyes widened. And so did his.

Before he could grasp what was happening, he felt a burning sensation on his forearm. Stunned and absolutely dumbfounded, he looked down and saw it trapped in the grip of the Night Queen’s hand.

*Oh.*

He wrenched his arm free and stumbled back. Jon’s eyes travelled back to hers, and he saw pure, unbridled fury. The air around them stilled, and he glanced to his side. Thousands of blue, frosty eyes bore into him.

*She can see me… they can see me…*

*And they can all fucking touch me…*

*Oh, bloody fucking hells!*

The Night Queen lifted her spear and thrusted the tip directly towards Jon’s chest.

Narrowly avoiding certain death, he panicked and stumbled backwards. Thinking quickly, his hand reached for Longclaw. But it was not there. He had absolutely nothing. And the woman in front of him was in the midst of thrusting the point of her spear towards, this time, Jon’s eye.

He rolled just before it descended and got to his feet. He sprinted away from her, looking backwards to ensure she was not aiming that spear of hers towards his back. He had seen what it can do to a dragon’s neck, he didn’t want to see what it could do to his spine.

But quickly, a horrific, yet fundamental truth descended on Jon like a ton of stones. He was surrounded. Behind him was an immortal monster made of ice who could raise the dead from their graves with a flick of her hand, and ahead of him was a cliff. And beyond that cliff, were thousands of white walkers who could not only see him but hurt him as well. He was unarmed. And he was alone…

He peered down at the gathering white walkers as they clawed themselves towards him. He looked behind him at the advancing ice queen. And he looked up, hoping the answer to his situation would fall from the sky. But nothing did, he was stuck in this nightmare.
Nightmare.

The word struck Jon like a flash of lightning.

*A nightmare, this is like a nightmare, and I have to wake up.*

He squeezed his eyes tightly and repeated to himself. *Wake up. Wake up. Wake up!*

But nothing around him changed. He could still hear them coming, he could still hear them screaming for his blood.

He slapped himself across the face.

*Wake up.*

He slapped harder.

*Wake up!*

He slapped again.

*WAKE UP!*

He turned his open hand into a fist and punched himself as hard as he could.

*WAKE UP—*

The ground beneath him vanished, and he was falling. Falling down… or was he falling up? And what was that strange sound? Like splashing waves…

His head resurfaced, and he was gasping for air.

“He’s awake!” he heard a voice call out. His breathing was laboured, and he was still so very disorientated, it took a while to realise where he was. But when he looked up, he saw red leaves, and he knew.

“Come, let’s pull him out!” Two pairs of small hands held onto his wrists and pulled. Jon felt the soft grass and mud beneath his body and gasped. And then, he choked. Water violently poured from his mouth and nose with each cough he forced.

Twig leaned closer to him. “Ah! I see you breathed the water!” She unhelpfully pointed out. Jon would have retorted, but when he opened his mouth, only water sprouted.

He remained a pathetic mess for a moment, on the ground, spluttering and shaking.

Finally, when the water dwindled, he coughed out what he knew.

“They… UGH… they are UGH… coming. They are UGH… preparing…”

“For war?” Twig asked. Jon nodded. The children silently shared a look amongst themselves, like he had just confirmed their worst fears.

“Wait… wait…” Jon breathed. He lifted his arm towards them, and for the first time, he saw his injury.

“She saw me… she touched me… and it burnt.” The mark was raw and red, and wrapped around his
forearm. Jon twisted his arm around and looked at his inner forearm, and noticed at its centre, was a pale mark he had never seen before. Acorn approached him and took a closer look.

She silently examined it, her eyes widening. She looked backwards towards her sisters and shook her head, before turning towards Jon again. “I can help you with your burn, but…I cannot help you with this. She marked you.”

“Marked me? What does that mean?”

She squinted her big eyes at the mark. “I’m not sure, myself. The mark is a spell, but I cannot be fully sure what it is for. Red Leaf, do you know?”

Red Leaf silently approached them and took a long look. She spoke in a language only she and her sister knew. It sounded like a forest; with birds chirping above in the high green trees and a brook running nearby. Jon would have been entranced by the beauty of their language, if he wasn’t so mystified by the mark on his arm.

Twig turned to him. “You are both lucky and unlucky. Lucky, because it is not a tracking spell. She will not be able to find you with her magic.”

“And the unlucky part?”

“This mark blocks the spell we put on you almost seven years ago.” She lifted his arm and Jon finally saw what she meant. The tattoo they had drawn on him all those years ago was obscured with the pale mark. “You are no longer hidden by our magic. And before you ask, no, there is nothing we can do about this. What is done, is done.”

After putting on his trousers, he watched as Acorn tended to his arm by slathering that foul-smelling salve and bandaging it with leaves.

All the while, Jon grappled with Twig’s words. He didn’t need to be told what this all meant. Bran will be able to see me now. He will be able to find me…

But will he want to find me? Perhaps he will leave me be… but what are the chances he will leave Daemon alone? He is a Targaryen, alive and untethered by vows of exile and banishment. Even if Bran doesn’t see him as a threat, Tyrion most certainly would. And perhaps even Sansa, as he is still a son born with Stark blood, even if it is from his grandmother.

He shook his head. He was getting ahead of himself. Jon may have lost his mark, but Daemon still has his. And who is to say that Sansa would see him as a threat? She was crowned queen by the North, they would not remove her in favour of a boy who is more Targaryen than Stark.

But then again… He may look Valyrian, but he was born in the North, he is connected to their Gods more than anyone else, and he speaks and acts like a full-blooded Northerner… Jon shook his head again. It didn’t matter, they still wouldn’t dispose Sansa for him. And perhaps in the seven or so years since they last saw each other, she has had her own heirs, so it is barely a concern. However, he couldn’t see Sansa ever marrying again, but perhaps…

It didn’t matter to him. His only concern is what Bran and Tyrion could do. Would they take his son, or would they allow them to live peacefully beyond the Wall? But with the white walkers readying for war, sooner than later, he and Daemon will have to make it back south if they want to survive. Daemon cannot be a secret any longer. And what will that mean for the both of them?

“Something is troubling your son.” Acorn informs him as Jon resurfaces from his deep thoughts. Jon lifted his head at her, then peeked at his son.
He was curled into a ball, breathing deeply and quickly, and his cheeks were spotted red, and tear stained. His eyes were squeezed shut and he was whispering to himself. He was hugging himself tightly and scratching at his arms, squeezing his hands shut and opening them repeatedly.

*Daemon.* Panicked, he jumped to his feet and ran to his son. He held him by the arms and called his name.

“Daemon!” Jon shook him.

He moaned and muttered to himself, yet, he was not waking.

“Daemon?” He shook him again.

He was still speaking to himself. Jon leaned closer to listen, but his words were largely incoherent. He could only pick up bits and pieces.

“…dangerous here… stay safe…” Daemon slurred sleepily.

*What is he dreaming about?* Jon wondered. Looking at his troubled frown, he figured it was not good. He shook him again.

“Daemon?”

His eyes fluttered open. He blinked a few times, focusing his vision.

“F…father?”

“Daemon, wake up.” He spoke softly, squeezing him closer to him. “You were having a nightmare.”

Daemon frowned and pushed him away. “No… no I wasn’t.”

“You weren’t?” Jon cocked a brow. “You sounded troubled.”

*He looks troubled too,* Jon thought, concerned. Daemon’s muddled eyes wandered around, trying to take in his surroundings. Then his eyes found his father’s, and Jon was slightly taken aback by his expression. It was as if Daemon was looking at him for the first time.

“Father…” His son spoke in a little voice.

“Yes?” He replied in a similar tone.

He hesitated, then found courage. Looking his father in the eye, violet on grey, he asked a question Jon knew he would one day hear but prayed he never would.

“Father… did you kill my mother?”

His heart stopped. His heart stopped and so did time. The air stilled, and nothing felt real. A knot formed in his chest and grew and grew until it felt too heavy to bear.

Daemon looked up at him expectantly. Jon opened his mouth, but there were no words.

“Father?” Daemon whispered.

Jon closed his mouth and painfully swallowed. He leaned away from him, their eyes never leaving each other. “I…”
The godswood was silent. The sky darkened as night descended upon them, the children lit fires for light and warmth. The red leaves shook in the evening breeze. But the father and son were oblivious to this all, they were in their own little fragile world.

“So… it’s true?” Daemon asked. “You killed Mother.”

“Daemon…”

“That’s why you never want to talk about her, because you murdered her.”

“I…”

“YOU DID!” He screamed. Daemon stood and looked down on him. “YOU KILLED MY MOTHER!”

“Stop, Daemon… you don’t understand.”

“I DON’T?”

“You don’t.” Jon never raised his voice at his son. He understood his anger, and he deserved it.

“Then tell me!” He demanded angrily. “Tell me right now. I want to know the truth.”

Jon looked away at the swaying red leaves.


After a moment of silence, still unable to look his son in the eye, he decided to do the right thing. Not matter how painful it was.

“The truth is… I did kill your mother.” He heard Daemon gasp. “Over seven years ago, I followed her South to fight for her, and to fight for her throne. Things got… complicated before then. I discovered who my mother was… and my real father. And I was battling with it within myself. I told your mother and it changed things between us.”

Jon looked at his son. “Daemon, you should know I loved your mother very much. She meant everything to me. I made some mistakes, I trusted others blindly when I shouldn’t have, and then it all led to the people closest to us conspiring against her. She was paranoid, and for good reason. She had every right to be. And since arriving in Westeros, she had only found loss and tragedy. Two of her dragons, her closest advisor and her closest friend… they were all murdered right in front of her eyes. She was drowning in grief, she needed comfort, and I was so selfish and careless I didn’t give it to her.

“And it led her to do something very bad. To hurt many people who were underserving of such treatment. But she wasn’t in her right mind. Your mother was the kindest person I had ever met. She endangered herself and sacrificed the life of her dragon just to save my life. She fought for the safety of the realm during the Long Night. She was good… but even the best of people can be pushed too far.”

Daemon stared, unblinking and with tears in his eyes. Jon took a breath and continued.

“I thought… after seeing what she did… I thought I was doing the right thing. I thought that she was going to… hurt so many others. But I never paused to think about how much she must have been hurting then, to do such a thing. Now I realised how foolish I was, but I was confused by what I saw, I wasn’t thinking properly. And others took advantage of that. I never should have listened to
them. The entire time it was just a plot to get me to do their dirty work so that they could exile me and take your mother’s throne and birthright. I should have realised, but I didn’t. And I have regretted that since.

“Also, because it meant that by killing her, I accidentally killed you. She didn’t know she was with child, neither of us did. After she died, I was exiled to the Wall but chose to escort the freefolk back home. I was struck by grief and sorrow that seemed never-ending, I was haunted by nightmares every night and visions of her when I woke… when I ventured this far North seven years ago, I intended to die here, Daemon. I didn’t think I deserved to live after what I had done.”

Tears were rolling down their faces. Jon sniffed, and finished the story.

“The children saved my life. And when I came here, the Gods offered me a boon. You know the rest of the story, hm? I’ve told you. I prayed for your mother, and instead, they gave me you. I was afraid of such a responsibility, but I was determined to keep you alive and safe. There are people south of here who still fear your mother, and you are her blood, if they knew you were alive, I… don’t even want to think of that they could do to you.

“So, aye, I did kill your mother. And I regret it. I regret it because… I loved her and I made a terribly foolish mistake. And because… it is because of me that you are not recognised as the prince and heir you were meant to be. It is because of me that you have had to grow up as far North as possible, hidden from the world, instead of the magnificent castles you would have been accustom to. And it is because of me that you grew up without her. And I am truly sorry, Daemon. If I could change things, if I could bring her back, I would without hesitation. But I can’t, so I can only hope you can forgive me.”

The silence stretched between them. The only thing they could hear was the rustling leaves, the crackling wood in the fire and Daemon’s sniffling. A long moment passed until Daemon spoke.

“I don’t want to be mad at you, but I still am.”

Jon nodded. “That’s understandable–umpf!” Daemon flew into his arms and buried his head in the crook of his neck.

“I don’t like seeing you cry either.” He murmured in his ear, hugging him. “I don’t like seeing you sad.”

Jon’s heart shattered into a million pieces. How could Daemon still love and care for him after what he had done? After he had told him the truth? It has been seven long years, and an even longer internal journey for Jon. But even he himself still struggled to reconcile with the man he has become since the day he last held Daenerys.

Jon’s arms slowly wrapped themselves around his son, his treasure, and tightened. Even though the rational side of him knew that Daemon would not spurn him now, the fear that had manifested itself within him for years whispered that it was not too late. He held onto his son like he would never let go. Tears fell freely down his cheeks. Even when Daemon is angry with him, his love is unconditional, and nothing can ever change that.

Jon never thought it possible to love your child more than you already did. But as he held his son in his arms and felt warmth blossom in his chest, he discovered something new.

“I love you, Daemon.” He whispered into his golden curls.

“I love you too, Papa.” Jon sighed the breath he never realised he was holding. If Daemon’s show of
affection broke his heart, hearing him say those words mended it. He had dreaded Daemon’s reaction for years, and after enduring several long years of fear, these were the words he needed to hear.

Daemon pulled away slightly and stared at his bare chest. Specifically, the rough scars on his chest and stomach. He traced a finger on one of them in deep thought.

“You died once, but you came back.” He commented out of the blue.

“I did.”

“A red priestess did it?”

Jon cocked his head. “Aye…”

Jon frowned as he silently stared at the scars, fascinated. “Daemon, you’re not acting like yourself. What is the matter with you? And how… how did you discover what I did?”

He looked up at him. “Where is Vol-an-tis?”

“Volantis?”

“Aye.”

*Where would he have learnt what Volantis is? I have never mentioned it to him…*

“East of Westeros, very far from here. Why do you ask, son?”

He looked away in thought.

“Father… if you could… would you like to see mother again?”

Jon looked at him like he had grown a second head. *Why is he acting so bizarrely?*

“Without question, Daemon.” He answered earnestly. “But what does that have to do with–”

“What would you do?”

“What?”

“What would you do?” He repeated. “If you saw mother again?”

Jon was dumbfounded. “I… I would… Gods, Daemon, I don’t know… I would… give her a big hug and kiss, if she doesn’t kill me first.”

Daemon smirked at his answer and reached for his hands. Leaning forward, he spoke.

“Then let’s go right now.”

Jon wasn’t following. “Where, Daemon?”

“Volantis!”

“Why?”

“Because that’s where she is.”

“Who?”
“Mother.”

Jon gazed long and hard at his son, then sighed deeply. He wasn’t sure what had gotten into him, but whatever it was, it had gotten too far. “Daemon… that isn’t funny. Don’t joke like that.”

Daemon shook his head, still smiling. “It’s true father, it’s all true! She speaks to me in my dreams. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner, I didn’t want to make you sad. But I’m not a liar, father, I promise. Mother told me what happened. She told me you killed her, and she told me it was because bad people told you to do it. And she told me that a Red Priestess brought her back to life, just like what happened to you…”

Daemon continued talking, but Jon didn’t hear a single word. He absolutely stunned. Dany… no, it can’t be… it can’t be true.

“And she said that she was in a place called Volantis! Father please, you have to believe me! I’m telling the truth! I promise!”

Suddenly, things became clearer to him. Why he was always so secretive with his dreams, why he was always so curious about what happened between his mother and I… why he spoke High Valyrian in his sleep…

Jon looked into his eyes and he could just tell, he knew those eyes better than anyone, and he knew when they spoke the truth.

The Gods never brought Dany back to life… because she was already alive. The realisation set in and hit him like a collapsing tower.

She breathes…

She is alive…

She knows Daemon exists…

She knows he is with me…

And she is in Volantis…

“…Father?” Daemon shook him. “Father, can you hear me?”

“Aye…” Jon replied, dazed. “Aye… I can.”

A million thoughts raced through his mind and it left him dizzy. He blinked, and the next thing he knew, he was lying down, staring up, straight ahead at the swaying red leaves above him, and a panicking, wide-eyed Daemon was hovering above his head, asking if he was alright.

He may have answered. He wasn’t sure.

But what he did know?

I must go to Volantis.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you for the comments and kudos!!

So, Jon finally knows… ah!!!!

Everyone will meet soon enough, I promise.

Next chapter: Dany is restless and receives some strange guests.

Until next time!
Daenerys III

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Daenerys was restless.

She could not focus on a single thing, and she has been in this state for what feels like a painful eternity.

Her mind was completely elsewhere. She struggled to sit for longer than a moment, her eyes held a distant look and her hands constantly fidgeted.

Her court remained unchanged, lords and ladies busied themselves with whatever they fancied and all around her, her people were building the lives they desired with their new-found freedom. Nothing was amiss, everything was just as it should be... except for its queen.

She could not sleep, she could not think of anything else. Her mind was on one thing and one thing only.

*My son.*

Dany still couldn’t believe it.

*My son is real, alive and breathing, and so very far away from me. The thought kept her up at night. He is with his father, lost to me in Westeros, as far North as North can be. And possibly in grave danger.*

The thought struck terror within her.

*I need to find him, I need to leave here at once...*

She groaned softly. She couldn’t do that. Not only because Daemon had not told her where exactly they were, but also because she had a mountain of responsibilities here.

She sat on her new throne, the very one Doniphos had commissioned. It was absolutely stunning, a magnificent work of art. Though, when he unveiled it her earlier this morning, she had to feign her excitement as to conceal her true worries. She was dressed in a beautifully crafted lilac gown made of silk, trimmed with white Myrish lace and with a golden belt shaped to look like a dragon coiling around her waist. On her head sat a delicate golden circlet decorated with red and amber beads and dripping pearls, and a large round ruby embedded at its centre. She kept her hair simple today; brushed back from her face and in one long braid that reached the small of her back.

It was a simple and softer look, but regal all the same. Now, she wished she could act like the queen she is. *Focus,* she told herself.

Two men stood below her, bickering and talking over themselves that she could barely hear what they were saying. She couldn’t even recall their names. *Who are these people?* They were dressed in fine cotton, leather and silks, they were jewels on their fingers and their hair and beards were well groomed. *Wealthy men,* she realised, *but not nobility. They would not behave this way in front of their monarch if they were.*

“SILENCE!” A voice boomed over the feuding men. It even knocked Daenerys into attention. It
was Doniphos. Daenerys was taken back, she has never heard him raise his voice so loudly. “You are standing before your queen, not in some rowdy alehouse where such uncouth behaviour would be tolerated!”

He turned to Daenerys and gave her a stern look. *Oh, Daenerys inwardly cringed, he noticed my mind is elsewhere.*

She cleared her throat. “Thank you, Doniphos. Perhaps it would suit these men to settle their differences in an in alehouse, since they so obviously lack the restraint needed to civilly petition their concerns to their queen.” The men looked abash.

“My apologies, Your Grace.” One of the men replied. Not wanting to be outdone, the other fell to one knee and gave his sincerest apologies, to the annoyance of his rival.

“Present your case.” She ordered. “Or else we will be here forever.”

“Yes, Your Grace.” One of the men said, and he told their story. The rivals were both merchants with their own successful trading business, and recently, they have been disputes over who gets to sell their trades and wares on one port. One believes that one side of the port is his turf, the other believes it is his. One accuses the other of sabotaging his business by poaching valuable customers and connections, the other accuses the other of sabotaging his business by plundering his wares. And to add to the ridiculousness, one believes the other’s son stole his daughter, while the other believes that his rival sent his daughter to seduce his son and convince him to run away with her.

Tensions grew until the opposing families were on the brink of slaughtering each other. That was when Daenerys’ men got involved, they were almost caught in the middle of one of their disputes as they patrolled the city’s ports. Lucky no one was seriously injured, but now they have been brought before their queen to answer for their insolence.

Daenerys sighed. She remembered Doniphos mentioning this feud weeks ago in one of their council meetings, before it had escalated to this point. *One family was the... what were their names again? The Balamars and the... Parys’? Yes, I think that’s right. They are very wealthy merchants, they bring good business to my ports.* Daenerys didn’t want to antagonise them, not because she feared him, but doing so might disrupt the peace she had so tirelessly worked to achieve, and that was not a headache she wished to induce when she carries so much to stress as it is.

*How do I deal with this?* She pondered. Before she became distracted, she remembered thinking about a possible solution. The South Western Volantene Port was one of the biggest ports in Volantis with a city that was growing larger with each passing day, and its streets acted as their battleground. She had laid out a map of it when she discussed the matter with her council.

But that was long ago, and before her mind was clouded with thoughts of her son and his father.

Recalling the map, she noticed that there was a way to divide the port into a definite north and south. Though, one side tended to be used more as the other side was still so underdeveloped. The northern side was more populated, had more inns, taverns and trade stalls, and travellers were more likely to rest and spend their coin there than the southern side.

She could request one of them relocate to the South Eastern Volantene Port, but that would cause disruption there as well, and both feuding families have lived and worked by the South Western port for generations, she doubted any of them would be willing to uproot their families and lives.

The same logic could be applied for the Main Port of Volantis. She would not allow their pettiness to be spilt there either, especially considering that was where her armada was stationed, and the level of
trade was significantly less than the other ports. No, they would both need to remain where they are.

But first, they needed to be separated. She could do that, officially set a boundary of which side is south and which is north. As for which family controls which... The Parys family had roots in the most northern part of the port. She looked at the man, he wasn’t a lord, but he carried himself like one. His hair was receding and greying, but she could still see how it was once a brilliant gold. His bright blue eyes were watching her expectantly.

She turned her head to his rival. The Balamar patriarch was his opposite, dark hair and black eyes, and there was barely anything lordly about the way he carried himself, except for his love for jewels and gold. His family had roots in the southern side of the port, the less affluent side, and she could read his family’s story just by observing him. While the Parys family were likely descendants of nobility, the Balamars were not. They’re a family that has had to work hard to establish themselves and their trade. And considering how underdeveloped the southern side was, it was little surprise he would begin pushing up further north for more business. She looked Balamar in the eye, and she could tell what he was thinking. He thought she would side with them, with the wealthier, more noble merchants, and he was gritting his teeth, waiting for it to happen.

She would have to disappoint him for now.

She spoke loudly and clearly. “To put an end to this war on who sells what where, I have decided it necessary to formally divide the port at its centre, creating a northern and southern side of the South Western Volantene Port. The Parys’ shall trade in the north, and the Balamars in the south.”

Parys beamed victoriously, while Balamar gritted his teeth and curled his thick fists in frustration. Her decision meant that he had lost the right to trade in a significant chunk of territory in the most populated side of the port.

“However,” she continued, “I understand that the most southern side of the port is severely underdeveloped. This cannot do, the South Western Volantene Port is one of, if not the biggest port in Volantis. It is a shame that so much valuable space is not being utilised. Therefore, I offer a grant of one hundred thousand golden coins to the development of the port and its surrounding city.” She looked at Balamar, “I’m sure the area will be bustling with activity soon enough as the area is developing, I trust you will do well with my gift?”

Balamar’s jaw dropped. “Y-Yes, Your Grace. Thank you, Your Grace! I will use the money wisely.”

“I’m sure you will, my trusted advisors will ensure you do.” Daenerys was no fool. If she gifted any man with one hundred thousand golden coins and told them to build a city, she had no doubt every second building would be an alehouse and every third, a pillowhouse. She would ensure that the space would be properly developed.

“You Grace, if I may speak?” Parys spoke. Daenerys raised her brow at him, it was obvious her gift left a bitterness in his mouth. Regardless, she waved her approval. “There is also the issue of what his son has done with my daughter.”

“My son did nothing!” Balamar yelled at him. “It was your daughter who filled his head with silly ideas and seduced him!”

“Silence you two.” Her voice, stern, even and hard, cut their bickering short.

“Obviously you two are at a disagreement of what truly transpired. I do not expect the full truth from either of you. Doniphos, any suggestions?”
“I suggest asking the very two people at the centre of the disagreement.” Doniphos waved his hand, and the crowd of court onlookers parted.

Two people emerged. A young woman with long, curling golden hair and bright blue eyes, and a young man with his dark hair combed back, a dark beard and even darker eyes. They walked with their hands entwined, united and with their heads held high.

Their fathers were stunned and furious. But they were not deterred, they did not drop their hands.

“Lenor, what is the meaning of this?” Parys demanded with a low, but threatening tone.

“Zacary, explain yourself!” Balamar shouted at the same time.

“You will explain this to me before you face your fathers.” Daenerys ordered. “Now, what truly happened?”

“Your Grace,” Lenor curtseyed as she spoke, “Zacary did not kidnap me, I did not seduce him into running away with me either. We eloped. Because I love him, and he loves me, and we knew our fathers would never approve.”

“Truly?”

“Yes, Your Grace.” Zacary spoke. “Our fathers may despise each other, but we do not. We have loved each other from afar for years, and we were tired of our fathers keeping us apart with their petty feuds.”

“So, you two made a decision to run away with each other. Did you anticipate your, frankly, reckless actions would almost result in a war? A war that would result in my men having to intervene?”

They shifted uncomfortably. “No…” Lenor replied sheepishly. “We left them letters explaining why we left. We never thought they would take it as far as they did, Your Grace.”

“We were very clear in our letters, Your Grace.” Zacary added. “We knew they would be furious, but we hoped that with time they would simmer down and accept our decision. Their extreme reactions surprised us when we heard.”

_They are children still_, she shook her head. But Daenerys softened the longer she looked upon them, the picture seemed oddly familiar. Lenor with her fair hair and light eyes, and Zacary with his dark hair, beard and eyes… he reminded her of a certain Northerner.

Stop! She scolded herself. She shook her head and refocused.

“Has the marriage been consummated?” She asked bluntly.

Both of them blushed furiously.

“I– I–” Zacary stuttered. Lenor couldn’t meet her father’s eyes and Zacary did not deny it.

“I will take that as confirmation. Then I offer you my blessing for your marriage, and hereby close the matter.” She looked at the older men. “Take this as a lesson, if your children can find love and peace in this war, surely you can as well. If not for the good of the realm, then for the love of your children.” All four of them, fathers and children, stared at her agape, for different reasons.

The lovers were thrilled, Parys was bitter, and Balamar looked uncertain. If he voiced his disagreement, he risked losing the generous grant his queen has bestowed on him. He promptly shut
his mouth and with a light shrug, seemingly accepted the circumstances. He had just been bestowed with one hundred thousand golden coins, a city to shape however he wants, and his son returned to him. He was not going to fuss.

And that concluded court.

She walked out of the Grand Hall and headed to her bedchamber. But before she could even make it half way, she heard steady footsteps behind her.

“An excellent decision, Your Grace.” Doniphos commented. “Developing the southern side of the port will surely bring in more taxes, we will recover the one hundred thousand golden coins soon. Though, I did believe that was an exorbitant amount.”

“How so? Three thirds of it will go to the development of the port and its city, the other quarter will be Balamar’s to do whatever he bloody pleases. He can consider it a treat or his due for the loss of profit he will surely incur by losing precious territory.”

“So I realised. No one can say you are not a generous queen.”

“Perhaps Parys could. He seemed quite bitter that there was no gold left for him.”

“Parys will remain bitter as long as others are making coin that he thinks should be his.”

“Ah, then he shall remain bitter until the day his heart stops?”

“It appears so. It makes no difference to me.”

Daenerys chuckled, earning a soft smile from Doniphos.

“You’re in a better mood now, I was worried before when it seemed you had lost focus.”

Daenerys cringed. “You noticed?”

“Nothing escapes me.” He replied casually. “It is my job as your advisor to observe and take note, should it prove to be helpful to you later. And I have noticed that you are not yourself.”

Daenerys looked away. “I suppose not. But it is nothing you should be concerned about, truly.”

He raised a brow. “Surely?”

“Yes. I just need time to rest.”

He stared at her unconvincingly. “May I ask a question, Your Grace?”

“Go ahead.”

“Could it have anything to do with the approaching anniversary of your… death?” He whispered the last word like it was a secret.

Has it truly been that long? Seven full years?

It wasn’t why she was so distracted. Only she knew the truth, but she couldn’t tell Doniphos what she knew. She has already gone through lengths to convince him that she has no desire to return to Westeros, telling him would undo everything and bring about the doubts she has worked so hard to quell.
She forced a smile. “How is it that you can read me like I am an open book?”

She hoped she sounded convincing, and it appeared to have worked. He smiled back.

“Knowledge and observation are key.”

She grinned reassuringly. “Do not worry about me, Doniphos. I will be fine, I just need some time to myself.”

It was a lovely, cool yet sunny day, but she was not in the mood to enjoy it. Perhaps she would have a bath? Taela shadowed her as she walked to her bedchamber, and at the door, she requested that she see to it.

As she entered her bedchamber, she thought about her handmaiden. She was still reluctant to look her in the eye, but she was warming up. The other day she offered Daenerys a small, shy smile. Sometimes, it feels like she is emerging from her little shell. Slowly, but progress was being made.

“Your Grace?”

Daenerys gasped and jumped backwards, her back to the door.

Two people stood in her bedchamber. A woman and a man.

The door to her bedchamber burst opened and an Unsullied guard rushed in, sword in hand and eyes trained on the intruders.

Their eyes widened and they lifted their hands defensively.

“Your Grace, please! We mean no harm! We only want to discuss a very important matter with you in private!”

“And you think it best to intrude on my privacy, rather than seek a formal audience?” Dany scorned.

“This is information meant only for your ears and yours alone, Your Grace.”

Daenerys considered the pair. The man was dressed in the finest leather and green velvet. The woman was clad in a flowing sky-blue silk dress with an intricately beaded bodice. On their fingers were emeralds and sapphires, they were finely groomed and carried an air of nobility. But what struck her was their accents. Those were Westerosi accents, and very few had that accent here.

“Who are you and why are you here?” She demanded.

Their eyes shifted to the guard standing by the open door.

“You will tell me first, then I shall decide if you are worth my time and forgiveness.”

The man spoke. “My name is Luthor Graceford of Holyhall, this is Lady Alyce Rowan of Goldengrove. We are vassals of the Reach and we are here on behalf of our fellow lords and ladies, to offer you a proposal.”

“A proposal?”

“Yes, to return to Westeros and take what was is rightfully yours, what was stolen from you.”

Daenerys stilled.
Return to Westeros? Her heart sped. She turned to her guard and signalled his leave and instructed him not to let anyone disturb them until she was done.

Daenerys turned back to her intruders. They seemed a bit more at ease with her Unsullied out of the room. She strolled towards her desk and signalled them to sit. They did.

“It has been seven full years since I was last in Westeros, and now I have Reachmen in my chamber requesting I return?” She paused, then laughed to herself, earning strange looks from her guests. “Excuse me for finding it absurd, why would any sane Westerosi want me flying my dragon over their land once again? After what I did? Have you not heard what they say? I am mad. Like my father.”

Lord Luthor and Lady Alyce looked uncomfortable. But not afraid, Daenerys noted.

“Your Grace, I understand it would sound unbelievable that there are those in Westeros who seek to have you sit the throne once more, but it is true. Lady Olenna and House Tyrell were loyal to you once, and we trust her judgement.” Lady Luthor spoke.

“Lady Olenna is dead.”

“And you avenged her and her family. The Reach has not forgotten.”

“So… your loyalty rests on the word and deed of a dead woman?” She cocked her brow. “That is a very shaky foundation to build loyalty and trust upon. And unnecessary, if you would simply open your eyes. I burnt innocent people alive in King’s Landing, should that not be enough to disqualify me from ruling over the Seven Kingdoms?”

They were silent, but Lady Alyce was bursting in her seat, itching to say something.

“Was it the imp?” Lady Alyce blurted, somewhat venomously. Daenerys was taken aback. Lady Alyce looked down at her fiddling hands, abash, as she remembered her courtesies. “My apologises, Your Grace, but… some in the Reach do not think it was entirely your doing. They think Tyrion Lannister told you to do it, then ordered Jon Snow to kill you once it was done.”

Daenerys blinked. Though Tyrion’s betrayal and treason had a hand in it, he was not fully to blame. It was she who rode Drogon, not anyone else.

“Well… No, it was my doing. To be quite honest, I was not in my right mind when I did what I did. I had suffered great loss and betrayal and… I was grieving and bitter and angry and I lashed out at those who were undeserving. It was a regretful mistake that was entirely my own.”

Lady Alyce looked up. “Oh… It is just… people speculate, Your Grace. Lord Tyrion has never been Hand to any good king, everyone he ever advises seems to turn cruel in some way, one would assume it was him all along.” A moment passed before she realised what she had said, and panicked set in, clear on her delicate features. “Not that I believe you are cruel, Your Grace! It’s just–”

Daenerys lifted her hand to silence her. “I did a cruel thing seven years ago. I would not fault you for thinking I am cruel in nature. You do not know me.”

“But we do, Your Grace.” Lord Luthor spoke boldly. Daenerys turned her head towards the man. “We have seen and heard what you have done. In Meereen, in Astapor and in Yunkai. And now, Volantis. People who thought they would never be free now live lives they can control. I do not see cruelty in you, I see a great queen.”

Such sweet words. She wished she could believe them wholeheartedly. Every time she dared think
that perhaps she might have a good heart, the chilling screams of her victims reminded her what she was capable of. It filled her with dread.

“We have been watching you, Your Grace.” Lord Luthor broke her out of her melancholic thoughts. Daenerys cocked her head. “After today’s audience, you have all but affirmed our mission with your actions. You are a generous and kind queen, yet you are stern and just when you must be. You could have punished those merchants, you could have given them nothing, you could have favoured one over the other, you could have punished their children and their families… but instead you favoured the path of peace and prosperity for your subjects and kingdom, at the momentary expense of your treasury.”

Daenerys examined the man’s face. *He is being sincere,* Daenerys saw. *He actually believes what he says...*

He looked her in the eye as he said his next words. “That is a queen I will follow. That is a queen we will *all* follow.”

Lady Alyce nodded her head sincerely at her companion’s words.

Daenerys didn’t know what to say. *After what I have done…*

She shook her head. “Even if I have the support of the Reach, there are still six other kingdoms that despise me.”

Luthor contemplated her words, then shook his head with such finality that it left Daenerys wondering what went through his head mere moments ago. “The realm is in chaos, Your Grace. It doesn’t matter whether they despise you or not, it is ripe for the taking, the time is now.”

Keeping her face neutral, Daenerys leaned forward and rested her chin on her hand. She didn’t want to make her interest obvious, but she could not help it. She hadn’t heard much about Westeros in recent years. Because she been preoccupied with conquering and ruling and maintaining smooth trade within her kingdoms… and because she was avoiding the subject of Westeros entirely. Bits and pieces would make it back to her, but she was still quite clueless on the goings-on of Westeros.

“What do you mean Westeros is in chaos?”

Luthor huffed, annoyed, but not with her. “Where do I even begin, Your Grace?”

“You may start with the Crownlands.”

“Massive resistance to the Raven King, Brandon Stark, Your Grace. When he was chosen by Tyrion Lannister to rule over Westeros, it was not with the approval of the rest of the realm, the commonfolk, maesters and lords alike. He is still a stranger to his people, with his strange magic; he does not even follow or respect The Seven. And the people of King’s Landing are tired of being watched by his cursed ravens. The rest of the realm as well, however, there is no other place in Westeros where your words and whispers will surely be heard by the king, than in King’s Landing.”

Dany was intrigued. “And the rest of the kingdoms?”

“Lord Edmure Tully has named himself King of the Trident.”

This surprised her. “With his nephew on the throne?”

Luthor nodded. “Yes, Your Grace. It would appear only the Stormlands are unscathed with political strife; the other kingdoms are not so lucky. The Mountain Clans in the Vale have grown bolder and
are invading keep after keep, every day is a fight for the Valemen. The Westerlands is being ruled by
Tywin Lannister’s bastard niece and her husband, Joy Hill, now Lady Joy Lannister by decree of the
king through her cousin, Tyrion. But they still remember the Hand as the man who killed Lord
Tywin Lannister and helped you invade and conquer Casterly Rock. They hold no love for him,
whatsoever.”

Hearing those words pleased Daenerys. She expected the Westerlands to detest her, she had defeated
them after all, but for them to despise Tyrion as well… it left a taste as sweet as honey in her mouth.
Luthor continued.

“The Reach… The Lannister imp gave it away to his sellsword. If not for the efforts of the
Reachmen and specifically, Lady Mina Tyrell, he would have bled the Reach dry of gold years ago.
The Dornish have invaded our lands, and he would rather spend his days in a whorehouse, sated
and drunk. He cannot not remain the Lord of Highgarden for long, but still, there is turmoil in our lands.
But at least we can count ourselves lucky we are not the North…”

The way he said those last words, with such unfortune, it made Daenerys salivate. “What about the
North?”

“Famine, Your Grace. And a nasty invasion from the Ironborn, led by Queen Yara Greyjoy. The
North has never been weaker. They have lost much territory, and we have heard whispers that the
Northern Lords are unhappy with their Queen. The kind of unhappiness that could sprout a
rebellion.”

It took everything in Daenerys not to smile. It is what that Stark bitch deserves.

Oh, how sweet it would be to return to Westeros and show them once and for all, her flesh in all its
glory, perched high on Drogon’s back, and triumphantly shout to her enemies, ‘you thought you
could end me, well, here I am!’ She could sate her hunger for the vengeance that has relentlessly
been gnawing at her insides for years…

But she has responsibilities here, in Essos. She could not up and leave to enact her vengeance,
because then what? Even if she managed to kill those who wronged her, even if she has the support
of the Reach… what makes her think she will have the support of everyone else? What makes you
think they will allow you to stay their queen? She wondered gloomily to herself. It will be a
precarious crown on her head, yet here, she had stability and certainty. Everyone recognised her rule.
Everyone respected her rule. She had everything she needed here.

Well… not everything.

Her son was in Westeros. Daemon had mentioned it was dangerous, is this why? Her heart sped in
her chest. Her son was in trouble, and she was bound to her duties here. And yet… she entertained
the idea of returning to the land that once shunned her.

She looked at them both with stern eyes. “If I were to return to Westeros, what makes you think they
will not settle their differences to beat me back?”

They glanced at each other.

“The realm has never been so divided, Your Grace. I truly do no not think that will be a problem.
Even those who are in alliance are too weak to beat you and your forces back if you were to return.”
Alyce replied.

They make it so tempting…
For the longest time, she felt like such a failure in the eyes of her ancestors. She failed to maintain the seat they had created, for longer than mere hours. And now, those who fought against and betrayed her family rule the lands they once fought and bled for. A realm that she nearly died and sacrificed everything for… It was not right.

Though the chain was imaginary, she felt it weighing heavy on her ankle. She could not just abandon the East, not after everything she has done to win it back and more. When she left Meereen to conquer Westeros, it fell back into dilapidation. What would become of her empire here?

She was still so unsure.

“I thank you for your proposal. But I need more time to think on it. Until then, please, allow me to move you into more suitable accommodations within my palace. You are my guests, from this moment on. When I have made my decision, I shall promptly let you know.”

The Reachmen bowed their heads and left her chamber. A moment later, she heard a soft knocking on the door and saw Taela pop her head in.

“Your Grace, would you still like your bath?”

She shook her head. “Not now, later, please. I would like to be alone.”

Daenerys sat in silence. She listened to the gentle swaying of the trees outside her window. The birds singing. The murmur of chatter in the gardens close by. She tapped her fingers on her desk and sat back, a frown creasing her forehead.

Her mind was blank.

She sat idly for what felt like an hour. Aware, but closed off from the world around her.

As expected, her thoughts drifted back to Westeros. She stood and crossed the floor to a drawer nearby and received a rolled map. She cleared her desk of loose papers, ink and quills, and unrolled the parchment she had already spent hours looking at the day before.

It was so large, it took up her entire desk. But she was focused only on what was at the very end of the map.

There was barely anything marked past the Wall. The North had every castle, keep and fort marked, but past the Wall, there was some forestlands and some mountains and valleys and rivers but then… but then the further she gets, there is nothing. It is unmarked and unchartered territory.

The Land of Always Winter, that’s where they are. There was nothing called The Heart of Winter marked on the map, and no amount of staring would suddenly make it appear to her. The land was vast and unchartered for a reason.

I need to be there, I need him in my arms, I need to make sure he’s safe.

The uncertainty of Daemon’s safety made her feverish with worry. He had not appeared to her in her dreams since she discovered his existence. She had contemplated flying to Westeros and over the Wall just to search for him herself, but she didn’t know the first place to look.

And then there was also Jon Snow. He was with Daemon. If she sought out her son, she would find him as well, and it made her anxious. She wasn’t sure what she would do if they met again. Before, she was certain she would make him pay for his betrayal. But now things had become so entangled and complicated, she found herself wholly undecisive.
If she killed him, or separated them in anyway, she knew she risked losing her son as well. But the sting of his betrayal still ached to this day, the wound of his treachery was slow to heal. She only wants what is best for their son and that requires facing this impasse between them.

Daenerys tiredly plopped back into her seat and buried her head in her hands.

There was no easy decision here. Her life in Essos, invading Westeros, Daemon, Jon, her vengeance, her empire, her legacy, her rule… could she truly have it all? Or once again, would she have to sacrifice one thing for another? As for what she would sacrifice, she was still undecided.

But there was still one thing she was certain of. Regardless of whatever comes to be in the future, she will have the one thing she craved most in the world.

Her son by her side.

And she would do whatever it takes to make it happen and keep him there.

*Whatever it takes.*

Chapter End Notes

Hello there!

Thank you all so much for the comments and kudos!

Next chapter: Jon and Daemon leave the Heart of Winter, but not without receiving a few strange gifts before their departure. Also, the duo unexpectantly stumble closer to their goal.

Until next time!
“So… are you going to tell me now?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean!” Daemon was jumping in his saddle. His excitement palpable on his face. “You haven’t told me anything since we left.”

Jon played coy. Hiding his smile, he pretended to deeply ponder his son’s words. “Whatever do you mean? What exactly should I be telling you?”

Daemon groaned dramatically and rolled his eyes.

Stifling a laugh, Jon kept his eyes forward as he watched Ghost sniff the trail ahead and weave through the trees. The snow has favoured them lately, allowing the duo to travel through the night occasionally. The sky was bright, and the winds were bearable. They had been travelling for days now, and Daemon was growing impatient. Jon however, was pleasantly surprised that he had lasted this long without asking, though.

“Please tell me how we’ll be travelling to Volantis?”

While it amused Jon to see Daemon so irritated, his actions had reason.

It was a lot simpler to pretend to have a plan, than to tell Daemon that he simply didn’t know.

Daemon is still at that age where he sincerely believes that his father knows everything, and that he can do anything. Jon was like that once. He used to think that Lord Stark was the most honourable and smartest man in the entire realm. Never mind that he fathered a bastard, to Jon, he was all-knowing, brave and constantly in control.

As a child, it was hard not to look at him that way. He was the most respected lord in all the seven kingdoms. He was kind to all of the servants, he loved his children and he had grown up hearing stories of all the wars and battles he had won. To Jon, he was not a man. He was above that. Men could be selfish, men could be treacherous, men could lie, and men could be wicked. And Lord Stark was nothing like that.

It has been five and ten years since Lord Stark’s death. And since then, he has finally seen him for who he truly is. A man. A man who could lie to the entire realm to protect the people he loves. A man who was never raised to be the heir, yet reluctantly thrust toward lordship. A man who was almost too honourable to a fault. A man who seemed naïve to how much people craved power, and what they are willing to do to maintain it. A man who made mistakes and paid the ultimate price.

Jon was now a father himself, to a wily boy of nearly seven. And he finally understands what it feels to be in Lord Stark’s position. He wished he were here to hear that. What would Lord Stark say? Jon mulled it over.

He looked at Daemon, into his curious and hopeful violet eyes. And he knew what Lord Stark would say. There was a fundamental difference here; while Jon had to learn the truth years after Lord Stark’s death, Daemon already knew his father was flawed. He knew he was just a man who could
make mistakes. There was no need for the pretence, he could tell the truth, and Daemon would still wholeheartedly put his trust in him.

“Truthfully, I do not know what to do next.” Jon admitted. “I’ve thought on it, and I have encountered obstacle after obstacle in my planning. Leaving the North could be a problem.”

“A problem? Why?”

“Daemon, do you know what it means to be exiled?”

He shook his head.

“It means that I cannot return to the lands beyond the Wall. I was sent here mainly for what I did to your mother, but also for political reasons, I’m sure. I could be punished for returning.”

Daemon scrunched up his nose. “What will they do? Hit you? You could fight them off!”

Jon chuckled. “No… I think my punishment could be more severe than that. Perhaps they’ll cut off my head, or a limb or two?”

Daemon paled and a flicker of defiance passed his eyes. “But… mother is alive now. Doesn’t that change anything?”

“It changes nothing, and it changes everything. My exile will not be overturned because she is alive, in fact, it likely endangers our lives even more.” Jon gave him an earnest look. “I still love your mother, and they know if given the opportunity to help her, I would not think twice on it.”

“And they don’t like that.” Daemon commented, understanding the situation. “The bad people… they’ll try to keep us from her.”

“If we are caught.” Jon added. “And that is just one problem, there is also the problem of… you.”

“Me?”

“Aye. No one south of the Wall knows you’re alive, Daemon. But if we are to make it to Volantis, surely that might change. Without a doubt, they will try to separate us…”

Daemon gasped at the mere thought of it occurring and shouted angrily, “we won’t let them!”

“Aye, we won’t.” Jon agreed with a grin. But his mood quickly turned sombre as he thought on it deeply. He didn’t want Daemon to think it could happen, but… if it did, he truly couldn’t imagine what they would do to him. He would never leave his son with his family south of the Wall, not after they betrayed him, not after they conspired against his mother. He would not throw his son to the wolves.

These worries have kept Jon awake at night. That, and the Night Queen.

He needs to be safe. And the only way he can be safe is if he’s with his parents… or at least one of them, far, far away from here. Jon shut his eyes and exhaled deeply. I must find a way to Volantis, quickly.

“You’ll figure something out.” Daemon said confidently, breaking through his solemn thoughts. “You always do.”

Jon kept his head facing forward, on the road ahead. Silently, praying to the Gods for a miracle.
The weeks passed quickly, and the weather remained kind and light. A journey that would have taken them moons took a few weeks, as the absence of heavy snowfall and storms allowed them to travel through the night and rest for shorter periods of time. They soon found the Milkwater and riding alongside it, Jon knew it was only a matter of hours before they reached the Fist of the First Men.

However, fatigue quickly caught up with them. The forest lands were in the distance, Jon could see the snow-covered trees from the mountain he stood on, but they could not travel any more. Not without losing one or both of their horses to exhaustion.

And besides, this type of travel was not good for a boy of nearly seven. Daemon needed proper rest. And so did he; admittedly, his tiredness made him increasingly paranoid. They made it this far without encountering a white walker, but for how long would that last? At every sound, whether it be the shake of a bush or the snapping of a twig, his heart would beat erratically, and his unsteady hand reached for Longclaw.

He was in no condition to fight.

He needed to rest.

He looked over to Daemon, whose head was bobbing as he tried tirelessly to stay awake in his saddle.

Jon rode closer until he was close enough to touch. “Daemon?”

“Hm?” Daemon replied half asleep.

“I think we will stop soon.” He pointed ahead. “There’s a small cave up ahead. I will unpack, you tether the horses.”

The sky hadn’t yet darkened, yet Jon lit a fire as Daemon laid sprawled out on his furs, already deeply asleep.

Jon watched him, savouring the peace. The crackling of the wood, the whistle of the wind, Daemon’s soft snores… It was a lullaby, and Jon’s eyes began to droop. But though his body screamed for the sweet oblivion of rest, his mind was racing.

There was still so much to think on. Starting with the Children of the Forest.

He had been completely and utterly thankful for their assistance. Before they left, he had asked a favour of Twig.

In the early hours of their departure, as Daemon fed and watered the horses and when he was sure he was out of ear shot, Jon slinked away to the Heart Tree, where Twig sat waiting.

“I have finished.” She had informed him, handing him the wood.

“Thank you, Twig.” He inspected the object. “I apologise, it was short notice, and it looks wonderful, truly.”

A smile crept over her lips as she casted a glance towards Daemon. “I made it out of weirwood. I think he will like it.”

“Without question. His name day is approaching. I thought I would give him something special.”
Jon held it in his hands. It was relatively light, but quite tall for a boy of seven. *He will grow into it,* Jon was certain. He eyed the intricate carvings and letters. “I like the carvings. But what are these runes?”

“Charms! It will help him grow stronger.”

Jon smiled. *I hope so.*

He had kept the gift wrapped and carefully hidden from his son the entire trip. Even now, his bag holding his present sat beside him. His gift was not ready yet, he hoped to have it done before his name day.

But Daemon’s gift was not his main concern where the Children were involved, it was what happened after.

Just before he left, for perhaps the first time, he interacted with Red Leaf. As he was saying his farewells, he was interrupted by Red Leaf who silently approached him and stood right under his nose.

He had offered her an uneasy smile. She did nothing to ease the tension. She opened her mouth and spoke in her mother tongue, a language so ancient it sounded nothing like words. The Children of the Forest had their own tongue, a language no living man spoke. And yet, Red leaf spoke to him, and looked at him expectantly when he didn’t answer.

He looked towards Twig for help.

“She made something for you and Daemon.” She translated.

Red Leaf lifted her hand and dangling from her pale fingers, were strings of blood red beads. Jon carefully took them in his hands and examined the gift, mesmerized by its artistry. The beads seemed to have been made of solidified sap from the weirwood and at its end was a small piece of white wood, carved to look like the Heart of Winter with incredible detail, down to its long, stoic face.

Suddenly, a head of pale, curly hair obscured his view as Daemon, who had just finished feeding the horses, peered over to marvel at the beads. “That’s pretty!”

“Aye, it is.” He lowered the beads over his son’s head, letting the weirwood dangle close to his heart. “It is a gift from Red Leaf, why don’t you thank her?”

Daemon beamed at her, but instead of saying ‘thank you’, he lifted his hands to his mouth and whistled a chirpy tune that unexpectedly reminded Jon of the melodious chorus of birdsong he would hear as he roamed the Wolfswood, joyfully hunting with Lord Stark and his brother, Robb, during his youth. It left him speechless.

Red Leaf’s eyes widened in surprise. And for the first time, Jon saw her smile.

Daemon had an unbelievable talent for learning languages… even the ones no man was supposed to speak. Jon’s heart swelled with pride. He could scarcely believe that from his seed sprout such extraordinary talent.

As for Jon, who could not sing their song, he showed his gratitude by bowing his head. Earning him a shy grin from Red Leaf as well.

Acorn, who had been petting Ghost by the pond peered at them.
“Those are Godsbeads!” She cheerfully informed them. She skipped to them and held Daemon’s small weirwood in her slim fingers. “It connects you to the Heart of Winter, no matter where you go.” Her smile suddenly vanished, and she cast them a stern gaze. “Never take them off.”

She leaned closer to them.

“Never take them off.” She repeated.

He and Daemon heeded her words. Never take it off, he tucked the strings of beads beneath his furs.

As the sun rose, lighting the sky and signalling their departure was long overdue, they said their goodbyes.

“Hopefully we meet again soon.” Twig said.

“It took us moons to travel here from Hardhome. I suppose if the snows are kind, and we occasionally ride through the night, we can make it sooner. But even then, it will take us even longer to travel by ship to Volantis. So unfortunately, I don’t think we will be seeing each other any time soon.” Jon replied.

To Jon’s surprise, Twig had chuckled to herself and looked at him with an amused twinkle in her eye.

“That is not what I meant, Jon Snow. But you will find out soon enough.” Her eyes momentarily dropped to his chest. “Farewell, and safe travels.”

As Jon silently stared at the crackling fire, mesmerised by the floating embers, his hand absentmindedly reached beneath his furs and pulled the beads out.

“What did she mean?” He wondered aloud.

His eyes began to droop closed, and he yawned. The sky was beginning to darken, and he was the only one awake. The horses slept, Ghost rested beside Daemon, and he felt sleep close approaching to claim him.

The Children of the Forest, Bran and his ravens, their journey to Volantis, Daemon’s safety, Dany, the Night Queen and her army… there was just too much to think about, too much to ponder, too much to worry about. Sleep wrestled with him, and after a great battle, won the struggle. He fell on his furs, and the cave blurred then darkened as he slipped into the peaceful land of slumber.

And he was quickly pulled out of his peaceful state when he heard the sound of footsteps approaching.

White walkers! Jon’s eyes widened, alarmed, and he was on his feet in a matter of seconds.

Ghost’s ears were perked, and his eyes stared straight ahead. Jon reached for Longclaw at his side and she sung as she was unsheathed. Ghost was at his side in a blink. Daemon however, was still fast asleep.

Jon silently approached him and shook his shoulder.

“Huh?” Daemon asked, sleepily. Jon placed a finger to his lips and mouthed ‘shhh’ and that was when he heard it. The footsteps. And Daemon’s eyes widened.

He jumped towards his bag and scurried to get his slingshot. Jon steadied his hand and shook his
head. The message was clear. *Sit still, stay behind Ghost, do nothing.*

With the wave of his hand, he instructs Ghost to remain where he is. He, on the other hand, approaches the opening of the cave and stands beside it in the shadows, with Longclaw steady in his hand.

He would plunge his sword in the white walker’s back the minute it passed him.

“I know what the fuck I saw!” One of the men exploded. “You saw it too!”

Jon’s brows rose. *Not white walkers, they are men.*

“I…” Another replied, flustered. “*Shit.*” He cursed.

“We should have turned back. This is bloody hopeless; do you know how fucking big this wasteland is?”

“What if he was lying? He did that shit on purpose, he knew what was out there and he sent us to our deaths!” Another spat, venomously.

“A coincidence, I’m sure—”

“Bullshit! It was a stupid idea coming here, and we should have just left— wait… is that a fire?”

The men were silent. Jon’s hands tightened around his sword.

“Yeah, and there are horses ahead as well.”

“Who the fuck would… J– what are you doing? Come back here!”

Someone was running towards the opening of the cave. The snow crunched beneath their feet, and Jon’s arm was tense with anticipation.

The man entered, and so did his companions in an attempt to pull him back.

And he was met with a ferocious white wolf, baring his teeth. Behind him, Daemon stared at them, not with fear, but with curiosity.

“Oh shit,” He cursed, his friends too, hissed a mirage of curses. “Oh shit, oh shit. Oh shit!”

They turned to run. And found themselves at the end of a Valyrian Steel blade. Their hands reached to the hilt of the swords, but with a stern warning from the Northerner, they stayed their hands.

“Who are you,” Jon growled, his voice low and dangerous, “and what are you doing here?”

Their faces paled when they saw the dark blade aimed for their throats.

“I…” One of them began. His eyes constantly flickered from the blade to the direwolf. “I am Garth Flowers. These are my companions, uh… Emmet and Rolf—no, Ralf.”

Jon’s dark eyes regarded them closely. A southern bastard from the Reach, he spoke with a lilt reserved only for those nobleborn. *Bullshit,* Jon thought.

“*Garth Flowers,*” He repeated slowly, scepticism heavy in his tone. “Why are you here?”

“Oh um… He looked away for a moment, the other men looked at him expectantly. “To see what is
north of the North?"

Jon was unmoved by his weak answer, and it was obvious to the man. His eyes flickered to Ghost.

“That’s a… big wolf.” He commented with a nervous smile.

“Ghost isn’t a wolf, he’s a direwolf.” Daemon corrected.

“A direwolf?” The nervous smile was swiftly swept from his face. “A direwolf…”

His head snapped in Jon’s direction, a frown on his brow.

“You’re Jon Snow, aren’t you?”

A dark look crossed over Jon’s features. And before he could react, his sword was beneath the stranger’s neck. The man lifted his hands defensively.

“I mean no harm! Truly! I… I’ve been tasked to look for you!”

“Look for me?” Jon spat. “Who are you?”

“I… My name is Jason Hightower. Son of the late Leyton Hightower, Lord of the Hightower and of Oldtown.”

A Hightower? Beyond the Wall?

“First you say your name is Garth Flowers and now you say you are Jason Hightower. Tell me the truth, before I cut out your lying tongue.”

He looked back at Ghost. “I would be happy to. I truly mean it, we mean no harm… could we please just speak without the threat of being mauled.”

“No.”

“Father?” Daemon spoke up. “Let them speak.” He turned to the men again. “But if you lie again, Ghost will tear you apart!”

The boy is too curious for his own good, Jon rolled his eyes. For a split moment, Jon noticed the peculiar look on the man’s face as he gazed upon Daemon, before he turned his attention back to him. They all looked to him anxiously.

“Put your weapons down, all of them.” He instructed. They complied. “Now step away.”

“Sit.” Daemon instructed, in the same authoritative voice his father used. They stared at him, bewildered.

“Sit.” Jon repeated coldly.

They did.

Daemon stood beside his father and Ghost, separated by the fire, they faced the strangers.

“You know the consequences,” Jon warned, his voice level and calm. The man was nervous, he could tell.

He watched him swallow a lump in his throat. Then he spoke.
“My name is Jason Hightower, these are my friends, Deryk Redding and Alyn Oldflowers, but we call him Pots. We have travelled from Oldtown, in search of you.”

“Why?”

Jason stared at him, reluctant to speak. “To… to return you to the Reach.”

“Why?”

“So that we may crown you king.”

The silence stretched between them, no one in the cave saying a word. Jon’s face remained passively stoic. But his eyes were grey ice. From the corner of his eye, he could see Daemon looking up at him, his violet eyes twinkling in the firelight and his mouth in a ‘o’ shape.

“You have wasted your time here.” He said soft, yet sternly.

Jason gritted his teeth. He wasn’t surprised, Jon could tell, but he wasn’t satisfied with his answer either.

“I understand why you wouldn’t–”

“Do you?” Jon frowned. “You have come all this way from Oldtown to crown me king. Me? A man who has lived seven years in exile for killing his queen. And you ask that I what? Do the same to my brother? Your king?”

“He is not our king!” Jason responded, heatedly. He and Jon gazed at each other; his fiery gaze on Jon’s ice. “He is not our king… We did not choose him. We did not bow to him.”

“It does not matter to me.”

“It should.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because you are the son of Prince Rhaegar Targaryen and his wife, Lady Lyanna Stark. The throne is supposed to be yours, the kingdom is supposed to be yours!”

Jon’s fingers clutched at his hair as he groaned, exasperated.

“How many times must I say this? I don’t want it! I never have!”

“And that matters?”

“It bloody does!”

“It does not.” Jason replied, deadpan. He fearlessly rose to face Jon.

“Jason…” Deryk whispered to him, tugging on his sleeve in a bid to calm him down. He failed. A deep frown set upon his face, Jason looked upon Jon with visceral fury and disgust. And his tone was as curt as he spoke directly to him.

“Do you truly believe that you are the first man to refuse power when given to you? There have been hundreds before you. Lords and kings before you have felt the same. That they were unworthy, that they were ill-prepared for their role.” He raised a brow in Jon’s direction. “Lord Eddard Stark was the second born son, he was never supposed to be Lord of Winterfell. That was meant to be his older
brother. And yet forced into unfavourable circumstances, he did not run, he rose to the position because it was the right thing to do.”

Jon was speechless. Not because he had been struck by his words, but because this southern lordling had the audacity to speak on his uncle, as if Jon did not know the story. As if he did not live to see it happen. The deathly cold glare he sent the little lordling did not deter him, he walked slowly around the fire, never breaking eye contact. Challenging him, even. Beside him, Ghost bared his teeth. A foolishly dangerous move, Jon thought darkly, to bring yourself closer so I may cut your throat…

“You want to kill me,” Jason observed, unbothered by the sneering direwolf. “That is fair. But I have travelled all the way here and I have had close encounters with monsters I never thought existed until today. Just to search for you, so I will say my peace. You are a selfish man, Jon Snow. You are selfish. Rarely do you meet a man so many are willing to live and die for, and at this moment I truly wonder why they choose to follow you, why they put their trust in you. To what end will you put your needs first?”

“My needs?” He repeated, his voice as spine chilling as a winter storm. Jon’s fists clenched. I helped save the entire fucking realm!

“You needs. Do you truly consider anyone else’s?” He scoffed. “I don’t want it!” He mocked, then laughed bitterly. “You are given what you are given, Jon Snow. What truly matters is what you do with it. And I had heard you were a righteous, honourable man, I had assumed you knew. A boy raised as a bastard yet given a kingship. Inspiring, truly… I thought so. Perhaps because I was the eleventh-born child of a revered lord, compared to my siblings, I am nothing special, but sometimes wished that I could be Lord of the Hightower one day. That I could sit the chair everyone wanted to sit. Until I learnt what it meant for that to be, and I would never wish malice on my brothers. That day I knew, we are given what we are given, and what matters is what you do with it. And it is so bewildering to see a man who seems so uncorrupted by power, who all exalt as good hearted, be gifted the power to change lives for the better and reject it.”

Jon could contain his anger no longer.

“AND WHAT MAKES YOU THINK KINGSHIP IS GOOD?” Jon screamed. “Have you ever been a king, have you ever held power? I have. And it is like constantly having a knife at your throat, where any move you make can mean your end. Who in their right mind wants to live a life like that? I do not crave power, I never have. I can want to have a life free of a knife at my bloody throat! I have held power, I have been Lord Commander, and do you know how that ended? With my fucking death. I have tried to be a great leader, and I failed.”

“And yet, you learnt nothing. Such is life, Jon Snow. You adapt, or you die. It is the law of nature. If you live long enough to return to your feet, you return stronger, more learnt in your experience, and with a vengeance. It is how you survive.” Jason threw him a condescending look. “Yet you are willing to fall, and never rise again.”

“I don’t want to fucking rise. I want peace!”

“And when will you learn that you’re never going fucking to get it?”

Jon was silent. He heard the voice of Ser Alliser Thorne. But you, Lord Snow, you’ll be fighting their battles forever. He gazed at the Hightower lord with a grim expression.

“Leave here.” He growled. “Now.”

“I will not.” He growled back, his eyes briefly flickered towards Daemon. “I see you have a son. A
Targaryen through and through. I do not need to inform you on the happenings in the realm beyond the Wall, but I can assure you, nothing is well. Thousands if not millions, lords and commonfolk alike, oppose your brother and Tyrion Lannister’s rule, they oppose his feathered watchers, and you would be naïve to believe that you can live a peaceful life any longer.

“I can turn around now, and we can never cross paths again. But I can assure you, I will not be the only one sent here to find you. But most likely, I will be the only one you encounter with good intentions.”

“Good intentions,” Jon scoffed. “You want me to help you overthrow a king, the brother I was raised with. You would plunge the realm into chaos, a war, just after we are healing from the scars left by the last one?”

Jason gave him an unusual look, before laughing to himself bitterly. “Clearly you have not felt the affects of your brother’s rule. Even the North looks at him and his family with great suspicion.” Jon raised his brow at this. Jason inched closer to him. “War is approaching, whether you want it or not. You can choose to live passively and wait for it to drown you and those you love, or you can fight for control. You cannot live passively in this world, Jon Snow. You cannot expect to come out unscathed.”

Jon gritted his teeth. He is right; and with Bran able to find me now, it is only a matter of time. But… he had other things to worry about, mainly, the Others…

“I have no time to fight a war over a throne. I have bigger concerns.”

“Like the white walkers?”

Jon did a double take.

“Yes, I know about them. We encountered one on our way here, scared my friends here shitless.”

“No, it didn’t!” Pots denied stubbornly.

“You pissed your pants, you bloody wanker.” Deryk replied flatly, at the same time.

Jon arched his bow. “You killed one?”

“We hid from one. We’re not fools, we don’t carry Valyrian Steel or dragonglass or whatever the seven hells can kill them. But… we saw them. And we were… surprised to see that they weren’t all gone, like the stories led the realm to believe.” Jason looked at him pointedly.

Jon looked away. His eyes found Daemon’s, and he felt a sudden tightness in his chest. Enemies in the North, enemies in the South… is there any place in the world safe for him? Well… he could think of one…

“I cannot be concerned with war right now–”

“Bloody fucking hells…” Jason sighed.

This bloody fool! Tightening his fists, Jon faced the southern lord. He opened his mouth to speak but paused when he saw the grimace on Jason’s face. He looked… remorseful, as his eyes flickered between father and son.

“I…” Jason begins, his speech heavy with realisation. “I understand now. You’re doing this to protect your son.”
Jon’s silence was confirmation enough.

“I know I, well, the Reach, really… are asking a lot of you. By crowning you, it means going to war against your brother and potentially your sister. And that is something you might not be keen to do, even though they really left you to rot here and took your birthright– don’t look at me that way, I have ten siblings and they would never do what your siblings did, but my point is that I understand now that you might not be a vengeful person, and you have different priorities now.

“But the realm needs you. I wouldn’t have travelled all this way if that wasn’t true. The realm is collapsing upon itself, and it needs a leader most can unite behind. And we believe that is you. And perhaps… if you help us, we can help you.” He said, suggestively.

“What do you mean?”

Jason didn’t look all too happy saying it. “If you’re king… if you unite the kingdoms once more, we will march if you command us to. Against anything that might threaten your kingdom.”

The message was clear.

“You would fight the white walkers with me?”

“If you commanded it.”

He sounded unsure. Jon tilted his head and regarded the lordling.

“I’m not a fool, my lord. I know your word means nothing, and most likely, the lords of the Reach would rather use me as their puppet to control the throne and all its lands.” It was then that an idea sprang into his mind, and he wondered why he hadn’t thought of it earlier.

Jason was stunned. What could he say? It was likely true.

“I would need a lot more convincing…” Jon scratched his beard, enjoying making the southron lordling squirm.

“Uh…” Jason spared a quick glance to his companions, who were equally clueless on what to do.

“Well… what can I do to convince you to join us?”

“Well firstly, you’ll travel to Hardhome with me. It is too dangerous for the freefolk to stay north of the Wall, they need to travel south once again.”

“Oh… that’s fine. I’m sure we can–”

“How did you travel here?”

“Excuse me?”

“How did you travel here? To the North.”

“By ship.”

A smile slowly grew on Jon’s face. “Very convenient.”

“Yes. I suppose so.”

“Where is it?”
“It is most likely back at Eastwatch.”

Jon nodded. “Then after Hardhome, we shall make for Eastwatch. And from there, we set sail.”

Jason’s eyes lit up. “To Oldtown? You’ll come back to the Reach with me?”

“No, of course not. Not yet. We shall set sail to Volantis.”

Jason’s face froze, and slowly contorted to apprehension.

“You… you want to go to her?”

Jon kept his face unreadable, but he was equal parts surprised and pleased.

“You know?” He asked, his voice barely above a murmer.

“Everyone knows!” Jason yell echoed throughout the cave. “She conquered Volantis. And who knows when she will set her sights on Westeros.”

“Aye,” he replied flippantly. “Who knows… but those are my conditions. Take me to Volantis.”

He looked at him like he had grown a second head. “A–Aren’t you afraid? That she will burn you alive? You killed her!”

Jon swallowed. “That is my own concern, not yours.”

“It is my fucking concern, I’m supposed to–”

Jon lifted her hand to silence him. “Who knows what could happen when I see her again.” He cast a quick glance to his son. He knew he was making the right choice. “But those are my only terms. If all fails… and she decides that I should not live, you have another Targaryen to crown. A Targaryen you could be in good graces with should she decide to return to Westeros, and I would say that’s a bloody good deal I’m giving you. Either way, the Reach has an advantage.”

“I…” Jason thought on it for a while. He was conflicted, he could see it in the crease of his brows. But Jon would remain adamant. Those were his terms.

Jason sighed in defeat and looked upon him warily. You are a madman, his eyes told him. I know, Jon told him with a small smile.

The two shook hands, and what was done, was done.

It took another few weeks to return to Hardhome. With luck, they managed to evade the Night Queen’s soldiers.

When he returned, Tormund warmly embraced him and declared that they would throw a feast to celebrate his return. However, the jubilant air would soon dissipate. Jon would never forget the look on his face when he told his dearest friend the cold, hard truth, and warned him to make for the South once more.

Jon could only remember the deafening silence of his people, the cold fear in his friend’s blue eyes, and the feelings of hopelessness that engulfed them with his news. Their days of running and climbing over the Wall were over. They were supposed to be safe now. And the looks on their faces hurt him more than any knife in the heart could. And even more, he had informed them that he could not lead them South as he once did years ago. That was another wound that would take long to heal.
The night was filled with bitter tension, as those who had survived the Long Night drowned their sorrows in ale and wondered if it was even worth it to run again. It took great convincing on Jon’s part. And he did not leave until he knew everyone was ready and packed. He placed a letter in Tormund’s hand, and they said their bitter farewells once more.

It was all he could think about as they rode to Eastwatch. The fact that he was not there to lead them. Tormund had been understanding when he told him why, but still… It had felt wrong.

“I will return, Tormund. I have not abandoned any of you.” He promised.

“I know you’ll return,” he said, laying his hand on his shoulder. “You always do.”

Jon breathed a sigh of relief as they approached the remnants of Eastwatch. He had yet to see the severity of the damage, and it made him feel cold. He averted his eyes from the destruction, focusing only on what lay ahead. Past the gaping hole, was the ship that would take him to Dany, and that was his only concern.

Well, not his only concern…

Before boarding the boat, as he gently pulled his son off his saddle and held him close, just past his head, he noticed something odd. Ghost was starring into the sky, silently and unmoving.

“Ghost?” he called. He never moved his head.

Jon followed his sight, and what he saw chilled him more than any winter wind could.

A flock of black ravens. All silent. Unblinking. Their black little eyes gazing at him, and him alone, for the first time in seven years.

And it was at that moment, Jon knew, with complete certainty…

He had entered a dangerous game. And the worst was yet to come.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for the comments and kudos.

I kinda feel bad for both Jon and Jason tbh. Imagine risking your life to make this dude king only for him to be like ’I dun wun it’. I feel like this is probably how most of Jon’s followers felt at the end (if GoT even cared to give them a voice). If I was a member of Jon’s army or even a northern lord, I would have mutinied tbh. I risk my life to fight for you, to crown you, and you do shit all with it! Tuh! Goodbye, sir! As for Jon, I offer him my best Olivia Colman/Godmother in Fleabag impression:

“I’m sorry you had to hear that. But you did have to hear it.”

Alliser Thorne was right. He will never find peace, might as well embrace it and try to take control where you can. Jon is slow to learn, but unlike in GoT, in my story, he learns. Game of Thrones is not a universe where you can live passively and come out unscathed. And now that you have a kid, you’re not just fighting for your life, for fighting for someone else’s. So, whether you like it or not, you have to fight. Harder than anyone else. He realises that.
Next chapter: We go to King’s Landing. The Small Council meet. A plan is set in motion. The sky turns black during the day, and carnage ensues.
He had not been able to sleep in several long moons.

He spent every morn forebodingly gaze up into the sky, expecting to see a winged beast descend upon him and burn him into a tiny pile of ash. Every noon he sat with his fellow councilmen, curled fist in hair, as they screamed and argued and drowned their fears on the looming inevitability of their destruction with deafening, teeth clenching noise. And every eve, he would sit alone in his solar, drunk to the point where he would piss himself without a single care, because why not? He would rather be blackout drunk than feel Drogon’s fiery breath as he unleashed his mother’s fury on him and the entire realm. Sometimes he would have a whore or two or three, because why die alone? He would never grow old, but at least he could die as he always intended: with his cock in a whore’s mouth and a belly full of wine.

The morning after, he would wake. Alone and with a splitting headache that felt akin to someone chiselling away pieces of his skull as he still lived and breathed. He would curse; he would curse her, her name, her life, her dragon, her red priests… he would curse her until his face was scarlet red and his throat was coarse and angry. It was always rage and fury first, then came despair. Full of unbearable dread, he would reluctantly get dressed… and gaze up into the sky, expecting to see a winged beast descend upon him and burn him into a tiny pile of ash. It was a vicious cycle he had grown accustom to.

At this very moment, he sat in the king’s council room, two fingers on the bridge of his nose and his long hair messily shadowing his face. He reached for the flagon of wine and poured it in his cup until it reached the brim.

“I do not understand why we just sit here when she could be on her way at this very moment!” Ser Brienne sniped.

Tyrion took a swing and finished half the cup in one gulp.

“What else do you suggest we do?” Ser Davos replied, he kept his voice level, but Tyrion could hear the annoyance beneath. “We have fortified the surrounding castles, lined the walls with scorpions and have guards watching the skies every hour of every day. What more can we do?”

“Call the bannermen!” She shouted, as if it weren’t obvious to them already. “Call Lord Baratheon, call Lord Hawthorne, call Lord Tully, call Bronn, call Lord Arryn, call everyone!”

He slammed the cup onto the table, startling his peers.

“Do you honestly believe we have not thought of that, Lady Brienne?” He asked, behind gritted teeth. “Lord Gendry, Lord Robin and Lord Jace have not answered my missive, Edmure Tully has declared himself King of the Trident and Bronn is balls deep in some nameless whore to even notice that there is a crisis in the bloody realm!”

Brienne blinked. “What do you mean Lord Hawthorne has not answered your missive? It is your niece who rules the Westerlands.”

Do not remind me, wench. Tyrion gave her a bitter smile.
“She rules in name, but I guarantee you, it is her power-hungry whore of a husband who makes the decisions. I never should have let them marry; I decided on the Hawthorne boy because his family has much less wealth and influence in the Westerlands than the other vipers in that hell’s nest, they should be on their hands and knees kissing my feet, thankful that I would deign to make them a house worthy of continuing the Lannister line. But no, he decides to sink his fangs into my niece and poison her against me.” He swirled the remainder of the wine in his cup as he grumbled bitterly to himself, “he will get his due before I leave this realm.”

The room was silent for a moment as they watched him, the Lannister whose wits were instrumental in the fall of a queen, the expulsion of the true heir to the furthest corner of the realm and who rose to become Hand of the King at his own trial. Looking at him, it would surprise no one to think it was not the same man. Maester Samwell cleared his throat.

“I still think we should try again. Perhaps a letter that is a bit more… forceful? If we are clear on the severity of the issue, perhaps they will come to their senses and march towards King’s Landing as they have been ordered.”

“What is more forceful than ‘By order of the King, you must march to defend the capital against the dragon queen in the East’? Must we threaten to geld them? Cut off their heads if they do not make haste? Then surely, they have more reason to stay away.” Tyrion poured himself another glass.

“They are not being defiant because they don’t believe they are in immediate danger, they are being defiant because they know who would bear the brunt of Daenerys’ fury. Me, perhaps you, and everyone else in this entire room. But mostly me. They will not march to King’s Landing to defend a man they despise so. In all honesty, they benefit more by staying away. Not only will their armies not be engulfed in fire, but when she finally descends upon the realm, they can proudly say they never lifted a finger against her, as they remained neutral throughout it all. They will probably even turn on us when the time comes… anything to save their hides.”

Brienne stared at him. Her big blue eyes, so large and so naïve still, even after all these years. “But… we still have Queen Sansa, we still have the North—”

“What good will her emaciated footmen do against a dragon? They could barely provide Drogon with a decent meal, much less a fight. And even then, do we have the North? How long until Queen Yara Greyjoy becomes Queen of the Iron Islands and the North? She seems to be quite on her way. I hear she is on her way to take Torrhen’s Square, which will be considerably easy, as I have also heard the Tallharts have mostly fled. I’m sure some Northern lord is housing Lady Tallhart and her sons, for they are open to helping their fellow Northmen. But how willing they are to help their queen at the moment, is an entirely different matter. Once the Ironborn reach Torrhen’s Square, they might as well have Winterfell. It is only a short march away.”

“This is madness!” Brienne exclaimed. “Do they not know what they stand to lose by playing this pathetic game? They crowned Sansa their queen! If she loses, the entire North is lost!”

“Perhaps not. The Northmen are playing a little game of their own, I don’t believe they are merely sitting in their frozen castles doing nothing. No… they are plotting.”

Brienne gasped scandalously. “A rebellion?”

Tyrion shrugged. “Who knows. It is said that ‘there must always be a Stark in Winterfell’… I don’t know how willing they are to overthrow one when they worked tirelessly to put them back in power. And besides, Sansa has no heirs. Her brother has no heirs. The only viable candidate left is Arya Stark, and she would never rebel against her sister. There is simply no one left in this realm with Stark blood to challenge her rule.”
Ser Davos and Samwell shared a look, and it did not go unnoticed by the Hand. “Do not even think about it. He has been exiled, and do you remember what we do with deserters? I don’t think you want to see his pretty head on a spike.”

Samwell paled while Ser Davos’ eyes hardened.

“Do you think us capable of treason, Lord Tyrion?” Ser Davos asked, curtly.

Tyrion glared at the man. “Anyone is capable of treason.”

Ser Davos gritted his teeth and curled his gloved fingers; his blue eyes never left his. The tension in the room was stifling to everyone but him, Tyrion was ready for a fight, he was ready for blood, and he would gladly spill it if it meant he could keep his head attached to his shoulders for a minute longer.

But the fight would not come. Instead, the doors swung open and in came Ser Podrick, wheeling their king. They all stood. King Brandon, dressed in all black, kept his expression nondescript and his hands laced in his lap.

“Your Grace.” They all greeted.

He surveyed each and everyone of them. His mysterious grey eyes landed on his green, and he felt a shiver up his spine. The way he looked at all of them… it was unnerving. Like he knows what you are thinking before you even think it… Tyrion loathed it.

“My lords.” He replied dispassionately. “It seems I am interrupting a heated discussion.”

It took everything in Tyrion not to snort. “No, Your Grace. We were merely discussing issues pertaining to the protection of your realm.”

“Hm.” He simply replied. The type of ‘hm’ that suggested ‘horseshit, I knew you fuckers were fighting’ but it is hard to tell with a man who seldomly uses any facial expression. “Then please sit. I suppose I have some relevant information to add to your discussion.”

Tyrion sat and poured more wine into his cup. “And what would that be, Your Grace?”

“Jon Snow has left the North.”

Tyrion nearly dropped the flagon. All heads snapped in the king’s direction, all eyes widened.

“H-he has?” Samwell asked meekly. “You found him? After all of these years?”

“Yes, after seven years I have found him. I have suspected why he was hidden from me, but now I know. He did it with the use of Old Magic. I don’t know where he would have learnt it, but I am certain that is how he has evaded me and my ravens for years.”

Tyrion was not used to seeing his king emote, but he had a keen eye for subtle gestures. Bran was tense. It was in the slight way his fingers were curled in his lap, and in the tiny, barely noticeable twitch of his eye as he spoke. He is displeased, Tyrion thought as he watched him with concealed wonder.

“And… it wore off? How did you manage to find him?” Samwell asked curiously, oblivious to the fact that he was perhaps the only person interested in such information at this very moment.

“Something must have happened to him… I do not know.” His fingers twitched, Tyrion observed.
“But that is insignificant, there are more pressing matters. Mainly, who Jon was travelling with.”

Tyrion furrowed his brow. “I beg your pardon, Your Grace. But isn’t the more pressing matter whether Queen Sansa has captured him or not? If he is heading South, we must find a way to catch him before he falls into the hands of your enemies.”

Bran stared at him. “Jon is no longer in Westeros, Lord Tyrion. He and his accomplices have taken leave by ship.” Bran slightly leaned forward, his dark eyes boring into Tyrion’s. “They are on their way to Volantis as we speak.”

He stopped breathing. He stopped feeling. Shock descended into the room and evolved into a heavy and absolutely suffocating silence. Nobody dared to move or make a sound, they only looked upon their peers, with wide eyes and open mouths and startled features.

“H-h-he…” Samwell stunned stutter penetrated the stillness. “He’s going… he’s going to Volantis?”

“He is going to Daenerys Targaryen.” Bran answered.

Tyrion was numb. I should have sent an assassin after him when I had the chance.

“Well… he needs to be stopped!” Brienne said. “Can’t you do anything, Your Grace?”

“Like what, Ser Brienne?”

Brienne blushed. “I… I don’t know. Send someone to ensure he never reaches her! Warg into a kraken and bring his entire ship down! I don’t know… something!”

Bran cocked his head. “There are no krakens in the Narrow Sea. And there are no weirwoods either. The Essosi do not believe in the Old Gods, they do not plant heart trees, and so I have no power there. Tracking him will be considerably harder.”

“We can still send spies. Any information we can gather on him will be useful going forward.” Brienne suggested. She looked towards Tyrion. “Why aren’t you saying anything? You always have something to say.”

Tyrion clutched his cup in his hand so hard it turned pale. He has someone helping him, someone is plotting with him to destroy me and everything I have built. They are traitors, all of them, treacherous snakes.

“Your Grace?” He began, his voice barely above a low growl as he looked towards the king. “You mentioned he had accomplices. Who were they?”

“Reachmen.” He answered. “But I’m not entirely sure who they all are. Though, I’m certain one of them is a Hightower.”

I fucking knew it! They are plotting against me! Those treacherous bastards! Those deceitful little cunts! I will see to it that they meet their fucking end.

Tyrion took a deep breath and spoke calmly. “They will pay for their treachery. I will send a missive, demanding that they come here and answer for their crimes before their king. I will send instruction to Bronn as well, to ensure they are brought to heal.”

“You may.” The king replied, nonchalantly. “But I doubt that will do much. War has already begun, my lords. It is best we prepare for it.”
Silence reigned over the chamber as the words sunk in. The realm has only seen peace for seven years and yet its people are ready to plunge into it again, Tyrion seethed. Fools, they are all fools.

“My lords,” Bran spoke, “would you please excuse us. I need to talk to Lord Tyrion alone.”

The rest of the chamber shared a look, then stood. One by one, they all filed out of the room, closing the door behind them with a loud thud, sending the room into an ominous silence as king and Hand sat alone, facing each other in uncomfortable silence.

Tyrion was unsure who should speak first. He took a sip of wine and stared at the dark red liquid as he swirled his cup.

“There is more you should know, Lord Tyrion.” Bran stated, breaking the silence.

He closed his eyes, pained. “Why do I have a feeling your news is going to make my day worse?”

It was in times like this he missed Varys. At least if he was going to tell him shit for news, he would crack a joke first. But King Bran was not one for banter. He wasn’t one for casual conversation either. When he wasn’t speaking in riddle, he was direct.

“I believe Jon has a child.”

Tyrion’s head shot up. “What?”

Bran unlaced his fingers and placed them on the arms of his chair.

“Besides the Reachmen, he is travelling with someone else. I know he found a way to hide from me, and for seven years he successful. For some reason, he is now visible to me. But the person who he is travelling with is not. That is how I know he used Old Magic to hide from me, a spell of some sort.”

Tyrion was mystified. “And you believe this person… who you cannot see… is his child?”

His fingers tensed on the arms of his wheelchair. “I cannot explain it. I am aware that someone is there, yet they escape my vision. As he was leaving the North, I watched him interacting with them and he was quite… affectionate.”

“Affectionate?”

“Yes. As a father is to a child. Quite like my father was to us when we were younger. I believe he has sired a child, and he has gone through great lengths to hide him from us.”

“Him? You believe it to be a son?”

“We can only assume, but does it truly matter? The Targaryen line lives on.”

Tyrion snorted. “House Targaryen is dead. Or it will be when we are done with the bitch in the East and handle the bastard. He must know the penalty for deserting his post, he cannot go unpunished.”

The king stared long and hard at him, and for a moment, Tyrion believed he had spoken wildly out of turn and egregiously misunderstood the king’s thoughts and intentions. Jon Snow was his brother after all, even after he stole his birthright. The wine has made me far too bold. But before he could collect himself and apologise, the king asked him a rather odd question.

“Do you believe that an end result can possibly justify the means as to how we arrived at such a destination, Lord Tyrion?”
Tyrion blinked at him. “Pardon me, Your Grace?”

“It is quite a simple question, but undeniably difficult to answer. Can one’s actions be excused if it brings about an end result that would better everyone and future generations to come?”

Tyrion was perplexed. “I... suppose so.”

“Even if the actions are... most egregious?”

*What is he talking about?* Leaning closer, Tyrion looked him in the eye and spoke in a hushed tone. “Your Grace, you’ll have to be more forthcoming with me.”

“As a king, it is my responsibility to maintain peace. I do not want to engage in war, not when we have worked hard to establish it. It is unfortunate that a rotten few would seek to undermine our efforts in order to selfishly further their own gains and ambitions. Don’t you agree?”

“I do.”

“But one cannot stop fools in their fruitless endeavour, can they? War is coming, and there is little we can do about that. Men are fickle, vain, prideful and egotistical... they would be willing to kill hundreds more if it means just one more step closer to power.” The king looked towards the window, where golden light shined into the chamber and engulfed them in a golden glow. “It is better to end their quest before they hurt anyone else and corrupt others.”

*He is talking about Jon Snow,* Tyrion realised. He was under the assumption that the king no longer felt emotion. Bran was no longer a man, he was above that. A powerful entity stuck in the body of a crippled man. But perhaps that emotion was still there, it was not long forgotten. He still felt some affection for the brother he was raised with.

And where there was emotion, Tyrion found a weakness to exploit.

He would not feed the king’s doubts on what to do with Jon Snow. The fool was willing to run to the woman he murdered seven years ago, and he doubted Daenerys had any forgiveness left in her cruel heart after what he did. He was also willing to collude with the king’s enemies and work in tangent to undermine the Ruler of the Six Kingdoms. He also dared to continue a bloodline best left extinct.

Tyrion was not a fool. He knew the entire realm hated him and the king. But they had managed to keep them at bay for so long because there was no one left to challenge their claim. And now, the Reach have Jon Snow in their clutches. A Targaryen who can sire heirs, who has already sired an heir. His very existence was a threat. His son or daughter as well. As long as they breathed, their enemies would always have someone to rally behind.

And now he and Daenerys are on their way to meeting again. If by some slim chance Daenerys welcomed him back into her cause – or even bed, – Tyrion was certain that they would reduce the entire realm to ash if they could. Starting with him, of course.

He could not let that happen.

“What are the lives of few to the lives of many? It is a painful decision to make, Your Grace. But you must consider what is arguably the most important thing in a stable realm: peace. It Is unfortunate that some will be trampled in the race for a prosperous future, but it is essential that the most righteous decision be made. And the most morally just decision, is the one that prioritises the needs of the majority, over the needs of the few.”
“The majority of the realm refuse my rule at present; shall I prioritise their needs?”

“The choices we make now affect countless in the future. Compared to them, they are merely a few to the innumerable lives you shall shape in the future.”

There was a commotion outside the chamber, with frantic voices rising behind the oak doors.

The king turned his head towards the sounds but did not formally acknowledge it. Instead, he turned back to his Lord Hand and spoke as if he had heard nothing.

“I am glad you think that way, Lord Tyrion.”

“You are?”

“Yes. It has made things much clearer.”

Lord Tyrion smiled and bowed his head. “I am happy to hear that, Your Grace. I live to serve you.”

Then the king did something he did not expect: he smiled.

“Yes.” He replied sternly, and ominously. “You do.”

Tyrion’s smile faltered as he waited for the king to reveal he was jesting, but he did not. Slowly the smile melted from his face, but before he could say more, the doors to the chamber burst open and in came Ser Podrick, with Maester Samwell and Ser Davos trailing closely behind.

“Your Grace!” Podrick called breathlessly. With his face flushed red and sweat heavy on his dark brows, Tyrion wondered where he could have been running from. “Your Grace! The city is under attack!”

Those words knocked the breath out of Tyrion’s body and completely stopped his heart.

“She’s here?” He whispered, frightened. “You saw Drogon?”

“No! It is not Daenerys, it is the commonfolk! They are rioting!”

Tyrion breathed a massive sigh of relief and dismissed his concerns with the flick of his hand. “The people are rioting? Well what is there to be afraid of? It is not the first time they have done this, they will tire themselves out eventually.”

“No, my lord, it is not like any riot I have seen. They have swords and bows and knives and pitchforks, they have murdered four gold cloaks! They have set fire to two towers! They are on their way to storm the Raven’s Keep as we speak!”

This is peculiar.

“How many people are there?” He asked.

“Thousands, my lord. It’s a massive gathering. Ser Brienne and the rest of the City Watch are stationed at the gates, she sent me here to get the king to safety.”

Tyrion was speechless. He looked towards the king, who did not look as stunned as he, in fact, he looked barely surprised.

“Your Grace?”
Bran turned to Pod. “That will be unnecessary, Podrick. I do not need to leave, I shall remain here. You all should.”

Pod’s mouth dropped as he looked towards Tyrion. *What do I do?* He seemed to be asking. Tyrion felt for him; *obey your commander or your king?* The choice is usually an easy one, but what do you do when the king’s request is lunacy?

Samwell approached the king. “Your Grace, I think it is best we listen to Ser Brienne’s orders. If she believes the situation is as dire as we think, we should all be getting to safety.”

Bran shook his head. “The situation is not dire. I know exactly what is happening, Sam. This was no spontaneous riot, it has been planned and calculated by the Brotherhood Without Banners, in alliance with the lords of the Reach who conspire against me. They thought I wouldn’t know, but I do. I have known they have been in my city for moons now, poisoning my citizens, and it would appear today is the day they strike.”


He nodded his head.

“There is nothing to worry about, my lords.” He nudged his head towards the large windows beside them. “Take a look for yourself.”

They obeyed, and all three of them approached the window and swung them open.

Below, the streets were filled with angry, jeering smallfolk. Some held swords in their hands, other knives or clubs or spears. In the distance, Tyrion watched as two towers produced black smoke that plumed in the air. Two gold cloaks lay dead from an arrow wound beside the gates of the keep, another one had his face clubbed in until there was nothing left but a bloody, mushy mound and the other bleed face down into the streets, his cloak soaked in red.

Tyrion held the edge of the window tight. They were nearing the gates of the keep. In the distance, Tyrion could see Brienne as she marched along the wall, her gold armour shining proudly in the bright winter sun. She shouted command after command, but Tyrion could not discern them from this far.

To Tyrion, it looked like his time was nigh.

*It would be a sick irony if it were the people of King’s Landing that tore me to shreds, instead of the dragon queen.*

He refused for that to happen.

“So, what do you suggest—” Tyrion began to ask, turning to Bran. Only to discover that the king was not there. His body was there, but his mind wasn’t. His eyes were pale and his body limp; he was with his ravens now.

Irritation bubbled within Tyrion. *The strange fucker would leave us now? When our situation is most dire?*

“What do we do?” Sam whispered, panicked as his wide eyes watched the angry mob of King’s Landing scream and revolt by their gates.

Davos looked towards Tyrion, and he shrugged in response. “The king says that the situation is not dire. We stay here, I suppose.”
He turned to the window and surveyed the furious protesters. The king had said that this was an organised protest, one coordinated by a group of lords from the Reach. *If I survive today, I will rain fury on those filthy Reachmen. Behead them all, seize their lands and imprison their children.*

Tyrion’s lips curled in pure rage. *I will scar their realm so deeply, future generations will know what they have done, and know who dealt justice on their traitors. They will know my power and might, and never forget.*

Below him, he heard the shouts get louder. Brienne paced the wall and shouted to the weapon-wielding men, women and children below.

“Lay down your swords!” Brienne’s voice was significantly drowned out by the angry yells. “This is your final warning!”

One brave, but profoundly stupid soul took it upon themselves to throw a clump of dirt – or at least that was what Tyrion wanted to believe – and hit Brienne’s helm and soiled her white cloak. Others followed their lead, and soon everything from dirt, shit and rotten food was being tossed in the Lord Commander’s direction.

*Fight them,* Tyrion urged silently. *Kill them all!*

But Brienne hesitated. Would she be willing to stand before them all, and order their deaths? Tyrion looked up; in the towers, hidden in the wall slits and windows, archers stood ready, waiting for their command.

*Her damned moral code,* Tyrion shook his head. She had never had to deal with such a situation before. She had never had to wield such power; the decision to end numerous lives all at once. She was still a woman who thought the highest honour one could bestow on a knight, the position of Lord Commander, was about protecting the most vulnerable in society, guarding your king, training recruits and maintaining the royal guard. And that much was true. But it was also about having the power to determine who lives and dies in any moment. You can protect the commonfolk, or you can protect your king, you cannot choose both. *And what will you decide, ser?*

“Notch!” She shouted after a tense moment.

“Draw!” Tyrion raised his brow.

“Loose!” Brienne made her choice.

Several smallfolk fell to the ground; arrows in their heads, arrows in their necks, arrows in their chests. At least four were children. If she was expecting the crowd to scatter in fear, she was wrong. They grew angrier, and much rowdier.

“Notch!” She shouted again.

“Draw!” The wild screams of the commonfolk grew louder.

“Loose!” Arrows rained from the sky, and again, many fell.

And the crowd’s thirst for blood became insatiable.

Strangely, he felt it in his heart to feel pity for Brienne. She had no choice, neither decision she could have made would end well for her. Absolutely none. And yet, she chose anyway. She could have run like a coward, but she stood her ground.

And she did so, even as the smallfolk began pushing on the iron gates of the keep.
Their screams grew ferocious and carnal. Tens of people pushed the gates, and behind them, hundreds pushed them forward, and behind them thousands egged them on.

He could not see her face, but he could tell. From the way her head whipped around. From the way she tensed and stood to attention. From the way she looked to her soldiers. She knew… she knew what was to come.

The gate collapsed, and like an angry swarm of ants, they pushed from their hill and invaded the Raven’s Keep. From where he stood, they looked so little, so insignificant.

Is this what they looked like to you, Daenerys? When you burned them all? He wondered. Like little tiny insects, so invaluable to the realm? To the entire world? Is that why you found it so easy to incinerate them all?

In this moment, if he could, he would do the same.

“We need to leave!” Sam whined. “Oh Gods, I need to get to Gilly and my children to safety—”

Tyrion interrupted him curtly, his eyes never leaving the ants below. “You will remain right where you are.”

“ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND! THEY ARE ABOUT TO ENTER THE KEEP!” He screamed in his ear and turned to leave.

Tyrion was undisturbed. He was mesmerised by the scene below. The commonfolk climbed the wall, overpowering and killing as many gold cloaks as they could in their quest. Brienne cut through one, then another, then another, but Tyrion knew she couldn’t fight forever.

He turned to his king. His eyes were still rolled, his body unresponsive.

Perhaps it is time I make my escape and leave here forever. But go where? There was nowhere to escape. He was hated everywhere in Westeros, and now that his former queen is alive, he would be hunted in Essos. There was literally nowhere he could go. He was a man living on borrowed time, and sooner than later, as Lannisters do, he would have to pay his debt.

He took a deep breath and released it from his nose. To turned in Samwell’s direction.

“Go then.” He spat venomously. “Take flight, you coward. I advise you to shit yourself before they find you, perhaps then they will think twice of eating your fat arse alive when they eventually get your grimy, filthy fingers on you.”

Samwell stopped, and turned to face him slowly. Stunned was an understatement to describe the look upon his face. He opened his mouth, then closed it, then opened it again. He looked to Ser Davos, who looked at Tyrion with pure abhorrence. It was not the first time anyone had looked at Tyrion this way, but it was the first time the old man had. He did nothing, he said nothing, he simply glowered at his fellow councilman. Thoughts were racing though his head, he could tell, but Tyrion did not care to decipher a single one. He simply turned to the window once more. I have little patience for cowards and weak men.

And when he was mere moments from dying, he would not bite back his words.

He tilted his head to the sky and watched. He would spare the commonfolk not another glance, he would look upon the sky.

At least I will see Jaime again.
But he would not see his golden-headed brother, no, he would see something entirely different. This one, a large black mass emerging from the clouds.

For a moment, he thought it was Drogon. But he did not hear the fierce roar he was expecting, no… he heard the screech of birds as a murder of crows descended from the skies.

The beating of their wings brought everyone in the room to attention and attracted them to the window like a moth to flame. Thousands of them, perhaps millions, soared through the sky and blocked the sun. Within moments, the sky turned black and engulfed the city in shadows.

The shouts of the smallfolk faltered as they slowed their advance and looked into the sky in bewilderment, and their yells turned to screams as they scattered beneath the darkness like vermin in the glow of candlelight.

Tyrion watched the sky in open mouthed wonder. What shall you do? He wondered, thinking of the comatose king behind him.

He was not expecting what came next. Truthfully, he was not. He imagined the king’s plan was to scare them all away, to scatter them in this show of power. To simply remind them who reigned above all…

But that was not what happened.

The birds swept down. All of them. And the streets were engulfed with a blanket of dark feathers, blocking Tyrion’s view. But he did not need to see every ghastly detail of what was occurring. He could hear it.

Screams turned to torturous cries, and the streets became paved with red. As the king’s ravens thrust their beaks down, a shower of red mist rose above the crowd as they pecked the eyes, ears, noses, hands and necks. Their vicious calls and the beat of their wings drowned the cries. Like vultures, they circled the city and cleaned skin off bone.

And Tyrion watched the carnage. Stone-faced and deathly still.

In the midst of it all, he spotted a fair-headed knight pop her head above the fray. Like she was drowning and had finally resurfaced to breath in the sweet air of life. But that was not the relief she found. She was covered in blood; blood Tyrion knew was not her own. Her terrified eyes darted around wildly, and Tyrion could only stare as she tried desperately to swat the birds away from the civilians that she, just a moment ago, ordered her arrows to rain down upon. She opened her mouth to scream, but nobody heard her above the noise.

He could no longer look, he had had his fill of this bloodshed. He everted his eyes and looked at his king. He simply stared, his mind completely blank and his body numb. He could not hear a thing, the sounds had frizzled down to this strange, incessant ringing in his ear. He was in a dream, or a trance. He blinked and rubbed his eyes with his hands and then looked at them. He could have sworn they were red, but when he blinked, they were as they always were.

He looked towards his king once more. And barely a moment later, the king’s eyes rolled back and made contact with Tyrion.

“What are the lives of few to the lives of many?” King Bran calmly repeated Tyrion’s words, and with his heart beating ferociously in his chest and his ears defensively tuning out the blood curdling screams that pierced the deathly silence of the chamber, Tyrion could do nothing but look at the king he chose. The man he raised to kingship.
He turned to Ser Davos and Maester Samwell; the former was ashen, heavy breathed, hands tangled in his hair and eyes bulging, and the latter was terrified, and doubled over in a puddle of his own sick. Both of them were expecting him to speak, to admonish the king and throw his Hand of the King pin on the floor, at the feet of his king, and walk away from this carnage…

But he would not do such a thing.

He would resign himself to be the man he has chosen to be.

He wanted to live, at any cost necessary.

He walked back to the table and sat beside his king. With a steady hand, ignoring the stunned and horrified faces of his fellow councilmen, he reached for his cup and took a shaky sip of his wine. It was strange how lately, the wines he had so happily indulged in since his youth always left the same bitter taste in his mouth. He lifted his head and addressed the room.

“What are the lives of few to the lives of many?”

Chapter End Notes

Whoa… the ending got pretty heavy there huh.

Thank you for the comments and kudos!

What I enjoyed about writing this chapter was getting into Tyrion’s head because he’s such a hypocrite. He just wants to live, or at least, live longer than his enemies.

Some of you may be wondering, when are Jon and Daemon going to meet Dany? I promise you, I’m not just trying to be mean by delaying it lol! It is just the way things are progressing in the story. Bad news is, next chapter will be another person’s POV. But good news is, the chapter after that will perhaps be one of the most important yet, if you know what I mean *wink wink* 😊 You’ll get what you’ve been waiting for veeeeeeeery soon. I promise!

Next chapter: Sansa tastes victory, but her joy is short lived when she hears some very distressing news.
She had not been able to sleep the night before.

For the past few days, her nights were filled with restless tossing and turning, before eventually giving up on rest altogether.

And there were many reasons as to why that was, but in essence, it boiled down to her fears of being surrounded by enemies. She had enemies in the east, in the south, in the west and even north from where she stood. She could not trust anyone, not anymore.

After re-reading her correspondence, Sansa put on a thick gown and cloak, and left her bedchamber. She roamed her castle like a ghost, silently and aimlessly.

Even after all these years, Winterfell still carried an eerie ambiance that refused to dissipate with time. Though the castle was rightfully hers and she ruled from it as its queen, there was something profoundly haunting about it as well. It was as if the castle itself was a ghost, a shell of its former self.

And perhaps that was it; she remembered it in its glory, she remembered it when it was so full of love and life and laughter. There was none of that now. The tone of the castle was as grey and dreary as its cold, sturdy stone walls. And she was alone.

Her family had split just as soon as they were reunited. Bran was ruling in the South, Arya was travelling the world and Jon was in exile. She had nobody else.

Once, long ago, it had been her dream to marry and have as many children as she could. But those were the hopes and dreams of a stupid, naïve little girl. That was before she discovered the horrors of men, the horrors of the world… She was now a woman grown, wiser, and with an entire kingdom to run.

Not that she never entertained the idea. No, as Queen in the North, it was perhaps one of the most important issues concerning her reign amongst her advisors. She had no heir. No way to pass down her legacy. No way to carry on House Stark.

It was a difficult situation to be in. A problem that could easily be elevated by finding a suitable husband and bearing his children, but she could not do that. After her experiences, she would rather cut off her arm than be married again. While it was true her time as a pawn of more powerful men had marred her opinion of marriage and men in general, her decision to never marry again was also a political one.

She would never let another man control her. Never again. And men, they are ambitious creatures, easily swayed and hungry for power. If she took a husband, whose to say he wouldn’t try to steal her crown? Men hated being seen as ‘below’ a woman, their foolish pride would never allow it. Would her husband bow to her? Play the role of a dutiful consort while leaving her to the affairs of the realm? She doubted it. He would want to be involved, he would want to have a say in how her kingdom is run, and eventually, he would want to rule.

And she knew her bannermen would gravitate to him, rather than her. They would discard her in favour of a new king given the chance. That is what they did with Jon. They crowned him over her. And she swore to never let anything like that happen again.
Even if the price is not having a legitimate heir.

A biting chill crept up her spine. She could feel the cold night air drifting through the halls and hugged her cloak closer to her body.

*It would be so much easier if Arya or Bran could have children instead,* she thought as she strolled past the library and ventured deeper into the halls. *I could name them my heir without having to marry at all.*

Sansa mused on it. *I would foster them, treat them like my own, and secure my rule.*

She frowned and placed a gloved finger on top of her lips. *Or... they could betray me and take my throne.*

For the first time in a while, her thoughts drifted to the long dead, golden haired queen, Cersei Lannister. She had taught her once, that the only people you could truly love and trust are your children. Sansa wasn’t entirely certain about that either.

She descended a long staircase, pushed open a door and grimaced at the bone chilling air. Two guards bowed as she walked by, and she made for the battlements.

Light was breaking as dawn slowly approached. Winterfell was bathed in a dull silver light as the sky turned grey-blue. The early morning light made the freshly lain snow looked brilliantly white as she trekked through the courtyard. More soldiers bowed their head as she walked by.

There were few of them still within Winterfell. It added to her growing fears, being this exposed, but it was necessary at this moment. She had sent them southward for an important mission.

The rest of the soldiers that remained stayed on the battlements and in camps surrounding Winterfell, their heads constantly looking skyward and their hands always near a bolt and scorpion. If Daenerys descended upon her today, she would be showered in bolts. Sansa made sure of that, she had ordered the entire wall surrounding Winterfell to be lined with scorpions. There was no side Daenerys could attack her from that wouldn’t risk her and her beast being shot down from the sky.

She settled herself between two scorpions and watched as the sky turned lighter and the soft snow drifted down.

She was nervous, but she would never show it. Her skin was made from steel, and her heart from iron. Publicly, she would not show weakness and she would not show vulnerability. She would remain strong, even when things were seemingly crumbling all around her.

In the distance, she saw a black dot moving through the white snow. That black dot was followed by three other black dots, and Sansa leaned closer and squinted for a better view. As the dots approached, they morphed into figures, riding their horses with haste towards Winterfell.

Sansa’s breath caught in her throat.

She had been waiting for this.

She lifted her skirts and briskly walked to the courtyard, where the men had just arrived and were handing their horses to the stableboy. Wordlessly, she approached. One of the men spotted her and fell to his knee. His companions looked in her direction and without hesitation, swiftly did the same.

“Your Grace.” They greeted.
Sansa was not in the mood for pleasantries. She simply asked the question that has been plaguing her mind for weeks.

“What happened? Was the battle won?”

The men looked at each other and rose to their feet. Sansa’s stomach was in a knot, she needed to hear some good news for once.

The man offered her a small smile.

“Your Grace, the battle was won. We have retaken Torrhen’s Square and pushed the Ironborn back to Barrowton. We have severely weakened their defences.”

Sansa released the breath she hadn’t even realised she was holding.

“Good!” She grinned, for the first time in moons. “Good.”

But the man’s smile faltered. And Sansa was quick to notice. *Something is wrong…*

“What? What is it?”

The man hesitated, but a stern look from his queen opened his lips. “Ser Benwyn has his concerns, Your Grace.”

Ser Benwyn Varwin, the commander of her guard who oversaw beating the Ironborn back. She and the men were attracting a few curious eyes in the courtyard, and she was reluctant to let anyone within the walls of Winterfell know anything was amiss. “Follow me to my study.”

She ordered a servant to light the hearth as she settled in.

“Now, what concerns does Ser Benwyn have, ser?” She asked as she sat in her chair.

The man looked uncomfortable. No man wants to be under the scrutiny of the Queen in the North.

“Well, Your Grace… As you know, the Ironborn still hold Barrowton and Moat Cailin. While we have retaken Torrhen’s Square, we are not sure how long we can hold it for. The Ironborn are west and east of us, they could siege us easily, or attack our entire army from both sides.”

Sansa listened. She was no battle tactician, but she didn’t need to be. That was why she appointed Ser Benwyn. But she did have one matter that concerned her.

“Where are the Tallharts? Did you find them?”

“No, Your Grace. By the time the Ironborn took their castle, they had long since fled.”

*Cowards.*

“They did not even put up a fight?” She asked, knowing the answer. “They fled with their tails between their legs and let the Ironborn just take their castle?”

“It would appear so, my queen.”

“What a disgrace.” She shook her head.

But it wasn’t just their cowardice that bothered Sansa, it was something more troubling. *They did not come for me for protection. I am a short march away… and they did not think to seek shelter with*
their queen. No… they went somewhere else. To another lord who they believe could offer them the protection that their own queen cannot.

Sansa gripped the arms of her chair and gritted her teeth. How many other lords think I am useless? That I cannot protect them and the North? And how long until they depose me in favour of a lord who they believe can offer them the protection they need?

“Do you have any word on where they could be hiding?”

The man shook his head.

“No, Your Grace. But our best guess is White Harbor. We received word that the Ironborn mounted an attack on the harbor, but the Manderlys beat them back.”

Sansa frowned. “An attack? When?”

“Two moons ago.”

Sansa’s eyes widened and her nose flared in anger. My own bannerman was attacked and this is the first I hear of it! Sansa’s blood boiled. They are plotting against me, I know it.

“That’s strange,” Sansa said behind gritted teeth. “When I first called my bannermen ages ago, Lord Wylis Manderly said that they could not spare any men to fight. ‘The harsh winter and famine have made them too weak to fight’, he said. And now, you tell me not only do they have enough food to possibly shelter House Tallhart, but that they are in fact strong enough to beat off an Ironborn invasion?”

The man gulped. “I… it is only what I have heard, Your Grace.”

Sansa stared at him, her mouth set in a grim frown.

“Well… that is surely interesting. You may go.” She dismissed him. He bowed and hastily left her study.

She sat in silence for a while, listening to the crackling of the firewood.

She rubbed her temples in irritation as she wondered how it all came to this. Jon got to be the wartime king that everyone loves, while I have to be the queen in the midst of a famine and invasion. The thought made her burst into a fit of giggles, and for a fleeting moment, she thought she was going mad.

It is not fair, but when is the world ever fair?

At least Jon was not a concern anymore. He was lost beyond the Wall, probably dead. Her traitorous bannermen couldn’t crown him if they tried. Their options were limited; even the Karstarks were gone. There was no cadet branch of House Stark left. And there was no Stark left to replace her. I suppose they could seek to crown someone without Stark blood. But Sansa knew that would cause even more division and infighting amongst her bannermen. Everybody wants to be a king or queen.

If they wanted to overthrow her, they needed to unite. And without anyone to unite behind, Sansa could at least take some small comfort in knowing her crown was still hers. And her men have successfully managed to beat the Ironborn back, away from Winterfell. At least she had this victory, even if it was small and possibly temporary.

She wondered how long this would last. Not only were the Ironborn taking her land, but her people
are starving, and her noblemen have lost faith in her. And she is alone in this. Bran was not helping her, Tyrion was ignoring her. And now she had to worry about Daenerys flying North to reduce her and her kingdom to ash.

She felt a headache slowly approaching, and so she stood up to pour herself a glass of wine to keep it at bay.

She heard a soft knock at the door.

“Come in.” She replied, and Maester Wolkan emerged into the room.

He bowed. “My apologies for interrupting your morning, Your Grace.”

She motioned for him to come forward. “You are not interrupting, Maester. Please, sit.”

They sat in front of the hearth.

“So, what news do you bear? It must be urgent to have you seek me out this early.”

“Ah, yes, Your Grace. I have heard some distressing news that I thought you might want brought to your attention with haste.”

She groaned and leaned back in her chair. “Distressing news, it is just what I need right now.” She commented sarcastically and took a sip from her wine. She waved her hand, beckoning him to continue. “Well? What is it?”

“I have heard reports from the Wall. All of the wildlings are migrating southward.”

Sansa’s brows shot up and she straightened her back. “What? Why would they be doing that?”

Maester Wolkan hesitated. “Maester Wolkan…” She repeated, her eyes hard and her voice stern. “Why would they be doing that?”

His eyes darted around worriedly. “I… It would appear that… or at least they believe that… the whitewalkers have returned, Your Grace.”

Sansa’s stomach dropped. Her eyes widened and her mouth opened and closed wordlessly.

“Or at least that is what they believe, Your Grace.” He quickly added. “Can we truly trust their word?”

But Sansa wasn’t listening.

“No, no, no…” Sansa screwed her eyes shut, silently hoping that this was all a dream. She placed her forehead in her hands. “I cannot handle this entire mess right now, not again.”

Maester Wolkan looked away.

“It would appear the wildlings are moving towards Winterfell, Your Grace. They seek your protection. We do not have enough food to feed them all.” He added, unhelpfully.

“I know, Maester.” She rolled her eyes and stared at him coldly. “We also do not have the resources to defeat the whitewalkers a second time.”
He shrank back in his chair and kept his hands laced in his lap. “But… that is not all.”

Her hands curled into fists, her nails biting painfully in the palm of her hands. She shut her eyes as she tried to calm herself. Maester Wolkan waited silently and awkwardly for her to open her eyes again.

“What else?”

“They are being led southward by Tormund Giantsbane, and it was heard from him that they were told to cross the Wall by… Jon Snow.”

Everything within Sansa froze like a shallow river in a snowstorm.

It took a while for the words to settle in Sansa’s mind. But when they did, she did not find herself relieved at her cousin’s survival.

“Jon’s alive?”

“It would appear so, yes.”

“And he is marching towards Winterfell with them?”

“No, he is not.”

She lifted a brow.

Maester Wolkan elaborated. “My spy at the Wall wrote that Jon Snow was not amongst the group crossing the Wall, but he did write that a group of three men did arrive at Castle Black not too long ago, searching for him.”

Sansa frowned. “Who were these men?”

“He was not at Castle Black when they arrived, but he heard that they were Reachmen. One of them was a bastard, he says.”

A bastard from the Reach?

Sansa shook her head, puzzled. “And when they couldn’t find them, what did they do?”

The Lord Commander suggested they try look for them beyond the Wall, specifically Hardhome. But whether they made it there or not is yet to be confirmed.”

She looked away from him, into the hearth. Her brows were creased as she chewed on this news. “What would three Reachmen want with Jon?” She wondered aloud.

Maester Wolkan cleared his throat. “Your Grace, it is extremely probable that they want to depose King Bran and crown him King of the Six Kingdoms.”

“Jon is in exile.” She scoffed. “He is a criminal.”

He grimaced. “Perhaps… they think an exiled criminal would make a better king than your brother.”

Sansa’s head snapped towards the Maester. She expected him to shrink away from her gaze, but he held her stare.

“Is there something you aren’t telling me?”
He sighed. “There was a riot in King’s Landing weeks ago. And King Bran may have dealt with it in a rather… bloodthirsty way, some would say. Hundreds perished, thousands were maimed.”

Sansa’s jaw dropped. “Bran?” She replied, slowly and sceptically. When Maester Wolkan nodded nervously, she shook her head in disbelief. “That’s not something he would do.”

Or is it? The brother she grew up with is nothing like the man she left in King’s Landing seven years ago. And even then, ruling an entire realm changes you. Neither she nor Bran are children anymore, they are leaders, monarchs, and the decisions they have had to make have gotten harder and harder with each passing year into their rule.

“It is being compared to Daenerys Targaryen’s massacre of King’s Landing, Your Grace. I’m sure His Grace has his reasons for what he did—”

“I’m sure he did.” She interrupted curtly. “It is nothing like what Daenerys did; she burnt innocent people alive, he squashed a rebellion. Death is the only penalty for treason.” Maester Wolkan’s eyes widened as he stared at his queen, he quickly averted his eyes to stare into the flames of the hearth.

“Yes, Your Grace. You are correct, Your Grace.” He replied timidly.

An uncomfortable silence descended into the room.

Sansa gritted her teeth. It has begun… if they are rebelling against Bran, how long until they do the same to me? And now that she knew Jon was alive, the time might be nigh.

“A raven arrived this morning for you, Your Grace.” Maester Wolkan reached into his sleeve and pulled out the parchment. Sansa took it and looked at the seal. A black raven.

She broke the seal then paused. Her eyes flickered to Maester Wolkan.

“You are excused, Maester.” She dismissed him. He stood and hurriedly left the room.

She would read Bran’s letter in private.

Sansa,

I hope my message finds you well. It is unfortunate that I must bring you ill news.

You might have already been told that there appears to be something sinister stirring beyond the Wall, the reawakening of a power we all believed once vanquished. I am aware of the threat, and I ask that you do not fret. I have plans of my own on how to deal with them once and for all, you may rest and remain calm knowing that it is of little concern to you.

Though, my next news is something you should concern yourself with. Perhaps you have heard, but Jon is alive and well. After seven long years, I have managed to find him, only for him to escape me again.

The Reach are plotting to overthrow me, their recent orchestration of a riot in King’s Landing is tangible proof of that. And it is clear to me now that they have plans to use Jon as a pawn in their game.

Sansa’s eyes widened.

But whether their plans come to fruition is yet to be seen. I last saw Jon sailing East to Volantis.
He is on his way to Daenerys Targaryen. She has grown revengeful in her years of hiding, and he is foolishly entering the den of a vengeful dragon. He could live, he could die, but that is none of our concern. He has abandoned his exile, and that has made him an enemy and traitor to the realm.

But his exile is not the only vow he has broken. I have reason to believe he has fathered a child— Sansa stopped reading.

Her body went rigid, her fingers clutched the paper in her hands tighter and she involuntarily sucked in a deep gasp.

Jon has a child. Jon has fathered a child. There is a child with Stark blood, no matter how tainted it is with Targaryen blood, alive and outside her reach. He has done what she could not: sired an heir. A child who no matter how young, is a threat to her rule.

Sansa shook her head. Jon is adamant he does not want to rule, she reasoned with herself. But still…

Even if Jon refused to be crowned, even if they saw him as traitor or criminal, her enemies could still rally behind a child they could mould. Sansa’s eyes narrowed in suspicion. Perhaps that is his plan, he plans to usurp my throne as revenge for telling Tyrion his secret. You may not want to rule Jon, but what ambitions do you have for your child?

Sansa returned to her letter.

I have reason to believe he has fathered a child in his exile, and he has kept him hidden from me using ancient magic. He may have kept him hidden north of the Wall, but as he sails East, he can no longer keep the child a secret. Regardless of who the mother is, the child is of Stark and Targaryen blood, and a threat to the peace, prosperity and stability of both of our kingdoms.

War has begun, Sansa, and we are surrounded by enemies. Time will tell who will strike first, will it be an attack from the East or from our very own lands? We must do what needs to be done to maintain our rule and defeat those who threaten our family and our crowns, at any cost.

When the time comes, I hope you will answer my call and join me in this war.

Your brother,

Bran

Sansa read the letter, then reread it again. With each time, her fury built, and her body grew more anxious.

She wanted to scream until her throat grew raw. She wanted to hit something, or someone, she wanted to unleash all her pent-up frustration and anger. In her rage, she considered throwing the letter in the fire. But stopped and read it again. Growing more agitated with each read.

What do I do? She sank into her chair, clutching her loose auburn hair in her fists, a deep frown marring her pretty features. I am surrounded by enemies and I have too few soldiers to fight them all. What would a strong queen do, to keep her enemies at bay for the time being?

She thought about Cersei, how she kept her in a little golden cage when she was just a sad, little bird in King’s Landing. I need hostages, Sansa thought. But I do not have any captives, no one’s life to place on the line—
Sansa’s head shot up and her mouth parted as realisation dawned.

She wasted little time and acted with haste as she summoned Maester Wolkan.

“Maester, where would you say the wildlings are now?”

He thought on it.

“Considering most are walking on foot, I would say slowly approaching the Dreadfort by now, Your Grace.”

“Good…” She replied, staring into the dwindling flames of the hearth. “And how many of them are there, including woman and children?”

“Perhaps thousands.”

“And how many men remain to me here? How many soldiers do I have available to me?”

“Four thousand camped within Winterfell and in Wintertown.”

Sansa smiled.

“Send a thousand armed soldiers to meet the wildlings this instant, have them escorted to the Dreadfort.” She turned to her Maester and looked him dead in the eye. “They shall be my prisoners, and they shall be treated as such. And give my men this command: should they receive my instruction, they must kill every single wilding. Man, woman, child. Every single one. On my command, and without hesitation.”

Maester Wolkan blinked. He blinked again, and he blinked thrice.

“Y-Your Grace?” He asked, wondering if he misheard.

“I will not repeat myself. You heard me, now go.”

He hesitated to move. His blue eyes stayed on hers for far too long, and Sansa could see the confusion and resistance behind them. Realising his mistake, he averted his eyes to the stone floor. She could sense his fear. But what she truly detested, was his wavering loyalty.

_Will you betray me, Maester?

“Maester Wolkan, is there a problem?”

“I–”

“Do not answer.” She replied, cold and fiercely. “If you cannot follow my simple instructions, I will find another Maester who can.”

Her blue eyes had turned to hard, cold ice. And her threat hanged between them in the silence that followed.

The Maester gulped loudly and nodded his head timidly.

“Y-Yes, Your Grace.” He bowed and retreated.

When Sansa Stark was left alone, in the silence of her study, she released a deep breath. Satisfied, that she had done what needed to be done.
The wildlings… she had always thought their kind was barbaric. She could never bring herself to appreciate their existence outside of their ability to fight and die for her home. She had little food to give them, and she doubted they would kneel to and fight for her. She was not the Stark they would die for. So, if they couldn’t, what use were they to her? Just more useless, hungry mouths.

Except now, they had some value. As my hostages, Sansa smirked.

Jon considers those squalid hordes family. He would fight for them, he would die for them. And they would do the same for him…

Sunlight was streaming through the stained windows of her bedchamber, the sun had risen, signalling a new day. Sansa poured herself another glass of wine and settled back into her comfy chair.

And for the first time in many moons, she relaxed, knowing that if he continued this silly endeavour of his, Jon would have to make the most difficult choice yet.

The North, or the lives of those he holds dear?

And should he take one step out of turn, do any single thing that led her to believe that she might lose her crown, Sansa was ready to make that choice for him.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the comments and kudos!

Damn, the Freefolk are Sansa's hostages now. Should Jon do something Sansa doesn't like, they could be in serious trouble. And yes, Bran knows about the whitewalkers and the Night Queen, but he's purposefully being vague and nonchalant about it. I wonder what he's up to...

Next chapter: Jon and Daemon travel the East, and Jon agrees to something he will later regret.
“Twenty.”

“Ten.”

“Twenty.”

“Fifteen?”

“Twenty!”

“Fifteen. That’s my final offer.”

The shopkeeper narrowed his dark eyes on the three men. Jon kept to himself, he would rather leave the haggling to Pots, who carried an air of confidence as he attempted to convince the shopkeeper to lower his price. Jason meanwhile, was occupied with the other wares hanging on the opposite wall.

For a highborn, Jon was pleasantly surprised with how at ease Pots was at haggling in the presence of traders and commonfolk. That, and his ability to speak in multiple tongues. When they travelled together, just the three of them, they barely raised suspicion.

Jon could not speak Braavosi, nor could he speak any of the other Essosi languages. If he tried hard enough, he could remember some of Maester Luwin’s teachings and at best, pick up the few Valyrian words he could recognise here and there, otherwise, he was clueless.

Meanwhile, while he struggled to understand the language, Daemon shined. Braavosi is just a bastardised version of High Valyrian. Within days of travelling, Daemon had adjusted well to the changes in tongue and was able to converse well enough to charm the women selling treats in the streets of Braavos to give him free sweets.

He would give them a big, dazzling smile, look up at them with his big, violet eyes and like a fish on a line, they were hooked. It made Jon proud to see him so lively and confident, happy and friendly, nothing like the sullen, quiet boy he was when he was the bastard of Winterfell. It made Jon feel like he was doing something right. He has made many mistakes, and he has felt like a failure many times before, but at least he could parent right, and that’s all that mattered to him.

“How much is this?” Jason pulled a short sword from the wall and weighed it in his hands. It was a magnificent piece, a dark grey metal with an ivory hilt and a golden pommel.

“Thirty coins.” The shopkeeper replied, and Pots gawked.

“Thirty? You would charge us thirty for a short sword but twenty for a bowstring?”

“This bowstring is from the Summer Isles, it is meant to be strung on our bows, the best in the entire world, it is good quality!” The shopkeeper retorted. “It is very strong too, it will last you a very long time!”

“I don’t give two shits if the string is from the Summer Isles! A string is a string! How much for the commoner’s kind?”
As the shopkeeper was a Summer Islander himself and an apparent enthusiast of bows, he placed his hand over his chest and stared at Pots, offended.

“You would put the commoner’s string on a weapon as magnificent as this?” The man gasped and picked up Daemon’s nameday gift, a slender bow made of pale weirwood. “A shame!”

Pots grumbled something under his breath, that Jon had no doubt was meant to offend the shopkeeper if he had heard it. To prevent an escalation, he stepped forward.

“If we pay the full twenty coins, will you include those arrows?” He pointed to the full quiver behind him.

“Hmm…” The shopkeeper considered it. “Yes, it is a deal.”

Jon smiled, pleased, then looked towards Jason expectantly. Whom in turn, jerked in surprise once he realised Jon was expecting him to cover the cost.

“Don’t you have any money of your own?” Jason asked.

“I have lived in exile north of the Wall for over seven years, Jason. Where would I have come into money? We didn’t need coins.” Jon shook his head. “We mostly traded, but I don’t think the shopkeeper would consider a fish and hare skin a suitable exchange.”

Jon grinned at the Hightower as he reluctantly fished for the coins in his purse, grumbling his displeasure under his breath. It was fine by him; Jason needed him more than Jon needed him, and he was willing to milk whatever he could. Especially if it was for Daemon.

The shopkeeper gladly accepted the coins and with care, strung Daemon’s bow. When he was finished, he handed him the black leather quiver.

Jon eyed the pale fletching of the arrows. “What feathers are those?”

Jon had only ever seen ones made from raven or pigeon feathers.

The shopkeeper offered him a warm grin. “These are goose feathers, they are very light and good for hunting.”

“I would like to teach my son how to hunt with a bow.” Jon replied, with a dreamy smile. Just the thought of teaching him how to shoot a bow, just like Lord Stark once taught him, filled his heart with warmth. It almost pained him to know he would have to wait another moon for Daemon’s actual nameday before he could.

And by then, would I still be able to? Jon’s smile faltered as that niggling thought encroached his mind. By the time Daemon’s nameday approaches, we would have made it to Volantis. What if Dany… what if she doesn’t let me… what if this is the last moon I have with him?

Jon gulped. No… don’t think of that. You can never be certain of what will happen.

Jon thanked the shopkeeper and tucked Daemon’s gift behind him, beneath his cloak.

Being in Braavos was a nice change from the cold, dark winter of Westeros. The sun shined brightly in the sky and a warm breeze brushed past him as he walked the crowded streets. He couldn’t even recall the last time he wasn’t covered in layers of wool and furs. But then again, Jon had never been in Essos until now.
Jon fanned himself with his hand. *I never even knew a place could get this warm, its hotter than King’s Landing!*

He wore a dark blue surcoat, a loose grey undershirt, dark trousers and black boots that reached his knees. Though he wore a thin cloak, he felt utterly naked without his furs.

“Can’t stand the weather?” Jason asked with a sly smile as they manoeuvred the streets. Jon sighed as he stopped fanning himself.

“This weather is not meant for Northmen.” He replied.

He leaned closer and spoke softly. “You’re a Targaryen, shouldn’t the heat not bother you? I hear that immunity to fire is a blood trait.”

Jon raised a brow. “Is that true? I’ve never been immune to fire.”

He clenched his hand, remembering the burns that have long since healed.

“Daenerys Tayrgaryen is.”

“Daenerys is unlike anyone else.” Jon replied, looking up into the sky.

Escaping the crowds, they made for the ports and walked in comfortable silence towards Jason’s ship. That is, until Jason asked him a question.

“Jon?”

“Aye?”

“I… I don’t mean to pry.” He leaned closer and looked towards him with curiosity. “But we have known each other for quite some time now… I would say we have even bonded quite a bit on our journey and have made good progress in our companionship.”

Jon looked at him sceptically. “We have?”

Jason nodded enthusiastically. “Yes, considering when we first met you wanted to kill me. And now you don’t – or at least I don’t think you do – so I would consider that very good progress.”

Jon chuckled. “We had no choice but to move past our hostility, we were going to be in each other’s space for many moons. What else could I do?”

Jason pursed his lips and gave Jon a peculiar look. “Well… regardless, I am considering this the beginning of a great friendship.”

“You wish to be friends with the man you would like to crown King?” Jon rolled his eyes. “How purely selfless of you. I can’t even think of a single way you could benefit from such a decision.”

Jason huffed. “You’re a good honest man, Jon Snow. That is reason enough.”

Jon hummed, unconvinced. “I am also cautious and untrusting, especially of ambitions Southerners.”

Jason waved him off. “Yes, yes. As you should. I hear you were quite close with Tyrion Lannister once. I understand your distrust after that. But not all Southerners are like the Lannisters though, they are a special breed of evil.”

Jon lifted a brow. “Is there a point to this conversation? Why would you mention that you ‘do not
mean to pry’, what do you intend to pry from me, Jason?”

He sighed then turned to face him.

“What happened to Daemon’s mother? Does she still live?”

His question caught Jon off guard.

“What do you mean?”

“His mother… I did not see her when we left the wildling village. Is she… dead?”

Jon was silent. He honestly did not know what to say, how could he explain the truth of Daemon’s existence without sounding like a lunatic?

“Uhh… no. No, she is not.”

Jason’s eyes widened.

“She isn’t?” He asked, puzzled. “Then where is she?”

Jon hesitated. “Err… Still quite far away, I suppose.”


“It means…” Jon wrestled with his next words. *Do I tell him the truth and risk sounding like a madman and potentially putting Daemon’s life at risk? He will be the first person outside of Hardhome to know the truth of Daemon’s parentage… and who knows what he could do with that information.*

Jason placed a hand on Jon’s shoulders. “It’s fine, you don’t have to tell me if it’s hard to say.”

Jon gave him a small smile. He understood why he would ask, and he appreciated that he wouldn’t push further.

“What in the seven hells is going on there?” Pots exclaimed, as they approached the area of the dock closest to their ship. A large crowd had gathered and were surrounding something, shouting excitedly.

*What is going on there?* Jon wondered, and as if to answer his question, a large, white, furry head popped up from the crowd. The onlookers stumbled backwards and yelped in surprise, though it did little to curb their fervour.

“Ghost?” Jon called. Though his voice went unnoticed by the crowd of onlookers, his direwolf heard him just fine. His red eyes met his, yet he did not move. In fact, as if on command, he fell to the ground and rolled to his belly.

Puzzled, Jon advanced closer to see what was truly going on.

And what he saw did not please him one bit.

“I told you he could do tricks!” Daemon cheered then pointed smugly to a piece of cloth neatly folded and laid by his feet. The crowd gasped, then applauded the direwolf before throwing coins onto the cloth.

Standing idly but watching his son – or more likely, the coins – was Deryk, who was tasked earlier
with keeping Daemon and Ghost on the ship.

Jon’s hands balled into fists. He was about ready to send Daemon and Ghost back to their room, and Deryk to the deepest pits of the seven hells. And he would have, if not for Jason sensing his fury and catching his arm as he marched towards them.

“You’ll attract more attention.” He hissed.

“I will attract more attention?” He asked, incredulously. “Not the giant albino direwolf next to the child with rare Valyrian features?”

“Daemon is wearing a scarf over his head, no one knows he’s a Targaryen, he looks like any other child.”

“Any other child with a direwolf? In Braavos?”

Jason pursed his lips.

Jon glowered at the crowd. “I gave them one instruction and one only. ‘Stay on the ship’. And I come back and see they have not only defied my order, but have turned into a dockside show? What if there’s a catspaw amongst us? What if someone sent an assassin?”

Jason thought about it. “Deryk would have handled anyone who seeks to harm him.”

Jon scoffed. “You’re sure about that?”

“I’m sure, he’s an absolute cutthroat. Well, not literally. Not many highborn men are. But he’s got the skills of one, and he’s the most capable fighter out of all of us. If anyone suspicious neared your son, they would have a bloody smile by now.”

“It’s kind of you to think so highly of your friend’s abilities, but I have fought harder and tougher enemies. I know that skill is not the only thing required to win and live another day, it is also an abundance of luck, and I would rather not push mine when I have far too many enemies to count at this very moment.”

As he approached the crowd, Deryk was the first to notice him and he did a double take. Jon wasn’t sure what expression was currently on his face, though he could assume it was quite murderous, for it was enough to make Deryk pale.

“There you have it, show’s over!” Deryk clapped his hands. The crowd groaned in disappointment, but Deryk did not relent. “That’s right ya’ fuckers, move along. The show is done!”

“Aw, why?” Daemon whined, until his eyes met his father’s stern ones, and he froze.

*At least the boy has the decency to look abash.*

As the crowd dispersed, he quickly knelt down to pick up the cloth by each corner to make a makeshift purse for the coins he and Ghost had earned.

Deryk cleared his throat and spoke.

“I tried to stop him, really I did, but he threatened me.”

Jon’s eyes narrowed on the man. “Really? You were threatened by a boy of not-even-seven years?”

Deryk did not shy away. “I was threatened by a boy of not-even-seven years… *with a gigantic*
direwolf who listens to his every command.”

Jon’s eyes flickered to Daemon, who was blushing furiously and looked anywhere but him.

“Daemon…” Jon’s voice was as low as a wolf’s growl.

It took a long journey, but eventually Daemon’s eyes found his.

“I just wanted to see!” He moaned.

“See what?”

“Braavos! It’s boring on the ship!”

“It’s safer on the ship.” He corrected.

“And boring! You wouldn’t take me with you, so I decided to see the city and its people with Ghost. Deryk was watching me!”

“Deryk can’t keep you safe!”

“I definitely could.” Deryk huffed, crossing his arms and confidently puffing out his chest.

“Not from a skilled catspaw, or a trained assassin or a Faceless Man.” Jon retorted.

He approached Daemon and knelt before him, holding his shoulders in both hands. He would not shout at his son but speak to him at his level. Keep his tone steady and make him understand. “I know you want to explore, and Gods know when you want something you will stop at nothing to get it. But you have to understand, Daemon. There are just some things you cannot do. Not now. Not while both of us are targets, not when many would rather see us dead.”

Daemon’s eyes widened and flash of fear flickered across his violet eyes. Jon tightened his hold on him. “I’m just trying to keep you safe, Daemon. The world is a terrifying place, a terrifying place where bad men will kill children without a second thought. You have to understand. You are the son of a ruling queen and an exiled criminal with royal blood, two enemies of Westeros, do you understand? People are afraid of you, they are afraid of your blood, of our blood… we cannot make stupid mistakes, because it could mean our end.”

Daemon looked down and for a moment, Jon thought he was about to cry. But instead, he looked back up and gave him a fierce look.

“Yes, Papa.” He whispered and gave him a firm nod of his head. “I understand.”

Relieved, Jon relaxed and gave him a smile. “Good… good.”

Unexpectedly, he lifted his purse for Jon to see.

“I made some money today, Papa.” He smiled brightly. “Maybe we can buy Mama a present, and surprise her when we see her.”

Jon couldn’t explain the feeling that spread across his chest in that very moment. His bright smile, his childish nature and his generosity. His chest tightened and he had to blink away the tears that threatened to form.

“I… I don’t think it is a present is what is going to surprise her when we arrive, but surely, we can look for something when we reach Pentos.”
“Do you swear?”

“I swear.”

“On the Heart Tree?” He placed a hand on his chest, over the Godsbeads that hung close to his heart. Jon did the same.

“On the Heart Tree.” He promised and was absolutely stuck by the sweet, dazzling smile that radiated from his son. It was hard not to smile when Daemon did.

But their blissful moment was interrupted by the presence of an unknown figure that approached them but stopped a short distance away.

Her sea blue-green eyes were wide from shock and her jaw was slack, as if she had just seen a ghost. For a moment, Jon thought she did. He looked towards Ghost then back, but it was clear she was staring directly at him and him alone. She was thin, pale and waif like. And she wore brown knee-high boots and a blue-green dress that ended by her knees and threaded with silver and gold in a pattern that looked remarkably like scales. Barely visible on her neck was a gold chain that disappeared beneath the collar of her dress. But the most striking thing about her, was her pale eyebrows and her long, braided hair that was dyed the most peculiar shade of green.

“Jon? Jon Snow?” She spoke, her voice high and thin.

Jon stood, and pushed Daemon behind him. Ghost approached him and stood at his side.

“I…” She looked at the direwolf, and her eyes widened even more as she noticed the gargantuan creature. She gasped, and a smile spread across her face. “It is you! By the Gods! I can’t believe I’ve found you here!”

Beneath his cloak, Jon’s hand inched towards Longclaw at his hip as he glared at the woman with suspicion.

“You’ve been looking for me?”

She laughed, oblivious to the tension heavy in the air. “Have I been looking for you? No, I can’t say that I’m here in Braavos because I was searching for you. But everyone has enquired about your whereabouts at least twice or thrice before. It used to be much more in the early years of your exile, but we have been quite preoccupied with the invasion as of late. Coincidentally, as the winter calmed a bit, there have been discussions about continuing the search.”

Before Jon could reply, she took a step forward and spoke again. This time, with more enthusiasm.

“And of all the places, you’re here! In Braavos! Not the Wall, but here! We had heard you were lost beyond the Wall; half the North thinks you’re dead and the other half thinks you escaped your exile! Glad to hear at least half of us were right!”

Jon couldn’t even hide the growing confusion on his face. “Um… Have we met?”

His question wiped the excitement from her face and though she was a stranger, he feared he had offended her greatly. But apparently not. Instead, she gave him a sly smile.

“Aye, once or twice. Though, I understand if you wouldn’t remember me. It has been over sixteen years. Though, I thought you would remember my sister Wynafryd and I taking turns dancing with you and your brother, Robb, at Lord Stark’s nameday feast, I lost track of how many times I stomped on your poor foot. Then we convinced you two to steal a flagon of wine for us from the soldiers’
table and you two were *this* close to getting caught.”

It took a moment for Jon to remember, but when it hit him, recognition immediately washed the confusion from his face. And it unsettled him.

“We *did* get caught,” Jon reminisced, “but it was by Ser Rodrik and he was drunk enough to let us go… is it really you, Lady Wylla?”

She reached for the chain around her neck and pulled it. At the end was a golden medallion with the merman of House Manderly. “Is this enough proof?”

“You could have stolen it. I do not recall Lady Wylla having green hair.”

She tugged at her braid and chuckled. “I have for years. Wynafryd thinks it is time I outgrow it, but I like it this way.”

Jon did not laugh with her. He stared at her, his hand still resting on Longclaw, ready to unsheathe.

She could smile and jest all she wanted, it would not ease Jon’s mind. A Manderly was still a bannerman of House Stark, and at this moment, he was a traitor to both realms of Westeros – and both its Stark king and queen – for abandoning his Watch and exile.

Sensing his apprehension, Wylla’s smile faltered and oddly, a look of desperation crossed her face.

“I am not your enemy, Jon.” She told him earnestly.

“House Manderly is sworn to House Stark,” he replied, his tone low and cautious. “It is your duty to bring justice on those who defy their rule, which so happens to be me.”

She blinked. “Aye, that is the consensus.”

“So, will you?”

“No… I do not think I will.”

“And why not?”

Wylla opened her mouth but hesitated to speak.

“I could say because House Manderly and House Stark, for the first time since our settling in the North, is not on the best of terms… but that would sound incriminating.”

Jon’s brow rose. From Jason, he had learnt that the relationship between the Northern bannermen and their Queen was strained, but he couldn’t have possibly fathomed the extent of it. *Losing the faith of House Manderly? Gods Sansa, how is that even possible?*

“So, I suppose the Queen wouldn’t be happy with either of us right now.” Wylla continued, stepping closer while absentmindedly pulling on her braid, avoiding his gaze.

Jon’s eyes shifted behind her, to the men loading boxes and sacks into her ship.

“Lady Wylla, answer me this?”

“Aye.” She replied, holding his gaze.

“How many of you are not happy with the Queen’s rule?”
She snorted, though the humour did not reach her eyes. Instead, they looked upon him with a fierce edge.

“It would be easier to ask how many are ‘happy’ with her rule, which is ‘not enough.’ The Crannogmen, maybe… though they have been awfully quiet as of late. The Ironborn have taken Moat Cailin and have been encroaching on their land. They have their defences to worry about, especially considering that the Riverlands are no longer helping the North as Lord Edmure has declared himself King of the Trident.

“She still has the support of some lesser noble houses, but most are mainly focused on defending their own lands. The winter has been brutal, Jon. It has brought famine and disease. And during the early years of winter, when we relied on Queen Sansa’s aid, things got worse. She increased our taxes which drained our coffers, all to import exorbitantly priced grain and rebuild Winterfell. Then she asked us to fight a war we were ill-prepared for. You may judge House Manderly and other lords for not answering her call, but these have been trying times. We have chosen to prioritise the lives of the commonfolk and soldiers close to us. It is better this way.”

He couldn’t blame them. Winter was the harshest season for a reason: production could slow for years at a time and if one did not stock enough in their stores, starving or freezing to death was a normal occurrence.

And the events leading to winter had prevented them from adequately preparing for a long winter. Fighting a war was costly, and there was little chance that the noble houses had enough to maintain their entire castle, its defences, its workers and buy grain for however long the winter could last. And the battle between the Night King had severely dwindled their stores.

That, and the extinctions of such significant houses such as House Bolton, House Umber, House Mormont and House Karstark. They provided the vital timber and hides needed for trade, as well as firewood and furs by other houses and smallfolk alike who did not live near Winterfell or the Wolfswood… and now that land was empty. The Night King killed everyone north of Winterfell, leaving land that had been carefully maintained and cultivated for thousands of years essentially vacant. There just aren’t enough people to repopulate and recultivate the area; this is an issue that would have to fix itself with time, a strong long-term plan and dependable allies. None of which Sansa appears to have.

He would not reflect on her decision for Northern independence. At a time when unity was vital for the survival of the North, she chose a crown over the critical trade agreements that would have aided her and her people during winter. She made her decision, and now she was paying the consequences.

Jon sighed. “I completely understand, you are all just fighting for your survival.”

_Had she truly been expecting judgement from me?_ By the way her fierce glare melted to a startled stare, then relief, it would appear so.

“I’m glad you understand.”

He nodded to the boxes and sacks that were being carried on her ship.

“And I suppose that is grain, then?”

Wylla looked back and nodded. “Aye. We found a good supplier here in Braavos. But it costs us quite a bit now that we have more to look after.”
“More to look after?” Jon inquired.

Her eyes flickered around nervously. “Aye, more… Those who run from the Ironborn tend to come to White Harbor for protection.”

But not to their Queen, Jon realised. The North is fractured. Sansa has lost control, as well as the loyalty and faith of her people. The North is weak, which would make it so much harder to fight against the whitewalkers when they eventually attack...

Jon looked at Wylla. Should I tell her? But that would only add more chaos to an already unstable realm...

Gods, there is so much work that must be done, and so little time. He looked behind him. Though the trio were initially intrigued with the stranger, two had lost interest. Deryk and Pots were comparing daggers, while only Jason, a few steps behind him, looked upon her with silent curiosity.

“Well…” Jon began. “It was nice seeing you, Lady Wylla. But we must get–”

He felt a tug on his pant leg and looked down to see Daemon staring at Lady Wylla.

“Hello, milady.” He greeted with a small bow, and Jon was slightly taken aback by his use of ‘milady’. This little wild thing can be courteous? Who knew!

Though he knew for certain that Wylla had noticed Daemon a while ago, her face lit up when she addressed him. “Hello there little one! What is your name?”

He stepped out from behind Jon’s shadow and spoke confidently. “My name is Daemon.”

He examined Wylla’s reaction, and as predicted, she was stunned and did a piss poor job of hiding it. Her eyes met Jon’s stern grey, and an understanding passed between them.

But that is what confused Jon about her reaction. Why did an understanding pass between them? How much do you know about me, Lady Wylla? He had assumed that no one else in Westeros knew of his true heritage, besides Sam, Tyrion and his siblings. And there was an incentive for the latter two to keep it a secret; Jason was proof of that, and according to him, had found out through a letter Varys wrote.

And one look at Daemon was enough to confirm any suspicion. Even if they had no idea who his mother was, it was clear that he was Jon’s son, he had the Valyrian features found only in the house of dragons.

She smiled warmly at him. “A powerful name. Nice to meet you, Daemon.”

“I like your hair.” Daemon complimented, and Jon caught a mischievous glint in his eye.

It took everything in him not to roll his eyes. Your charms will not work on every woman, son. Not all of them have treats to give.

He cleared his throat, ending the interaction. “It was nice to see you, Lady Wylla. But we must get going.”

She cocked her head. “You’re leaving Braavos? To go where?”

She wanted to play the innocent maid asking a simple question, but Jon was not born yesterday. He could see the intelligence in her eyes, she was asking questions she already knew the answer to.
When he didn’t answer her, she gave him a slight, tiny nod. She knew where exactly where he was going, there was no other place he could possibly be travelling to.

She glanced over her shoulder towards her ship. The men had finished loading the ship and were awaiting their lady. A forced, closed lipped smile spread across her face. “I suppose it is time we part. It is a shame I cannot stay longer, but if I do, my people might starve.”

“Aye. I wish you and the North fortune in these trying times, Lady Wylla.” Jon replied, earnestly. The North was still his home, after all. It pained him to see his people suffering. Unfortunately, there was nothing he could do about it. He was not their king, not anymore. And so, he bowed his head slightly, as a courtesy to the daughter of a lord, and bid his farewell. “Until we meet again.”

She grinned at the man that was once her king and returned the bow, this time, deeper.

“I wish you good fortune in your endeavours.” While turning away from him, she returned the farewell. “Until we meet again.”

But as Jon turned away, he could have sworn he heard her whisper, ‘Your Grace’, beneath her breath, causing him to pause and look over his shoulder. But by then, she was already halfway to her ship, out of reach.

Even after they had all returned to the ship, Jon continued to wonder about what he might have heard. He laid on the bed of his and Daemon’s cabin and wondered about the consequences of this encounter.

“How is she a friend?”

Is she a friend? Lady Wylla was the daughter of Lord Wylis of House Manderly, a sworn bannerman to House Stark no matter their current relationship. And he was the former King in the North, a bastard then a secret prince, a kinslayer and an exiled criminal who was currently involved in a plot to overthrow his brother, the King of the Six Kingdoms. He was an enemy to both the North and the South, a threat to both monarchies.

It is her duty to bring him to justice, to deliver him to her queen in chains or his head on a spike. And yet, she made no move to do so. It didn’t even seem to cross her mind; or if it did, she purposefully refrained from doing so… but why?

Have I inadvertently stumbled into a plot to overthrow another sibling? By now, he was certain he heard what he had heard. But if Lady Wylla truly believes me to still be her king, would she have not done something, like offer her allegiance to me in private? Or offer me an alliance? She had done none of that, she had simply let him go. Perhaps it was merely her being kind, to show that she still had respect for the man her family once knelt to.

Aye, Jon reasoned. That must be it. The North has more pressing matters to deal with, they have little time for plots against the crown and exiled princes.

Ignoring the significant detail that the Northern lords are unhappy with their Queen, and that they have been looking for him – and have now found him, alive and well, and with an heir – he dismissed any signs pointing to a blatant plot that might be burgeoning in the shadows of the North.

He was not being purposefully ignorant, it was purely for his own sanity. His main concern was finding Daenerys, and he didn’t need the added stress of being entangled in not one, but two outrageous plots.
“Papa?” Daemon repeated, lifting his head to look at him. “Is she a friend?”

“I’m… not sure.” Jon replied. “I suppose only time will tell.”

And he held his son close to him as he felt the ship set sail from Braavos, gently rocking them closer and closer to Daenerys.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the comments and kudos!

So… Good news and bad news.

Bad news: This Jon chapter was so long I had to split it into two chapters.

But good news: You won’t have to wait long to get part two, I will be posting them both this week! 😊

Next chapter: As they near Volantis, Jon has a strange dream and Daemon makes an insane request that results in them having to fight for their lives.
His bones were as ancient as the First Men. As old as the thick, pale roots that wove themselves beneath the ground and connected each heart tree throughout the land.

But beneath the Heart of Winter, he was but a sapling. A child of its mighty earth, a servant to the Gods who enacted their will though the trees spread throughout its land.

He looked beside him, at his brothers and sisters. Or at least, what was left of them. Their numbers were dwindling, and it terrified him. But still, they gathered together and sang. They sang the song of the earth: of the trees, the grass, the stones, the mountains, the rivers and the wind. Birds perched themselves on the branches above and sang along, a melodious tune that made the world feel right.

But his body felt weary. Jon knew the feeling; the familiar ache of a battle fought and the uncertainty of whether war will come again. He closed his eyes and knelt before the sacred tree, offering his desperate prayer to his Gods. He prayed for peace, he prayed that war would never come again and hurt the ones he loved… He heard the rustling of the blood red leaves above – the Gods had heard him – but they did not whisper to him. Their silence spoke louder than words, and suddenly, Jon felt a heavy weight placed upon his shoulders.

He slumped beside the tree, wondering how much time he had left. Whether he meant until another war or in this world, he was unsure.

Jon looked up into the clear, blue sky. The snow was light, and the winds were gentle. It was a pleasant day, and that only made his chest ache. ‘How many calm, pleasant days do I have left?’ He wondered.

‘I will never know.’ He answered himself and stood. Over his shoulder, he took one more look at the Heart of Winter. The source of all ancient magic in their realm, the Gods channel to the realm of men and children. He placed his small hand over the solemn face and shut his eyes.

He would rather not wait to see his fate. He would leave here, explore, and for once be selfish and live for himself. The thought itself felt like a betrayal, his family, friends and the Gods. But he was tired of merely being a soldier and worrying whether he would have to fight for the survival of his people again.

As he gathered his sack of belongings, his brothers and sisters asked him where he was going.

“Exploring.” He replied in the Common Tongue, and then he left.

He travelled through the snow, along the rivers and on top of mountains. He saw routes that were familiar, and some that were not. At night, the snows grew heavier and he slept in caves, curled in his fur lined sack.

Jon had never seen the North like this. He saw white bears and encountered a giant elk with horns the same size as he. Suddenly, he was made aware of how much his feet ached from travelling. He approached the animal and lifted his hand, towards its snout. Though it was he who was speaking, he recognised the language as one he had never spoken before when he was just a man.

The elk nodded his head and lowered his neck. Jon climbed on, settled himself on its back, and they
They travelled through the days and travelled through the nights, resting in caves, drinking water from the rivers and eating bush berries. Jon marvelled at the mountains he had already seen many times before; hard and grey, but dusted with pale, soft snow that was tinted a gentle orange and gold in the early morning sun.

As they exited the valley, he was greeted with the familiar sight of the green summer grass. The winter snow had melted the ice nearing The Wall, and the land was alive with green and white and red. The weirwoods stood proudly rooted in the grass, and he felt a comfort he had never felt before as a man, but in this new, old body, it was a distant memory; it was akin to being tenderly swaddled close to a mother's bosom.

It was beautiful and serene, for a moment, he was certain that he had made a mistake. Did he truly want to leave such beauty behind?

But then he felt a gust of cold air and noticed the small snowflakes floating gently in the breeze, in his direction. He advanced further, and in the distance on top of a hill, he spotted her.

A long figure sat atop a silver horse, her back turned to him. Her long, snow-white hair fell down her back like an avalanche and swayed majestically in the wind. Her furs fell off her shoulders, exposing her pale skin that glittered like frost. Around her neck, wrists and woven into her hair were shards of ice that shined like gems.

Fear should have struck Jon in that moment, but it didn’t. A part of him wanted to run away, a part of him wanted to fight. But those were feelings of a man who had looked her in the eye as she fiercely readied for war, he was not the same man now. He urged his elk forward, and she slowly turned her head. Her eyes glowed blue, and her features were soft.

His eyes met hers, and he did not see the fierceness he once saw many moons ago. It was sadness, longing. He turned his head forward to view just what she had been gazing at. The Wall. The sight was a harsh reminder of the North’s bitter history.

They sat in silence for a moment, looking at the mighty wall of ice. There was nothing to say, and even if there was, neither of them spoke the other’s tongue. But in their silence, there was understanding. He pitied her; the magic woven into the Wall was not intended to keep the likes of him out, but the likes of her. He could move freely, but she was trapped.

He urged his elk forward and left her on that hill. The air got warmer the further he rode, but he could still feel her icy blue eyes on him as he rode onwards.

When he reached The Wall, he found a door carved from weirwood with a stern face etched into its centre. This was as far as his elk could go, and so they bid farewell to each other and went their separate ways. As he approached the door, the face opened its eyes, and red sap fell like tears.

“Who goes there?” It asked, its voice as strong as steel.

Jon opened his mouth, but he did not hear words. It was a song, and the face patiently waited as he completed it.

“You may enter.” And then the face opened its mouth so wide, he could walk through. He passed a dark tunnel, and within moments, he was on the other side of the Wall. His journey had officially begun.

He travelled on foot for moons, passing castles and villages. He even saw Winterfell and he briefly
sat and wondered which Stark sat as the King of Winter, ruling from its cold, grey walls. If he tried hard enough, Jon thought he could perhaps name him. But he wasn’t sure what year it was, so he could do little but guess. And if he tried to do that, he would be stuck there for who knows how long. He needed to get moving.

He visited many other places in his travels. He passed the Vale, the Riverlands, the Westerlands, the Reach... watching as those long dead went about their day. The current landscape still told him little about what year it was, but he guessed it was the time before the Dragons landed in Westeros.

And that much was confirmed when he reached King’s Landing and found nothing. Just hills and hovels here and there. Jon had seen it as a great city with millions of inhabitants, but here where he stood, it was empty land that stretched towards the waters. And he travelled to where it ended, towards the beach where over three hundred years from now, a bay will sit. And using a makeshift boat, he rowed himself to where he really wanted to be.

Dragonstone.

But it was not Dragonstone yet, he soon realised. It was just a rocky island. He was surprised to find that there were no dragons craved into the rock, no magnificent castle, no halls, courtyards, towers or steps. Just a sandy beach, rocks and caves.

He pulled his boat to the mouth of a cave and held his belongings close to him. There was something that called him here, but he was unsure what it was or why. He lit a torch and ventured into the dark caves.

They were familiar, he has been here before. Yes, he has. Almost a decade ago he had mined dragonglass from here. But what was different was that there was a wall that obstructed him from continuing the path he remembered walking.

‘The Targaryens must have cleared this wall themselves.’ Jon realised. He looked around the cave and found a small opening between two rocks. Squeezing his small body through the hole, he managed to crawl through the opening, and was surprised to find the air humid and the rocks warm to touch.

He lifted his torch and gasped. The entire cave sparkled in the fiery glow, and he knew he had found the dragonglass mine. He marvelled at its loveliness for ages, climbing over the rocks and admiring its beauty.

He suddenly remembered what else he found here and crossed the cave to see the drawings for himself.

But he did not see any.

The wall was blank.

Confused, Jon touched the warm stone. But then realisation dawned on him quickly, and it suddenly all made sense.

‘Ah... that is what I am here to do.’

It was strange, being in this body. It was as if they were two minds in one; Jon and The Child. While Jon held memories of the future, The Child held memories of the past. He felt like a passenger in a carriage; he could see, he could feel, but he had little control of where he was headed next. And he knew that this Child of the Forest was aware of his presence, and generously, he let him come along on this ride.
They opened the sack and inside were drawing materials, and they got to work.

They drew until night descended and morning came again. Stories in pictures of a great Northern war; an invasion of men, of terrifying monsters made of ice, a pact, a Wall... symbols after symbols he hoped that someday someone might happen upon and understand. As Jon did when he first arrived at Dragonstone. But he didn’t need to see the drawings to know what it all meant, it was history he already knew.

Then something strange happened.

The Child abruptly stopped, as if Jon’s thoughts caused him to pause. He stood still for quite some time, then walked away from the drawings, deeper into the cave. Jon did not recall travelling this far down into the cave when he had mined it years ago. Confused, Jon wondered what The Child was doing. Then he lifted his hand and began to draw a new picture.

He recognised the Heart of Winter immediately, but the other drawings were new and confusing. Pale figures with glowing blue eyes, giants, little creatures that came from the earth. They were familiar, but nothing made sense to him in the drawings, neither did the symbols and ancient runes.

“What is it that you want me to know?” He wondered aloud, and the hand paused for just a split moment, then continued to draw faster and faster, with more urgency.

But Jon would never know.

Because before he could see the full picture, he heard a familiar noise. One he had not heard in such a long time.

A screech in the distance, a furious roar usually followed with dragonflame.

The Dragons have arrived.

Jon gasped, and looked to the wall. It was not finished, he still did not know...

And something was pulling him. Not physically, but spiritually. They were separating, something strong was pulling him out of this body and while he tried to fight it and stay, there was nothing he could do–

Jon woke with a start, sweat heavy on his brow and his breathing laboured. He felt small hands shaking his arm.

“You’re awake!” He heard a cheery voice yell beside him. Daemon sat cross-legged beside him, the furs and blankets pooled in his lap and his hair a mess.

“I…” He began to reply, but he was still so disorientated. He looked down at his hands, made them into fists then relaxed them. They were his hands. He was back in his own body, what he had experienced was just a dream.

Just a dream… He wasn’t so sure. He clutched at the Godsbeads laying on his bare chest.

“Were you dreaming?” Daemon asked.

“Aye… Aye I was.” Jon squeezed his eyes shut and ran a hand through his dishevelled hair.

“What was it about?”

“I…” Jon paused. The room was still dark meaning it is still hours before sunrise. He turned to
Daemon, confused. “Why are you awake?”

He shrugged. “I had a dream.”

“You as well?”

He nodded.

“What was it about?” Jon asked.

“You first, what was yours about?”

Jon sat up in their bed. “I dreamed I was a Child of the Forest.”

“Really?” He looked at him excitedly. “What did you do?”

“I travelled Westeros. I saw how it looked like before the Targaryens landed.”

“How did it look?”

“Different… just different. Then I went to Dragonstone.”

“Dragonstone? Where Mama was born?”

“Aye. But it was empty. Actually… just before I woke, I heard the sounds of dragons in the sky.”

Daemon gasped. “You dreamed of dragons too?”

“I didn’t see them, I heard them. But I don’t think that’s important. The Child I was with… he was trying to tell me something…” Jon trailed as he rotated the small weirwood between his fingers.

Intrigued, Daemon leaned forward and whispered. “Tell you what?”

Jon glared at him from the corner of his eye.

“I don’t know… because someone woke me up before I could find out!” He replied as he playfully prodded his finger into Daemon’s chest.

Daemon’s mouth fell as his hands touched where Jon’s finger poked him. “I tried waiting for you to wake up, but it was too boring!”

“And you decided that since you couldn’t sleep, neither could I?”

He scrunched his little nose up and looked at him as if he had said the most obvious thing in the world. “Yes.”

In response, Jon unleashed a vicious attack on him, tickling him into submission.

“You could have woken up Ghost!” He growled, but his words were largely drowned by Daemon’s hysterical laughter.

“I… tried!” Daemon wheezed. “He… wouldn’t wake up… and play!”

Jon turned his head to the sleeping direwolf, who was snoring softly in the corner of the cabin. When Daemon calmed, he scooted closer to Jon and hugged his arm.

“Ghost has been sleeping a lot lately.” Daemon commented. “He gets tired often too.”
Jon’s eyebrows knitted as he felt the familiar cloud of melancholy descend on his soul. “Direwolves don’t always live this long.”

Daemon looked up at him. “What do you mean?”

“I found Ghost over fifteen years ago. Direwolves age differently than us, Daemon. Ghost is very old, and I don’t know how long he has left.”

Daemon stared at him silently, his eyes wide and his eyes glassy. “You mean… Ghost will die soon?”

“He’s travelled all over the North with us before, hasn’t he? He still has a lot of energy for a direwolf his age, but…” Jon didn’t know what to say. Looking at his beloved companion, who has been with him since he was a green boy at Winterfell. He was an extension of Jon himself, his second half. But it would be worse for Daemon. Ghost has been by his side since the day he came into this world, he couldn’t fathom a life without him by his side. They were brothers.

He hugged Daemon close to him.

“Why don’t you tell me about your dream?” He asked, trying to lighten the mood.

He blinked at him then hummed as he tried to conjure memories of his dream. “I dreamt that I was in a big city. But it was empty. Not because people moved away, but because its people died there.”

“Sounds like a nightmare.”

He shook his head. “It was sad, but I wasn’t scared. It felt… familiar.”

“Really?”

“Aye. The city… it was destroyed. Like something bad happened before I got there. It was covered in ash, and it was full of ghosts and men made of stone. It had castles, Papa, and I imagined how it looked like before they all burnt. And… I met a dragon made of grey smoke!”

“Smoke?”

“Aye, like from a fire. He came from the sea and he led me to a tall tower, and I walked around the rooms. And I found something, but I don’t remember what. But I know it was important, Papa. It was very important.”

Jon thought about it. “A city covered in ash where many people died, dragons and stone men… I think you dreamt of Old Valyria.”

Daemon’s face perked up. “Old Valyria?”

Jon nodded. “It is where our Targaryen ancestors and their dragons came from. Before they arrived in Westeros, they came from Valyria. The Valyrian Freehold was the greatest empire in the world, but one day a cataclysmic disaster called the Doom of Valyria ended it. The entire city was destroyed, and countless died.”

Daemon leaned closer. “How did it happen? Why did it happen?”

“The earth quaked, mountains erupted sending molten rock to blanket the land, giant waves rose from the seas and washed away homes, towers, castles and temples, smoke poisoned the air, and lakes and rivers boiled so hot it cooked everything and everyone in it.” Jon shrugged. “People say it
was dark magic, but who knows. It happened over four hundred years ago.”

Daemon was entranced.

“Where is it? Where is Old Valyria?”

Jon rubbed his chin. “Just past Volantis. Not too far away from where we are now, actually.”

Their ship was docked in Lys.

They had spent the day replenishing their food stores and touring the city. The city was magnificent, an absolute beauty. It made King’s Landing look like a hovel compared to its brilliance. The city had green grass, tall trees Jon had never seen before, sweet fruits he had never tasted before and blue-green waters that glittered as the waves washed on shore.

Everyone here was perfumed, dressed in beautiful flowing clothes and spoke a type of Low Valyrian that sounded smooth and sweet as it left the tongue. And for once, Daemon did not stick out. The silver-golden hair and lilac eyes that distinguished the Targaryens was common here. For the first time, Daemon could leave the ship without a scarf over his head. And he was mesmerised by the people who walked the streets.

He had never, ever, seen so many people that looked like him before.

He wanted to stay longer, but Jon refused. Though the city looked magnificent, it had a filthy underbelly. Slavery was rampant here. Men, women and children were led around in collars, forced to do as their masters bid. They performed hard labour, stood as guards to the wealthy merchants and patrolled the city as soldiers. And it seemed everywhere he looked, he found a comely young boy or sweet looking maid being led or enticing others to follow them to a splendid looking house with towering marble pillars and sweet-scented air. He had never seen a Lysene pillow house until now. Men in silks and fat coin purses came and went, and it made Jon’s skin itch.

Slavery was outlawed in Westeros; Lord Stark had taught him from a young age that no man or woman should ever be sold or born into bondage, and those who forced others into such circumstances must be dealt with swiftly and with justice.

And it is what Daenerys fought to abolish. Looking around, he understood why she would not let it stand.

Pots and Deryk had no problem with it whatsoever. They would not pass on the opportunity to bed a Lysene bed slave in their famed pleasure gardens. Sensing his discomfort, Jason elected to return them to the ship. He would rather not spend the night here.

“Father.” Daemon clutched at his arm, breaking him away from his thoughts. “I need to go.”

“Go?” Jon frowned. “You need to piss? Well the chamberpot is right there—”

“No, Father! I need to go!” He screamed, and Jon had never seen so much desperation on his face. “To Old Valyria!”

Jon’s jaw dropped. Has Daemon lost his mind?

“No.” He stated. “No, we cannot.”

“But we have to—”
Jon held Daemon’s shoulders. “No Daemon, we cannot go because nobody can. No one who enters Old Valyria ever returns.”

Well… Jon’s eyes flickered away from his son as he remembered that there was indeed someone who did.

“But what?” Daemon asked, hopeful.

Jon quirked his brow. “What do you mean?”

“You made a face. Like you had more to say but you didn’t want to say it.”

*Why is he so observant?*

Daemon pointed a finger in his face. “And don’t lie to me, Papa. We don’t lie to each other!”

Jon groaned and shut his eyes. “I know one man who sailed through Old Valyria and left alive. But barely, he was infected by those stone men with just one touch and contracted a disease called Greyscale. It is a deadly disease; it turns your skin as hard as rock and drives you into insanity, before eventually taking your life.”

Daemon blinked. “So you’re saying it’s possible to sail to Valyria and come back alive?”

Jon was stunned. “Did you hear a single word that came out of my mouth, boy? There are stone men who can infect you with a deadly disease that will drive you to insanity before it kills you… *with just one touch!*”

“Is that what happened to your friend? Did he die because of those stone men?”

“Well…” Jon looked away. “No, Ser Jorah died fighting the Army of the Dead. He found a cure—wipe that smile off your face! What happened to him was nothing short of a miracle! Maesters have tried to find a cure for centuries and never could, he was in the right place at the right time. Just because he survived, doesn’t mean we could!”

Daemon jumped off the bed and stood before him. “The Gods will protect us!”

“Our Gods are a sea away!”

“No!” He clutched the beads on his chest. “They’re not, and you know that!”

Daemon approached him, and in the dim, dwindling candlelight of their cabin, his fierce violet eyes looked so much like his mother’s. “Father, my dreams are not just dreams. They are more than that, and I think you know that just as much as I do.”

Jon swallowed. He *did* know it, he also didn’t want to hear it.

This time it was his son holding his shoulders and looking him in the eye. “Father, we need to go. Just for a little while, there’s something I need to find there. Please… trust me.”

Jon bit his lip. He was reluctant to do so, but… there was something in his eyes.

He hung his head. “Daemon… we are *this* close to your mother. Just a sail away. Do you really want to do this?”

He didn’t want to, Jon could tell. And yet, he still nodded his head. It was hard for Jon, but it was harder for Daemon.
Jon sighed. “Then we leave at dawn.”

Daemon’s eyes lit up. “Thank you, Father!”

He picked Daemon up and placed him on his side of the bed.

“Don’t thank me yet. I have a few rules and conditions that you must follow if we are to do. Firstly, you will cover yourself from head to toe. I don’t want anything or anyone touching you while we’re there. Secondly, we will only be there for a short while. Once I say it’s time to go, it’s time to go. If you cannot find what you are looking within that time, we leave, empty handed. Thirdly, at the first sight of trouble, we are leaving immediately.”

“But you said we could be there a while—”

“But if we’re attacked. If we are, we leave immediately. Understood?”

He reluctantly nodded his head. “Understood.”

“Good. Now get some sleep, you’ll need your strength.” Jon pulled the blankets over his son and kissed his head.

He then settled himself back into bed and beneath the covers, held his Godsbeads in his hand.

Gods, I pray this is not a mistake.

Chapter End Notes

This Jon chapter was supposed to be one part and it’s ended up being three. No, I have no idea how it happened. SMH. But the next chapter is the most exciting one, you might want to read to the end 😊 *wink wink nudge nudge*.

Thanks for the comments and kudos!

Next chapter: Jon and Daemon arrive in Old Valyria.
“YOU’RE GOING WHERE?”

Jason’s hands flew and clutched his hair, in utter distress.


“Absolutely not! I quite like being alive, and I don’t want that to bloody change any time soon!”

“Suit yourself.” Jon handed his bag to Daemon and began to untie the rowboat from the dock. “Look after Ghost while we’re gone.”

Jason looked behind him and saw the direwolf sitting silently by the dock. The gargantuan wolf and his white fur glowed a fiery orange and gold under the rising sun and his blood red eyes visibly chilled Jason to the bone.

“No!” He refused. “He’s terrifying. Why aren’t you taking him with?”

“It was hard enough convincing Ghost to come onto your ship, I sincerely doubt he’d like a smaller rowboat any better. And besides, its to keep him safe. Ghost is old. What if we run into trouble while we’re there?”

“Exactly. What if you run into trouble while you’re there? You could die!”

“No, we won’t!” Daemon interjected. “Papa is the best swordsman in the entire world, and I have my slingshot.” He lifted his weapon for him to see.

“Oh, Seven…” He buried his head in his hands. “You’re both going to die.”

“No, we won’t.” Jon replied, though truth be told, he wasn’t certain of it himself. “We’ll be right back.”

“NO, YOU BLOODY FUCKING WON’T!” Jason exploded, causing Jon to pause and look up at him. “We are so close. So bloody close. Volantis is just a few hours sail away and yet you chose to unnecessarily risk your life like this. Why? Because your son of seven years says so? Jon, please. Be reasonable!”

Jon took a deep breath and blew from his nose.

“I know to you it makes little sense, but there are some things in this world that you will never truly understand. My son has a gift, and he is certain that there is something in the lands of Valyria that he must find. Sometimes you must have faith in the people you love, and follow them when they are certain, without doubt, that they know the way.”

Jason blinked. Then looked behind him, at the golden sun rising over the pale, marble temples of Lys. Below the Lysene hills, they, as well as the entire dock, stood beneath its magnificent shadows.

“I won’t be able to convince you that this is a monumentally bad idea, will I?”

“Correct.”
Without looking back at them, he sighed, then murmured. “You cannot sail though the Smoking Sea with a little rowboat like that. We will need a sail boat.”

“We?”

“Yes. We.” He turned. “I’ll get us a better boat. Stay here.”

Jason begrudgingly marched away from their dock to obtain them a new boat and retrieve his things from his ship.

Jon smirked and turned back. “I told you I could convince him.”

He expected Daemon to grin, but he didn’t. He offered him a weak smile and looked away.

“What’s wrong?” Jon asked. “I thought you would be happier? We’re finally going to Valyria.”

“I am happy.”

“You don’t sound like it.”

He shrugged. “I’m just tired.”

He’s acting strangely.

Okay… hand me the bags, then?”

They hadn’t packed much. Just some food, water and their weapons. He did not intend to be gone long, just the entire day at most. Hopefully we will be back before nightfall, and if we do, we can sail to Volantis the next morning.

When Jason returned, he had his sword sheathed by his hip and had covered himself completely, leaving only his face exposed. In his hands were three helms.

“I’ve heard about the stone men who roam Old Valyria. I do not intend to join their ranks, and neither should you.” He threw two helms in Jon’s direction. Jon caught them with ease. “I managed to find a smaller one, but I suspect it’s still a bit too big for the boy, but it’s better than not wearing anything at all. If you sense trouble, put them on.”

“Thank you, Jason.”

“I don’t want your thanks, I just want to live another day.”

Jon snorted. “You could stay here, that option is still available.”

He sneered. “No, it’s not. Until I get you to return with me to Oldtown, whenever that may be, I am responsible for you. Therefore, if you decide to do anything foolhardy, I must be by your side to ensure you do not die while doing it.”

Jason turned and motioned for them to follow.

“Those are sweet words, Jason.” Jon teased. “Perhaps we are friends.”

Jason looked horrified. “If I had known this is what it meant to be friends with you, Jon Snow, I would not have been so kind.”

Jon playfully slapped his back and despite his grumpiness, Jason smiled. He really was grateful for
Jason’s presence; the more men, the higher their chances of survival.

“Speaking of friends…” Jon looked around. “Are Deryk and Pots coming as well.”

“No.” He rolled his eyes. “Deryk told me that it was a death sentence and he refused to come. And Pots spent one too many gold pieces in the pleasure house last night, I couldn’t even wake him. I instructed them to look after Ghost until we returned, though.”

He hoped Ghost was in good hands. He had left whatever was left of the money he and Daemon earned to buy him meat, he would barely have to leave the ship while they were gone for the day.

“Here it is!” Jason motioned towards a small sailing boat. “I asked a few men if they were willing to assist me sail to Valyria.”

Jon looked backward. “Oh, more men are coming?”

“No.” He replied dryly. “They called me mad and started praying for me in their mother tongue. So, I suppose we will be sailing there ourselves. No matter, let us sail!”

Lys was bathed in morning light by the time they set sail. Jon lifted his hand to his heart, over his Godsbeads, and prayed that their journey went smoothly.

Within a few hours into their journey, as he watched Daemon look over the boat’s edge and stare into the dark waters, Jason spoke to him.

“You see that port there, in the distance?”

He pointed over the water. Jon squinted as he spotted the land there yonder, and a few ships sailing in and out of it.

“That’s Volantis.” Jason whispered, and Jon’s heart jumped.

_**Daenerys**_. Jon stared at the port. She was so close, yet still so far. He cast his eyes upwards, thinking he might see Drogon flying overhead. But the skies were blue and clear.

Daemon, who had heard, lifted his head from the waters and stared out ahead. “She’s that close…”

Jon bit his lip. “Perhaps… we can just dock there on our way back? Then send word to Deryk and Pots to sail to Volantis later?”

Jason thought about it. “Sounds like a good idea. What do you think, Daemon?”

Daemon grinned. “Aye, but… I want Ghost to be with us when we meet.”

Jon chuckled. “They can meet later, son.”

Daemon bit his lip. “Then let’s go. After Valyria.”

Jon nodded. “After Valyria.” He whispered beneath his breath. He tore his eyes away from Volantis and leaned forward, absentmindedly looking into the water.

It has just occurred to him that he does not know what he will say to Daenerys once they meet. How does one even begin to apologise to a loved one they have so gravely betrayed? She had every reason to be furious with him, to seek revenge, to do as he did to her. He couldn’t fathom the hurt and betrayal she must have felt.
He wanted to see her, more than anything. He wanted to hold her in his arms and kiss her and make love to her again. But he also knew he didn’t deserve to know that feeling ever again. This journey is purely for Daemon, to unite him with his mother.

Then what? Leave his happiness and return to Westeros where he is a criminal? Where he would have to fight the white walkers again? Where he is entangled in a dangerous plot? Where his own people likely expect him to turn on his siblings? Where those siblings see him as a traitor?

Jon’s hands turned to fists.

I will never truly be happy again once I leave here. But at the very least, Daemon will be safe and with his mother. At least I will have that comfort.

“Father… Father, look!”

Jon looked up from the green-blue waves of the sea and was suddenly engulfed in a wave of silver smoke. Jon looked around him, he had never seen anything like this before.

“There’s smoke everywhere!” Daemon yelled excitedly.

“Yes, we are approaching the Smoking Sea.” Jason replied inattentively, focusing his efforts on steering.

The silver mist rose from the water like steam from a boiling pot.

“The dragon…” Daemon whispered, leaning further on the edge of the boat. “It came from the sea.”

“Which dragon?”

“The one from my dream. I was standing near a pool of water, and it rose from the smoke.”

Jon scratched his chin. “I don’t think we’ll be seeing any dragons here, Daemon. Especially ones made from smoke.”

Daemon rolled his eyes. “I know the dragon wasn’t real, he was only my guide.”

“A guide, hm? Where did he lead you? And to what?”

Daemon groaned. “I don’t remember… but I will when I get there.”

Jon blew air from his cheeks. “You sound so certain.”

“I am.” He replied, unconvincingly.

Jon raised his brow and Daemon stared back.

“I AM!” Daemon yelled, then angrily turned away from him.

Jon looked at him, nonplussed. What did I say to warrant such a reaction?

“Daemon has been acting strange, don’t you think?” Jason whispered, leaning towards him. Jon nodded, his eyes never leaving his son’s back.

“He has, and I don’t know why. He was fine last night.”

“Children.” Jason shrugged. “They are strange little creatures.”
Jon sighed. *Something is weighing heavy on his mind, but why would he not share it with me? What is he hiding?*

As his son watched the water, his figure was but a pale shadow as the mist grew and began to swallow the boat whole.

Daemon!" Jon called, concerned for his safety. "Come here!"

He obeyed and scooted to his side.

"Are you scared of the smoke?" Daemon asked.

Was he afraid? He could no longer see the coasts of Volantis or Lys. He looked around him but saw nothing but pale mist. With the mist came a sense of doom and an eerie ambiance that was as suffocating as the sea smoke. It made the hair on the back of his neck stand, and his hand inched closer to Longclaw on his hip.

"No, I’m not afraid. But I would prefer it if you stayed close."

The boat sailed onwards, blindly moving through the water.

"How long until we get to Valyria?" Daemon asked.

Though the smoke was thick, Jon could see Jason’s troubled features through the fog.

"We’re here.” Jason replied, his voice heavy with dread.

The smoke yielded, and they were engulfed in darkness. They looked above as they passed beneath a shadow and came face to face with a colossal dragon, its wide and mighty wings spread, and its teeth bared.

Jon lost his breath and Daemon gasped in wonder.

The statue was decrepit, its dark stone looked course and lustreless and one wing had broken off, likely sinking to the bottom of the Smoking Sea. As the boat navigated around it, it looked less like a fierce dragon and more like a terrified animal, encased in stone.

And Jon wondered if that were the case. If this was a dragon, centuries old and trapped by the molten rock and ash that caused its demise.

He gazed upon it, and truly did not know.

"Look, Father!” Daemon shouted excitedly, pointing ahead.

He did not know what he expected the land of Old Valyria to look like. He hadn’t wondered such a thing since he was a little boy, sitting beside Robb and listening to Maester Luwin tell the tale. At that tender age, his head was full of imagination and tales of magic and long deceased heroes. He imagined it as a dangerous, mystic isle alive with of dark monsters, ghosts and sinister magic.

But really, it was a silent graveyard. Full of ruin and dread. The sky was grey, the air was still, no birds sang and there was little sign of life. Ancient towers and temples stood half submerged in the murky waters and above them the bridges and structures crumbled. Even the trees and moss that have grown wild since The Doom were coloured a strange mix of green and grey, as if they too could sense the sombre ambiance of its home.

“I remember…” Daemon whispered excitedly. “I remember…”
He leapt from his seat and crawled to the prow.


Daemon gripped the boat and began whispering softly to himself.

Jon stretched his hand towards him. “Son?”

Daemon stopped, then turned to face not him, but Jason.

“Do you see that bridge over there?” He pointed to an arching bridge which was missing a middle. “Sail under there then turn left. There’s a temple there with steps, we can get off there.”

Jason wordlessly looked to Jon for confirmation, and with a firm nod, they followed Daemon’s instructions.

They passed beneath the bridge, found a forked path and sailed left. And as they did, they found a large house with nine sides, half its steps submerged in water and missing its walls. As they sailed closer, Jon observed the building and realised that the house’s walls and roof were once constructed with glass.

The boat slowed to a stop.

“A glass garden?” He wondered to himself.

“No,” Daemon hopped off the boat and climbed the steps to the very top. “It was a temple once. But the Gods here have been forgotten.”

Jon joined his son on the steps. Beneath his feet, shards of glass crunched beneath the weight of his boots.

“That’s a sombre thought.” Jason commented as climbed the steps.

“What is?” Jon asked.

“That the Valyrian Gods have been forgotten. No one even knows what they were the Gods of or how they were worshiped. And unless they shared the name of a Targaryen-hatched dragon, their names are lost to history as well. It is a miserable thought, really. What happens to a God when all those who pray to them perish? Do they die as well?”

Jon contemplated it. “I know nothing of what the Gods do. But if I could guess, I suppose they go elsewhere.”

Jason looked at him, puzzled. “Elsewhere?”

“Aye. Religion and faith can splinter and change with time. Like the Lord of Light, and how His followers favour the use of fire in their rituals. You do not think there is a connection between them and the Old Valyrian Gods? Both of their very identities revolve around fire and its power.”

Jason looked up towards the temple. “I never thought about that. It just seems absurd to think that the Gods would simply move on, that they can be unanchored to the very people who worship them. It is discomforting thought, I think… to believe that they would simply move on and go elsewhere.”

“But what’s left of their magic remains…” Daemon suddenly spoke, his eyes fixated on something unseen in the distance. He squinted and lifted his finger towards a distant tower, frowned, then shifted his finger slightly to the right. His squinted eyes, and his mouth that was slightly agape, both
unexpectedly widened in joy. “I know where to go!”

Without warning, Daemon sprinted away from him, through the temple and disappearing out the other side.

“Daemon!” Jon called after him.

“Keep up with me!” Daemon’s voice echoed though the ruins.

“I do not think it’s a good idea to keep shouting.” Jason replied, his voice low. “We do not want to disturb those who roam here. I may have followed you here, but I would rather not die of greyscale, thank you.”

Jason looked around and held tightly to his sword. Jon was tempted to do the same, but his concerns were elsewhere, mainly the boy who had such difficulty listening to simple instructions. ‘Stay by my side’, is that so hard?

Jon nodded to Jason, and both men rushed to find the wayward boy.

They found him about to cross a bridge, hesitating from doing so and instead looking over the edge and into the canal.

“Is something wrong?” Jon asked.

Daemon frowned. “Is the water moving?”

Jon glanced below. The water, steaming, dark and murky, did seem to move. As if there was a disturbance nearby, creating gentle waves and ripples.

“Could be the wind.” Jason shrugged. “Could be from when we arrived.”

“That seems unlikely.” Jon turned to him. “The boat is tethered.”

“Then it’s the wind!” Jason nervously looked around. “May we hurry? I don’t want to stay here another second longer than we should.”

Me neither, Jon agreed. And the three of them crossed the bridge, following Daemon’s lead. They travelled on paths overgrown with weeds, past crumbling walls and crossed bridges that threatened to crumble beneath their boots.

“We’re so close!” Daemon turned and grinned excitedly at his father, as they walked alongside a wall covered in layers of hardened ash and wet moss. “This is where the dragon took me.”

Daemon rounded a corner and led them to an arch, etched with carvings of young dragons perched, watching vigilantly as they walked below.

Below the arch were seven short steps that lead to a square courtyard that, Jon could tell, was once tiled with red, black and orange. Large cracks marred the patterned tiles, making the ground look particularly precarious to stand on. Surrounding the courtyard were weather worn stone stumps, the remains of dozens of stone pillars that once held a roof that was now nowhere to be seen.

And there, ahead of them at the far end of the courtyard, was a curved wall wrapped in mud, dust, and rotting vines that filled the air with an earthy yet smoky scent that reminded him of the Wolfswood.

“There.” Daemon said softly, and Jon narrowed his eyes ahead. Black and covered in withering
leaves, were two large doors. “I only got this far before I woke up. In my dream it looked different but it’s the right door, I think. The door was open, and I was meant to enter.”

Jon breathed. “Well, the sooner we open it and find whatever you need, the sooner we can leave.”

But that proved to be more difficult than Jon initially thought.

“Push harder!” Daemon whined.

“WE’RE TRYING.” Both Jason and Jon grunted behind gritted teeth.

But it would not yield.

After hacking at the withering leaves and vines, they had tried to open the double doors first by attempting to kick it down, then by pushing with their shoulders.

Jason fell back, sweat glistening on his brow and heavy breathed. “Let’s try this again.”

They both took three steps back, breathed and ran towards it, shoulder first.

They did it twice. Then thrice. And all they had for their effort were aching shoulders.

“What kind of door is this?” Jason whined, rubbing his tender shoulder.

Jon examined the door. How could a centuries-old wooden door not yield to two grown men in the prime of their strength? His left hand roamed the door, and felt ridges, bumps and curves. Wait… He leaned closer, and rubbed his finger on the dark doors, noting how it crumbled beneath his touch.

“There’s something beneath here…” He commented, and he withdrew his dagger.

As with every other surface in and around the isles, the door was covered in remnants of The Doom. Mud, ash and dust. It had all solidified into a layer of hard rock that, with enough strength, could be chipped away. Jon learnt this as he plunged his dagger into the door and watched the layer crack before his very eyes.

Jason followed him and together they removed the layer within minutes, revealing the door as it had been centuries ago. Bright red, and with a large, brass dragon with ruby eyes that curved and stretched over both doors, curling around a dark hole big enough for a hand at its centre.

“This is how it looked like in my dream!” Daemon exclaimed. “We have to open it!”

“But how?” Jon asked. “There’s no handle, or key.”

Daemon thought about it and pointed to the hole. “Maybe that opens it?”

“It’s just a hole.” Jason replied, sceptically. “How can that open the door?”

“Maybe there’s something in there.” Daemon walked up to the door and nearly put his hand through, but Jon stopped him before he could.

“Don’t put your hand in strange holes.” He told him, mildly irritated but not surprised that he would have to teach his son this.

“Then what do you think we should do?” Daemon asked.

*Good question… I don’t know.* But he wouldn’t tell Daemon that.
Perhaps I should put my hand in the hole… but I should at least make sure there is nothing hiding in it first.

Cautiously, he put his dagger through the hole. It disappeared into the darkness and hit something hard just two inches above the hilt, signalling to Jon its shallowness. Then he shook his dagger, up and down and side to side, hoping to hear something that could hint at a key or lock buried in the darkness.

And he did.

A small clinking sound rang as his dagger hit something metallic within.

“There’s something in there.” Jon told them.

“What?” Daemon asked, his eyes shining and full of excitement.

“I’m not sure, let us see…” And with reluctance, he put his gloved hand in.

And he was met with a cold, sharp pain.

Alarmed, Jon yelped and pulled his hand out, then removed his glove. Blood dripped from his pointer finger and trailed to his palm.

“Father!” Daemon cried and gripped his wrist. “Are you alright?”

“I…” He was alright, it was only a small cut. But once again his attention was drawn to the hole, as it emitted a small hissing sound then began doing something quite unexpected. “Is… is that smoke coming from the hole?”

Everyone turned and gaped, and Jon realised that he was not imagining it. The hole was smoking.

And that was followed with three consecutive loud bangs, then ear-grating creaking as the ancient hinges moved for the first in four centuries. The door was open.

“You did it!” Daemon cheered.

“But… how?” Jon was still bewildered by the event.

“My best guess is that the door only opens to those with Valyrian blood.” Jason hypothesised. “Or it could be blood magic.”

*Or it could be both.* Jon looked at the red blood that flowed from his wound and dried in his palm.

“Hopefully your finger does not suddenly rot and fall off.” Jason teased maliciously with a grin. “It would be quite regretful.”

Jon gave him a frosty look.

“Father, come! Let’s see what’s inside!” With one hand clamped around his wrist, Daemon used the other to push open the doors and enter the room.

The air was barely breathable. As soon as they entered, all three of them began coughing into their sleeves, shielding their mouths and noses. The door opening had created a cloud of dust that took a moment to settle.

“What is this place?” Jason wondered.
The room was circular with windows on each side, its walls were blood red. At its centre sat three iron braziers rusted red and turned over. Every surface in the room was covered in a blanket of ash and dust, and the air held the scent of stale smoke.

“Look, stairs!” As Daemon padded to the other side of the room, he unsettled the dust, sending it into the air. Morning light streamed into the room, making it look like pale snow. Light and spiralling upwards, ever so slowly and gently and disappearing from view.

Jon approached the middle of the room and looked up. He found that the stone walls stretching up into the sky, leading to a topless roof. Stairs lined the walls, spiralling upwards and connecting to balconies.

“It’s a tower.” Jon informed them. “The staircase there… it spirals upwards and connects to at least five levels.”

Jon followed Daemon and climbed the stairs. The level did not have any doors, it consisted of numerous large, stone arches and pillars that opened the room, filling it with light from the topless roof. Further down the balcony was another staircase leading to the level above.

The room was scarce, save for some broken cabinets, overturned chairs and a few bare bookshelves. There was nothing of interest here. Jon found Daemon idle, one hand on the barrister. His brow was furrowed, he looked lost.

“What’s wrong?” He asked. “Have you found anything?”

“I found a body.”

Jon frowned. “What?”

Daemon pointed to a heap by the staircase leading to the next level. The fabric was tattered, torn and aged. Scattered around the cloth were bones, and beside it was unmistakably a skull.

“What do you think killed him?”

Jon shrugged. “Who knows. Let’s not wonder, we cannot waste time by sparing a moment for the dead.”

Daemon nodded and ran up the stairs. Jason approached him.

“Does it make you uncomfortable?” He asked him. “Does it bring back memories?”

“Of what?”

“Of fighting the dead, of course.” He replied. “Does looking at them make you nervous?”

Jon turned to him. “No. I’ve seen more dead bodies since that night, and none of them have risen since then.”

“It makes me nervous.”

Jon walked up the staircase. “Why? You never fought them.”

Jason’s eyes lingered on the corpse as he followed closely behind. Jon could tell he was tense, and his tension seemed to grow the longer they stayed here.

“Because I’ve seen a white walker. And if I can be quite honest, I was scared shitless when I did.
It’s… quite discomforting seeing a monster you only thought was fable with your very eyes and frankly, I haven’t been able to stop thinking of them. And it’s making me uneasy, seeing you not really thinking about it at all.”

The next level was just as bare, Daemon had already moved on to the next.

“I’m always thinking about it.”

“Truly?”

“Of course, it never leaves my mind. It is always at the back, a constant presence.”

Jason looked puzzled. “It’s just… I figured you would be more… panicked? This is an army of the dead… You fought them once and now you’ll have to fight them again. You know how powerful they are, and yet you’re not assembling an army! Or sending ravens to every corner of the realm! Or leading a charge as we speak! It is quite a departure from the man you were several years ago.”

Jon gritted his teeth. “Aye, you are correct. The man you see is not the man he was a long time ago. Several years ago, I had an army, a home, and a crown. I was a respected leader, men would follow me, and I wouldn’t even have to ask. And now what am I? I am a criminal. I have no army, I was exiled from my home, and I relinquished my crown. The latter I do not regret, however. I would gladly bend the knee to Daenerys again. My point is that I have much less now. In fact, I only really have one thing. My son. And my main priority is his happiness and ensuring his safety. Everything else is secondary.”

“Even the lives of those in Westeros?”

“Aye. Even them.” Jon turned to him. “But I did say that they were secondary, did I not? If I were a dastardly man, I would have left them all to die. But I suspect you aren’t talking about the commonfolk when you speak of those in Westeros. Do you mean my brother and sister?”

He nodded.

“It is just that…” Jason struggled with his words. “I know I am not one to speak on this, considering the nature of our friendship. But… the Starks find honour in standing by their family, or pack, in better words. I just wonder why you would immediately think that leaving your son with the woman you killed is better than leaving him with your brother or sister in Westeros. You say you want your son to be safe, is he not safer with the family you have known your entire life?”

“No. He is not.” Jon stated, then turned away and began walking up the staircase. “And do not believe everything you hear about the Starks. For power, they can be just as treacherous as a Lannister.”

Jason’s mouth dropped. “Bold words.”

“True words.” He replied over his shoulder.

On the next level they found four more bodies, their bones scattered around the room. There was something deeply tragic in the sight, even centuries later and their bodies rotted away, there was a sense of desperation in the way they were positioned. One perished curled into a ball, another seemed to have died trying to reach the stairs and the last two passed in an embrace. Like they knew their days were at an end, and they also knew that there was little they could do about it.

“I imagined convincing you to go against your siblings would be a much more difficult task.” Jason admitted as they approached the next set of stairs.
“I understand why. Lord Stark taught us the value of loyalty and sticking together. I didn’t realise it then, but those ideals died the day he did.”

“Clearly. But it is quite surprising to see Starks fighting amongst each other. Is this something you have dreamt of?”

“You will have to be clearer.”

“Revenge.” He elaborated. “Has this been something you’ve wanted for years? Since they exiled you?”

The question made Jon pause.

Revenge… is this something I have wanted all along? Is it really why I was so willing to accept his offer, knowing it meant war between the siblings I grew up with?

Jon took a deep breath.

“No.” He decided. “I am not a vengeful man. Never have been. Before, all I desired was to be happy, to have a home to call my own and a family with the one I loved. It was my dream, one that I would never have. Now I only want is peace for me and my son, and that has been threatened yet again.”

“So you have forgiven them then? For the role they played in the demise of that dream?”

“I never said that, and I don’t think I could.” Jon leaned closer to him, his demeanour as cold as the Land of Always Winter. “What I do now, I do for my son. I want a better life for my son. A better world for my son. I want my son to be safe. And if they were to threaten that, it does not matter if we share blood. I will fight them.”

Jon took another deep breath and looked Jason in the eye. “They know about Daemon now. They see him as a threat, I am absolutely certain of it. I can try to reason with them, try to convince him he is just a boy and no threat at all. But they do not fear the boy, they fear the man he will become. They fear he will want war, they fear he will want the throne and they fear he will take it. Because if he is anything like his mother, he will take it, with fire and blood. If she does not do it, he will. And they know for each minute he lives, is another minute closer to their reckoning.”

A look of bafflement crossed Jason’s features, before it was swiftly washed away with pure shock and sudden realisation.

“Daemon’s mother… is Daenerys Targaryen?”

Silence hung between them, and Jason found his answer. Jon could see it in his eyes, a million questions sprung from every corner and crevice of his mind.

But he wouldn’t be able to answer them all. Daemon called for him.

“Father?” He called gently. Jon looked up and saw him standing awkwardly from the top of the stairs. He heard me, Jon realised. But whether he had thoughts on his words or not, he would not give them. “I need help.”

“Of course.” Jon replied calmly and climbed the stairs.

And to his surprise, the room was quite different from the rest. The walls were black. There were more braziers, the shelves still stood and broken glass littered the floor. Animal skulls and strange jars
filled with rot sat atop the shelves. And a strange aroma filled the air; it smelt like firewood, smoke, blood and death.

*If there was ever a room fit to perform dark magic, this is it.*

“There’s a door here but I can’t open it.” Daemon pointed to the stairs leading to the next level and, strangely, this one lead to a door.

But unlike the last door they encountered, this one had a handle and a lock.

Daemon stepped back as he approached. Hopefully, this one *would* yield to him.

And it did. After barrelling into it three times, it not only opened to him, but it completely flew off its hinges.

And finally, the secrets of the final level were revealed.

Chapter End Notes

*Sigh* Another chapter that had to be split up… But don’t be disappointed! The next chapter will be published the same time as this one! This was originally all one big chapter, but it ended up being over 12,000 words so… yeah.

Thanks for the comments and kudos!

Sorry it’s taken me a bit of time to update! I was in the middle of writing exams.

Next chapter: The continuation of this chapter…
Jon XII

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It was a library.

There were rows and rows of shelves, with scrolls and leather-bound books. The floor was littered with paper, fallen brass candle sticks, shattered glass and broken vases. There were a few cabinets here and there. And on each side of the room sat wooden desks and beside them, multiple sealed chests stacked on top of each other.

And of course, because of his curious nature, Daemon dove straight towards the chests.

He opened a smaller one placed on the desk, and was disappointed to find only a small knife, most likely used to open letters.

While he moved onto the next chest, Jon decided to survey the library.

He would likely never set foot in a library such as this again. Who knew what secrets it held? No one has ever managed to set foot in it and tell the world what they have seen.

He pulled a scroll from the shelf and unrolled it but was disappointed to find it written only in High Valyrian. He tried his luck with the next, and again, it was written in High Valyrian. He tried another and ran into the same problem.

Sighing, he turned to Daemon, who was rummaging through a cabinet. He lifted a paper, held it to his nose and furrowed his brow.

“What does this say?” He asked Jon.

Jon shrugged. “I don’t know, I can’t read High Valyrian.”

“Neither can I.” Daemon replied. “Mama only taught me how to speak it.”

“I’m sure you’ll learn once we arrive in Volantis. You will need a tutor, to teach you how to read and write.”

“I know how to read runes.” He grumbled.

“You won’t find Old Runes south of the Wall unfortunately.” He winked. “Keep looking, maybe you’ll find something with pictures.”

Jon followed his own advice and decided to try his luck with the leather-bound books. One immediately drew his eye. Though it was covered in dust, the gold lettering still shined through.

He pulled it from the shelf and found a leather tome. It was as thick as his wrist and weighed heavy in his hands. Jon carried it to the table and set it down.

“Find anything of interest?” Jason asked as he mindlessly picked at the scrolls on the shelf.

“Aye. This tome looks quite promising.”

“I’m sure—” Jason paused as his eyes locked on something across the room. His eyes widened and
without another word, he swiftly strode past Jon.

Hanging on the wall was a Valyrian Steel longsword with a leather and gold hilt. The minute Jason laid eyes on it, was the moment it became his. He plucked it from the wall and held it to his chest like a new born babe. His eyes sparkled and he smiled tenderly at it.

“I wonder if you would ever look at your first-born babe with the same joy and tenderness as you have a sword you found in a decrepit library.” Jon commented.

Jason managed to tear his eyes from his new-found treasure for just a mere second. “It’s Valyrian Steel, Jon! My first-born child will just have to accept that they might not compare!”

He snorted and returned to his tome.

Opening the book, he found himself satisfied. Illustration after illustration, and so finely drawn, it was immensely pleasing to the eye. He could at least pass the time with this while Daemon looked for what he was looking for.

The pages were old and stained yellow-brown, but the colours were still vibrant on the pages. And the story it told… it transcended words. Hundreds of men, with blood stained skin and swords in hands. It was a familiar sight, it was war. He had seen it, he had lived it. He was sure it was not done with him yet.

But Jon found himself overcome with a strange sensation looking at the worn pages, a sensation he could not comprehend. It felt like a heat had ignited in his gut and spread throughout his entire body, slowly but steadily.

He turned the page and was struck by a painting of a warrior. His helm obscured his face, making him a faceless foot soldier in an army of many. Jon’s eyes lingered on him and his fingers gently brushed over the pages. The man’s armour was splattered with blood, his arms were thick and bulging from years of training, the veins of his hands stood prominent as he grasped his dark longsword, ready for bloodshed. The warrior roared, spittle flying from his teeth. His passion and rage were not one for the heat of battle and the fire it ignited in the bravest of warriors… it was for survival. He could tell; for when he saw the man, he saw himself.

It was strange that Jon would find kinship with the faceless warrior.

He lifted his head to spare Jason a glance. Earlier, he had told Jason that he was not a vengeful man and he was certain that was true. He didn’t… desire revenge. He desired a peaceful existence, he desired solitude from those who he did not trust.

But he would be lying if he said he hadn’t thought about it. Sometimes he did wonder… If he had a chance to repay Sansa in kind for betraying him, would he do it? For years, the answer was yes. He would. But he figured it would be by giving her the cold shoulder or denying her help when she needed it. Perhaps he would even make her beg.

But he knew that would never happen. Her pride would never allow her to beg her ‘bastard’ brother – who was really her cousin – for anything. Not while she reigned as Queen in the North. So, he never entertained the idea further than in a fleeting moment of boredom. And even then, his musings were never fuelled by rage.

And neither was my decision to abandon my exile, agree to Jason’s terms – hereby involving myself in a war I want no part of – and travelling to Volantis to reunite with Westeros’ most formidable enemy… That couldn’t possibly have been fuelled by rage… could it?
Jon began to feel ill.

*I did it for Daemon, I did it for his safety…* Jon looked at the page before him. *Not because I have some silent rage bubbling within me that I refuse to acknowledge. My decisions are purely calculated by reason, and reason alone.*

He wished he could be convinced by the voice in his head.

He turned the page, and the faceless soldier was consumed by fire. Jon leaned closer, breathlessly. The soldier clutched a sword in one hand and a shield in the other. Fire burned below his feet, grew past his legs in bold orange strokes and licked his tense arms. He did not appear to be in agony, his head was tilted to the Gods and he stood confidently before his foes. He was ready for battle, ready for a fight, ready for war.

Below the illustration was one Valyrian word in large, prominent letters. The ink was reddish-brown, different to the rest of the writing which was written in dark ink. He frowned. *What does this mean?*

“FATHER!” Daemon screamed. Jon jumped and reached for Longclaw.

“What?” He shouted, his eyes skittering around the library, trying to find the threat.

Daemon’s grin was so large, it squinted his eyes. “I found something!”

Jon breathed a sigh of relief. “What is it?”

Daemon, who stood beside a large chest, turned towards it for a moment then returned his attention back to him. The boy grunted as he attempted to lift a fairly large and heavy object in his small arms. He triumphantly lifted his little hands to show him what he had found… and Jon’s stomach sank.

Jason peered curiously over to inspect the object and scrunched his nose in disappointment. “A rock?”

“An egg!” Daemon corrected.

“A dragon egg.” Jon breathed, and all three of them stood still and silent.

Jason’s eyes widened as he leaned closer. The egg was covered in scales as pale as freshly lain snow. Wordlessly, he looked at Jon to gauge his reaction. Jon was stone-faced. *There is only one dragon left in the world…* His eyes travelled from the egg to Daemon, whose eyes were wide and bright and full of joy and wonder. *Gods… there shall be more.*

“It must be dead by now, though.” Jason commented, earning a furious glare from Daemon. “Don’t look at me like that! It has been unhatched for over four centuries how could it have survived all this time?”

“Daenerys told me that her dragon eggs were older than two centuries before they hatched.” Jon informed him, and Jason bit his lip.

“So is that your plan?” Jason asked. “To hatch dragon eggs and conqueror Westeros once again? I will admit, having dragons on our side is a fine idea. But it would mean having to wait *years* before we can use them in battle.”

Jon frowned. “Absolutely not.”

“Then what is your plan, hm? How will you hatch them?”
Daemon hugged his egg close to his heart. It tugged at Jon’s heart. It was reasonable to think Daemon the last hope for the future of House Targaryen. The boy’s very existence was a miracle, and though he was aware that his birth was a boon from the Gods, he couldn’t help but think that perhaps… he is meant for something greater.

Obviously, Jon resisted the urge to shake his head. Once he is with his mother, he will be a prince. The heir to her empire. He could conquer lands and rule kingdoms one day. Jon gazed at him and saw Daenerys. He saw her passion, her fire, her confidence, her kindness… then his eyes drifted once again to the egg in his hands. Jon sighed, it almost seemed destined that he would follow in her footsteps.

Daemon’s eyes were wide and hopeful, as he too wanted to know the answer to that question. How will you hatch them?

“I don’t intend to.” He replied. “I only know one person who has successfully hatch dragons. Perhaps she will know what to do.”

“Do you think mother will hatch one for me?” Daemon asked.

Jon knitted his brows. He asks it as if it’s the easiest task to accomplish, as simple as doing a chore. “It’s… not that easy. Magic had a heavy hand in the hatching of Drogon and his brothers.”

Daemon grinned then turned to collect a book from the chest. “Maybe the books will tell us how.”

“If you learn how to read them, perhaps. Unfortunately, none us can, so picking the books you will take with you will have to be a guessing game. Choose wisely.”

Daemon pouted. “Can’t we take them all?”

Jon looked around the library, incredulously. “You want us to find a way to pack up an entire library?”

And for the love of Gods, Daemon looked at him like he was earnestly about to say yes.

“No.” He replied sternly, before Daemon could utter his response. “We barely have enough room in our bags as it is. We will take only what we can carry.”

Jon had begun to turn away when Daemon spoke. “Well… I’m still going to carry the rest of the eggs.”

He paused, then slowly turned back to face Daemon. “There’s more?”


Jon approached and peered over his son to look into the chest. And there they were. Five additional eggs: An egg as blue as the sky with a cloudy white base, an egg as black as coal, a blood red egg with golden scales, a fiery orange egg with blue veins and finally, an egg as grey as winter storm clouds with silver veins.

Jon blinked. “I… suppose we can bring those as well.”

Daemon beamed while he gently placed the egg in his bag. “I’m so happy we came!”

Jon hummed, still slightly stunned at his son’s discovery.

“I also found a book, look.” Daemon picked up a book from the desk and opened the front page.
“Look at the dragon, Papa!”

Jon looked at the picture on the first page… but then his eyes spotted something interesting.

“This book was written by a Targaryen.”

Daemon’s eyes widened. “Really?”

“Aye. It says here is was written by Laenar Targaryen.”

“Who’s that?”

“Likely a scholar who lived here before The Doom, many centuries ago.”

Excited, Daemon took the book and stuffed it into his bag. “I can’t wait to learn how to read it! If we hadn’t come, we never would have found it or the dragon eggs! To think Mother didn’t want us to even come!”

Jon froze. And so did Daemon when he realised what he had let slip.

“What did you say?” Jon hissed, loud enough for him to hear.

Daemon did not turn around to face him. But Jon could see that he gulped at his question.

“Daemon…” He called, in a dangerously low voice. “What do you mean ‘Mother didn’t want us to even come’?”

Daemon, slowly, turned his head to face him. His joyful expression had disappeared and was replaced with a mask of youthful innocence, with his bottom lip slightly pouted and his eyes glossy and wide.

“Remember yesterday when you promised we could come to Old Valyria?” He asked in a light tone, avoiding his stern gaze and instead staring at his boots.

“I do.”

“Well… after I went to sleep, I dreamt of Mother. We were in her garden and she asked about our travels and how soon we were coming to Volantis and… I told her about my dream and I… I told her that we were going to Valyria first. And… she got angry at me.”

“Angry?”

“Aye. Very angry. She shouted at me and… Mother never shouts at me, but she did. She told me not to go because it’s so very dangerous but… I knew in my heart that we needed to go, Father. But Mother… she wouldn’t listen and I’m sorry I never told you, but I was afraid then you would change your mind and say no.”

Suddenly it made sense why he was acting strangely this morning. He felt guilty.

Jon crossed his arms. “You are right, I never would have agreed if I had known your Mother had said no.”

Daemon gave a feeble shrug and muttered beneath his breath. “Well… now you see why I never told you.”

The strange sensation returned. That heat, the same one he had felt when he paged through the tome. Jon felt hot. Like his blood was boiling. Jon gave his son a sharp look, and Daemon shied away from him. But Jon… he wasn’t angry at Daemon. He’s only a young boy, and he had been one once. He
knew they were prone to questionable decisions.

But he was angry. Perhaps he was angry at himself, or just… angry. He felt his skin heat beneath his multiple layers of clothing, and he was tempted to rip them off. He needed to put his hands on something… His hand twitched, and he willed it to stay.

What is happening to me? He wondered. This has never happened.

He shut his eyes tight and breathed. In and out. In and out. He curled his hand into a tight fist, unclenched and squeezed hard again. He opened his eyes and found both Jason and Daemon staring at him, waiting for him to say something.

“Gather what you need.” He finally said. “It is time we leave.”

Gods, he thought, Daenerys will most certainly be furious with me. Well, more furious than I originally thought. Bringing Daemon here was already a foolish idea to begin with, and since Daenerys has the sense he so obviously lacks, she objected while he didn’t have the heart to.

He groaned to himself. I already have a lot to explain for, now I have this.

He turned away and listened as he silently arranged his belongings. Gods… what am I going to do with this boy!

He sighed and looked at the tome that had engrossed him not too long ago. His eyes were drawn to the lonely word once again. ‘Vēdros’… what does that mean?

He turned the page and found more Valyrian writing. This time, in this strange reddish-brown ink. Suddenly, he was aware of a wet sensation on his fingertips. A red stain formed on the pages of the ancient tome as Jon realised that he had accidentally opened his wound.

Cursing, he closed his fist to try stop the bleeding. He hoped he had not ruined the tome… And then he noticed something peculiar. The blood stain… the writing… Jon’s eyes widened. Slowly, he leaned closer to the pages and inhaled the reddish-brown ink. Centuries in a dusty old library had not dulled the scent, he could smell the distinct metallic scent of blood.

Perplexed, he leaned away and gazed at the page once more. There were only five lines of large text. And though he couldn’t understand it, he wondered if he could still try to sound it out. A voice whispered in his head, urging him to say it. He hesitated but his curiosity grew, and so he eventually complied.

“P… Perzys se… ānogar, ānogar se perzys”

He felt the flame ignite within him again.

“Kostagon se… se perzyssy hen… uh… Valyrio tepagon issa… kustikāne”

His skin felt warmer, and he began to sweat.

“Ivestragī perzys se… vēdros zālagon issa.”

I should stop. I must stop.

“Kostagon jaes gaomagon issa.”

His blood… it felt like something inside him was boiling. Beads of sweat roll down his forehead and his breathing became shallow. He gripped the tome with both hands and left a bloodied handprint on
Noticing his father’s strange behaviour, Daemon called to him. “Father, are you feeling well?” But something in Jon desperately urged him to finish what he started.

“Maghago… issa ērinnon!”

And Jon’s entire world went black.

He could still feel, but what he felt was fire. Burning him. Searing him. Consuming him alive.

He heard screaming and thought of Daemon. He opened his eyes and saw him, his violet eyes wide and terrified. He shouted, but Jon couldn’t hear his voice. He attempted to leap towards him, but Jason pulled him away from him, his expression was pale and aghast.

Jon heard whispers. Hundreds of voices spoke to him all at once, but none in a language he understood. They got louder and louder and louder until they were no longer whispers, they were screams and roars and cries of war.

He felt his body twist. He felt his hands grasp desperately at his ears.

Make it stop.

MAKE IT STOP.

And he roared. An animalistic sound that no man should ever make. He could scarcely believe it come from him, but his throat was too bloody raw for it to have come from anywhere else.

And it silenced the voices.

But the fiery sensation never left him.

“FATHER!” Daemon cried. Jon wiped the sweat from his brow and lifted his head. Daemon wrestled in Jason’s grip and finally broke free from his hold and dove straight for him. “WHAT’S WRONG?”

“What happened?” Jon asked, disorientated.

“I don’t know! You fell and started screaming!” Tears fell down his face. “You scared me!”

What happened? What did that book do to me? He found it difficult to breath.

“Help me up.” He breathed huskily, and Jason grasped his arm. His eyes widened as he touched his skin.

“Your skin… its burning hot.” He told him. He didn’t need to be told, he could feel it.

Jason threw his arm over his shoulder and carried him down the stairs. Daemon held onto his pantleg and let him support himself by holding his shoulder as they walked. Briefly, he spared a moment to put his glove back on to stop any further bleeding.

“How are you feeling, Father?” Daemon asked softly.

Jon took a deep breath. The burning… either he was becoming accustomed to it or it was slowly going away. He hoped it was the latter. “Better, I think.”
“Can you walk?” Jason asked. “We’re nearing the bottom of the tower.”

“Aye, I think I can—”

They had approached the bottom of the stairs when Jason abruptly stopped. He felt Daemon move behind him, his hands clutching his pant leg tighter. Before he could ask what was wrong, he saw them.

At least four. Blocking the stairway to the lower level, to their freedom. Their skin was sickly grey, their skin dry, crackling and flaking. Their eyes dark and soulless.

Time slowed. His heart stopped. Their eyes locked, and Jon could only hear his breathing. Jason moved his hand slowly to his sword and Jon did the same.

“Put your helm on, Daemon.” He instructed in a low voice. “Now.”

Not even a second later, the Stone Men attacked.

Their swords sung as they were unsheathed, and the skilled swordsmen lunged in a counterattack.

Though the Stone Men were living, they were, in a matter of speaking, dead men. It was the sickness, their greyscale, that rotted their soul, skin, mind and body. And so, their tactics were not unfamiliar to Jon, a man who had fought wights years long ago.

They had no strategy. They had no will to survive, their only motive was to kill. They use only force and erratic behaviour.

Jon cuts through one, from shoulder to chest to hip in one decisive swing, but he is not easily felled. The creature staggers backwards, but he does not fall. His hand grips his sword tighter and his lips purse into a grimace.

He should have known. A sword can hardly cut through rock, and a monster with stone for skin will take much more force to fall. The creature lunges, Jon tries again.

The creature falls, but it still moves and rolls on the ground, ready to stand.

Beside him, Jason screams. One of the creatures has found itself on his back and they both fall to the ground. Beyond him, Jon sees Daemon curled beside a bookshelf, hugging his bag close to his chest, terrified.

Before Jon can rush to Jason’s aid, he feels the wind pushed out of him as he impacts the floor. Longclaw clangs beside him as it falls from his hand. The creature snarls atop of him. Jon kicks at him, knocking his leg out from under him. He falls on top of him and Jon takes advantage to switch their positions, rolling and sitting atop the monster, and gripping his wrists with more strength he could possibly muster.

He thrashed and wrestled beneath him, and Jon wondered for how long he could maintain this. There were four of them, and only two of them could fight. And Jason was currently wrestling with his own foe, struggling to keep the Stone Man from putting his hands on his neck.

Wait… His eyes widened. There are four of them… where are the other two?

A stone whistled past him as it flew above his head. Then he heard a ghastly cry directly behind him as a body fall beside him. The creature withered in pain as it clutched its eye.
“Got him!” Daemon cheered. And Gods… he was grateful for his help, but he also wished he hadn’t done that. The Stone Men hadn’t been paying attention to Daemon… until this very moment.

Jon’s eyes widened. And so did his, as he realised what this meant.

Daemon hurriedly reached into his bag to collect more stones, but the boy was frightened and half of them spilt from his hand while his shaking hand refused for the others to stay within the leather strap.

The Stone Man beside him stood. And the other passed him. Both of their sights were set on Daemon.

“Daemon!” He called as they cornered him. Daemon’s wide eyes looked to him and only him.

Jon became distracted, and the creature below him took advantage of the opportunity. Suddenly Jon was flipped on his back and the creature was the one holding his arms this time around.

“PAPA!” Daemon’s desperate screams froze his heart, it struck a cold and soul crushing fear in him that threatened to end him right there. “PAPA!”

Jon tried to fight him. To raise his arms, but the creature was too strong.

“PAPA!” Daemon cried again, and Jon wanted to scream.

And then… the burning returned.

It seared his skin and turned his blood to molten stone. He saw red. He smelt blood. He saw flames and breathed smoke.

This was pure rage.

And he had never felt so alive.

But that was all he could do: feel.

The sensations blinded him and numbed him to everything else but what ran through his body. He could hear only screams and cries and growls, he tasted copper, he smelt blood and smoke.

He felt his body move. He felt his muscles flex and tense and rise and fall. His hand gripped Longclaw, and his Valyrian Steel sword did not feel like a sword, but an extension of his arm. An extension of his being.

The feeling was euphoric, but also wholly consuming, tempting and dangerous. It boiled within him like a dark cauldron, threatening to boil over and burn anything and everything within reach. He was unstoppable, he was untouchable, he–

“Father!” He heard a voice call through the noise. And that one voice… it was the spell that extinguished the flame and iced the burning.

He felt little, gentle hands touch his own.

And finally, his senses returned to him.

“Father, look at me.” Daemon shook him gently. Grey eyes found violet-silver, and those eyes were confused, stunned and full of childlike curiosity. “You did it, you killed them all!”

“I did?” He asked, disorientated.
He nodded his head and glanced behind him. “You did.”

Blood, black and rotted and sick, was spilled onto the ground and splattered on the walls. It fell from his sword and dripped freely to the floor. The creatures laid motionlessly on the floor, their heads severed, and their chests slashed open.

Did I do that?

“You did.” Jason replied in disbelief. “While I appreciate you saving my arse, I have to ask: What in the Seven Hells came over you? You’re usually so… level headed.”

Jon shook his head. “I’m not quite sure.”

“Well perhaps you can do it again if we encounter any more of those Stone Men.” He replied, stepping over a body and towards the stairs. “Let us leave, please. I escaped the Stranger once, and if we stay here a moment longer, I fear he’ll think we’re taunting him and send another challenge our way.”

As luck would have it, they managed to leave the tower without another incident. But the tension was still high. They moved— no, ran— towards the direction of their boat.

The air was still. Almost too still.

The blue sky was turning golden-orange. It was way past noon, and it was unlikely they would make it back to Lys while the sky was still light. Or Volantis… Jon remembered. He had told Daemon that they could head straight to Volantis after their journey, but he was unsure he was ready to face Daenerys now. If she was angry with me before, she must be positively incensed now.

The trio slowed to a walk as they passed the canal to recuperate their strength. As Jon leaned against a moss-covered wall, Daemon walked beside the canal to look over into the steaming water.

“I think there’s something in the water.” He said, pointing to the ripples and waves. “It’s always moving.”

“Water tends to move, Daemon.” Jason replied flatly. “It might be the easiest thing to disturb.”

Daemon frowned. “I’m not imagining it. There’s something there!”

“Nothing is in there. Come, we have to keep moving—UGH!”

A Stone Man leapt out of nowhere and came barrelling towards Jason.

Jon, thinking quickly, pulled Longclaw out and drove it so forcefully into the creature’s heart, that the tip of his sword emerged the other side. It made a pitiful noise before falling over the ledge and into the canal below.

The three of them watched it sink, bubbles surfacing above the murky water until it finally ceased.

After a moment of silence, Jason cleared his throat. “That was unexpected.”

“Really? This is the fifth one we have fought. We must remain alert, and hurry to our boat.” Jon replied.

“Yes, yes…” Jason peered over the canal and watched the ripples and waves. “Gods… can it get any worse than this?”
Their attention was drawn to the sound of splashing waves. All three of them turned and looked at the canal. The waves grew bigger and bigger, then suddenly the water level dropped. As if something gargantuan was in the water… then suddenly got out.

“What in the Seven Hells is happening now?” Jason whispered, frantic.

In the distance, they heard the distinct sound of rushing water, falling from a great height and falling to the ground below. They stood still and held their breath.

After a moment of silence, Jason whispered a suggestion. “Perhaps we should just make a sprint to the boat?”

Jon nodded and grasped Daemon’s hand and prepared to flee.

But then Jason’s face paled. And his face rose to the sky and his mouth fell. “Father, protect us.” He gasped, full of fear.

“What?” Jon asked. And then they were engulfed in shadow. A huge shadow, a long and dark singular shadow that stretched over them and eclipsed the sun.

Slowly, Jon turned.

His eyes lifted to see what creature had risen behind him.

His jaw dropped.

He had never seen anything so grotesque in his life.

The monster was worm-like, but… with a face. It had large, tar-black eyes and no nose. It opened its mouth and Jon saw the deepest depths of Hell, with rows and rows of sharp, yellow teeth. The giant was covered in a slick black coat that glistened in the sun and silver steam rose from its body as the water from the canal sizzled on its skin.

When it rose from the water, it was as tall as a tower.

“Oh Gods.” Jon whispered under his breath. Then he shouted for all to hear. “RUN!”

All three of them sprinted away. Jon did not let go of Daemon’s hand, not even for a moment. He heard the monster roar and the sound of a building collapsing as the beast dove in their direction.

His only concern was getting to the boat. But what then? The thought nearly paralysed him. Our only way out of Valyria is the boat… and the monster lives in the water.

Suddenly, they hear a loud slash as the monster unexpectantly dove into the water beside them, showering them with scalding water. Jon grabbed Daemon and shielded him with his body. The water washed over him and Daemon, and though it was somewhat painful, it only turned his skin red. Daemon on the other hand appeared fine; drenched, but okay. Relieved, he prepares to stand but is halted when he hears a painful scream. It is then that he notices that Jason is no longer ahead of them.

“JASON!” He shouted. His eyes searching the path. “JASON!”

“Over here!”

Jason had managed to jump behind a crumbling wall which, by some luck, did not buckle beneath
the wave. But he was not lucky enough to come out unscathed. He clutched his forearm in his hand. He lifts his sleeve and Jon sees that it is red and excruciatingly raw.

“Get up.” Jon urges. “Get up, we just need to get over the bridge.”

“And then what?” Jason snaps. “That thing is in the water! How will we sail from here?”

Jon was stumped. “I… I don’t know. But we’ll figure it out when we get there. Now get up!”

Jon pulls him to his feet. He peers behind the wall and finds that the monster is nowhere to be seen. “Come now.”

The three of them run from their hiding spot and head for the bridge.

The bridge is in sight when the water explodes once more. And the worm rises, head first, from the water directly beneath the bridge. They dash out of sight and behind the ruins. Scorching water and ancient stone rain around them as the trio watch events unfold, absolutely horrified.

The bridge… Their only path to the boat… was destroyed.

The worm lowers its body and begins slithering on the path beside them, searching.

It was in that moment an unsettling realisation sunk, but only Jason had the capacity to voice it.

“Gods… We’re going to die here.” He said deliriously, followed by laughs that had Jon questioning his sanity. When he calmed, he tearfully whispered to himself. “I don’t want to fucking die. Not like this. Not here.”

Jon’s body was frozen, his hand was clamped tightly around Daemon’s wrist.

What do I do now? Nothing came to mind. There is no escape. The worm slithered down a separate path close by, searching for them there. But it was only a matter of time before it saw them here. There was little place to hide. The towers were crumbling, many of them could collapse upon them if the worm attacked them there. And swimming was not an option, they would cook the minute they touched the water.

Either we are eaten by the worm, boiled alive in the waters of the canal or buried beneath a mountain of rock and rubble. None of the options were enticing, none of them guaranteed they live another day. Ultimately… they were doomed.

And it is my fault.

“This is all my fault.” Daemon sniffled and curled beside him. “I never should have asked to come here.”

“It isn’t.” Jon shook his head. “I never should have said yes.”

“But you said yes because you trusted me.” He cried into his side. “And I let you down.”

Jon squeezed his son close to him and kissed his head for what could be the last time. “You can never let me down. Never ever.”

Jon heard whispering beside him. Jason’s eyes were closed, and a prayer was on his lips. He could have sworn he heard him murmur a woman’s name.

It made Jon think of Daenerys.
I have failed you again. He closed his eyes, pained. Gods… I wish I could have seen you one last time.

He could have sworn he heard a deep roar in the distance, but he was certain it was a figment of his imagination. But then he heard it again.

His eyes open, and he wondered if he was truly going mad.

Daemon lifts his head and looks to the sky. Did he…?

“Did you hear something?” He asked him.

Just then, they were consumed with blinding light. A wave of heat washed over them, and Jon briefly wondered if he were on fire, but he was not. No… but something else is. The sickening smell of burning flesh invaded their noses and a deafening shriek of a dying animal shook the earth beneath them.

The air filled with black smoke. All three of them hurried to block their noses and make sense of what was happening.

The ground beneath them was shaking. Smoke filled the air. Around them, towers fell, and the stone paths cracked. The heavy smoke shadowed them, blocking the sun. In his disorientation, Jon was sure that The Doom was repeating itself. He held onto Daemon and whispered a prayer for his Gods to hear.

Daemon grabbed onto his father and buried his head into his chest.

Jon opened his eyes to access the damage but found only the smouldering remains of the monstrous creature. It had fallen onto a tower, causing it to collapse and create plums of dark smoke and dust. The fires surrounding them was spreading, but it had not reached where they sat yet.

He first checked to see if Jason was alright. At the very least he was still alive, though paralysed with fear and shock. Daemon lifted his head to see the commotion. A peculiar look crossed over his face, one that was wholly inappropriate for the predicament they were in.

His lips parted in a smile and he shouted one single word. “Mama!”

And it was that single word that moved all the pieces into place.

Slowly, almost fearfully, Jon turned his head. And it was at that moment that he realised that it was not the smoke blocking the sun. It was a dragon. A dragon he had not seen in several years.

Jon held his breath as the smoke began to clear.

And for the first time in what felt like centuries. He saw her. Her silver-gold hair. Her pale skin. She swiftly turned when she heard Daemon’s voice.

And immediately, her eyes locked onto his.

Violet on grey.

The moment felt as lucid as dream, but it was not a dream this time. This was real.

Jon Snow had finally found Daenerys Targaryen.
Translation:
“Fire and blood, blood and fire.”
“May the fires of Valyria give me strength.”
“Let fire and fury burn me.”
“May the Gods use me.”
“Bring me victory.”
And “vēdros” is fury.

Word of advice to anyone who comes across an ancient tome in a strange library, and finds words written in blood on its pages, don’t utter the words out loud if you don’t know what they mean. It might be a blood spell 😊 But Jon isn’t completely to blame though, the moment he sacrificed his blood to open that door, he was already susceptible to Valyria’s suspicious spells and ancient magic.

Dany and Jon have reunited! But unfortunately, it is not going to be a happy reunion once they land in Volantis. Pray for Daemon please, what is supposed to be the happiest moment of his life is about to be the opposite.

Next chapter: Daenerys and Jon arrive in Volantis and have their long-awaited talk.
Daenerys IV

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

She had circled the city of ruins for what felt like hours.

She had been absolutely sick with worry the moment she woke and performing her queenly duties had been near impossible during the day. And everyone noticed. As she dressed her, Taela shyly noted how she seemed to be agitated and skittish. Daenerys lied that it was simply a particular affair pertaining to her rule that stressed her this morning, nothing to be concerned about.

Predictably, her uncle approached her before the council meeting to probe her on her worries. She assured Doniphos that nothing was amiss, but he wasn’t too convinced. Though, to her relief, he didn’t push the matter further and they managed to finish the meeting without issue.

But it was in those moments, when she was alone in her study or her bedchamber, that her thoughts ran wild.

*They could be dead. They could be dead. They could be dead!*  
She could not work, she could not focus, she could not do anything until she knew they were safe.

And so, she and Drogon took to the skies, and they flew straight to Valyria.

Flying over the city, she was convinced that perhaps Daemon had had second thoughts or Jon had come to his senses and refused that they go. She was convinced that she was worrying herself for nothing.

That was… until she spotted a boat tethered to a building below her. That was when she knew. And she was determined to find them as soon as possible. But trying to find two people in a city of rubble proved to be the hardest task to accomplish. It was near impossible, there were too many places to hide and for all she knew, the Stone Men might have gotten to them first.

She knew they would encounter trouble, she had little doubt in her mind. Even as she flew over Old Valyria, she was haunted by scenarios, no matter how outlandish, of what could have befallen her young son. She was ready to fight anything and everything for his safety. Well, not everything. Even she couldn’t have imagined encountering a worm-like bemouth shooting from the smoking waters.

Then she heard the screams, the shouts, the commotion. And it chilled her to the bone.

She wasn’t even sure if the monster was attacking her son or not. She would not even hesitate for a moment, she would not give it an extra minute to potentially hurt her boy. As soon as she locked eyes on it, she breathed one word. “*Dracarys.*”

And the beast sizzled and blistered under Drogon’s mighty breath.

She watched the repulsive creature wither painfully as it burned, and she wondered if there were anymore hiding in the dark corners of this doomed city.

“Mama!” A voice in the distance cried.

That one word. She knew that voice. Her body froze but her heart melted.
She turned her head, desperately searching for her son. But then she saw him. Her eyes met his, and it truly felt like time stopped. He always had that effect on her; the ability to change her world simply by existing in her space, but now, time stopped for completely different reasons. Her emotions would have crumbled her right there, had her instincts not taken over.

“Quickly, climb up!” She commanded steely. And Daemon, Jon and a man she did not know ran towards Drogon. A warmth spread throughout her as Daemon held tightly to her middle, but that was quickly replaced by a powerful and consuming heat when he felt his arms wrap tightly around both her and her son. She wasn’t sure what it was, but she wagered it was pure fury and rage.

By the time they arrived in Volantis, the sun was setting, and it bathed them all with a passionate, fiery glow.

Drogon landed atop her tower, and they all climbed down onto her chamber’s balcony.

And as soon as Daemon’s feet touched the ground, they were swept up once again as she held him tightly in her arms. If she could squeeze him any tighter, she would have. She embraced him like he would disappear from her if she let him go. Daenerys heard a soft sob from him, and her knees buckled. They both fell to their knees, allowing their senses to indulge in one another.

She hugged him, held his face in her hands, smelt his scent, watched him smile and listened to him speak and cry and laugh and tried greatly to ingrain every little detail of every little thing he did into her mind. She couldn’t believe it. He was real, and she held him in her hands. After all these years, he was hidden away from her in that desolate frozen wasteland and now she was able to see him, smell him, and touch him with her own hands during the day, as she waked.

And no dream could compare to seeing him with her own eyes. His silver-blonde hair that was so much like hers, and his violet eyes that also held flecks of silver-grey. Under the setting sun, they sparkled with so much life as he grinned broadly. The feeling was euphoric, she had never felt this happy. Never.

Nothing could compare to the feeling of knowing she could close her eyes, and when she opened them, she knew he would not disappear. Not this time. Not ever. Tears fell freely down her face.

“I’m so happy to see you!” Daemon cried happily.

“So am I, my little one, so am I…” She cried, a joyful grin on her face and his chubby face in her hands.

“Our family is complete.” He whispered with bliss. “You, me and father. I’m so happy, we’re all together now!”

Daenerys’ face fell, and her steely eyes flickered over his shoulder, towards the man who stood a distance away. He was watching them, a nondescript look on his face. But he was tense, Daenerys had held tightly to those muscles before, she knew what he looked like calm and joyful, and this was not the picture he gave.

He is afraid of me. Daenerys gave him a prolonged icy look, and he visibly gulped. Her eyes returned to Daemon, whose smile had disappeared and had his brows knitted.

This was not the response he was looking for... Dany smiled warmly at him and rubbed his arms reassuringly. “You need a warm bath. And a hearty meal. You’ve travelled such a long way, and I would love to hear your tales.”
Daemon returned the smile, but she could still sense his underlying unhappiness.

She stood and held his hand in hers. As she walked through the door, she threw a frosty look over her shoulder. Her eyes met his, and the message was clear. *If we must speak, it will be much later.*

She opted for a private supper in her quarters. Inviting them to sup in the hall with her subjects would have raised too many questions she was not prepared to answer.

And she wanted Daemon to have her undivided attention. She revelled in spoiling him, mainly by feeding him foods he had never tasted before. She fed him a big, juicy roasted duck stuffed with onions and carrots, with a side of spiced potatoes, pie filled with diced bacon, chicken and melted cheese, and for dessert, sweet apple tarts.

And he gobbled it all. Whatever she placed in front of him. She resisted the urge to throw dirty looks Jon’s way as he quietly sat beside Jason on the opposite side of the table. Hours past, and they still had not uttered a single word to each other. *Look at the way he’s eating, how have you been feeding him this entire time?* When he tasted the duck, he exclaimed that it was better than the rabbit meat he was accustomed to and took two servings more.

*My son, a prince, forced to survive on rabbit meat in the cold, icy lands of the North during its harshest winter as I have been feasting in the sun all the while.* It made her want to weep, and it made her want to viciously scream at the man who kept him there.

It brought back memories of her childhood. Struggling for food and without a proper home, enemies to a crown that rightfully belonged to her family’s, forced into hiding and terrified that she would meet her end at the hands of a cutthroat… She swore that her children would never live a life remotely close to hers, and already she had failed in that promise. It made her furious, but mostly at him.

*This is his fault. It all is.*

Beside her, Daemon yawned.

“I’m full.” He said, rubbing his eyes. “And sleepy.”

“You’ve had an exhausting day. It is time you rested.” She replied, preparing to pick him up and settle him in her bed.

But instead, he looked towards his father. “It’s time for bed, Papa.”

Jon’s eyes flickered towards Dany, read her hard expression and he cleared his throat. “You should sleep with your mother tonight, Daemon.”

Daemon grinned, he would not object to that. And Dany would have fought for that to be so anyway. *You have had him all your life, it is my turn now!* And she did not even feel remotely selfish for wanting him all for herself. In fact, she just wished he would disappear so Daemon could remain hers forever. She never wanted Daemon to be out of her reach ever again. Now that he was by her side, she would fight for that to remain so.

Besides, now that he was here, there were preparations to be made. A suitable chamber for the crown prince, new clothes, tutors, a royal guard assigned to keep him safe… All that couldn’t be done in a night, so she would be his protector until then.

And so, she walked him into her bedchambers, leaving Jon and Jason at the table.
“You sleep in here?” Daemon marvelled as he took in her bedchamber. “It’s so big!”

Daenerys grinned. “I’ll make sure your bedchamber is just as big.”

He scrunched his nose. “I miss our cabin back home. It’s small, but cozy and warm. And it always smells like smoke, leather and wood. And I like having Papa and Ghost close by.”

“I suppose we can make a few compromises.”

He looked towards the door of her bedchamber. “Is Papa going to be far? He doesn’t like us being apart. One time he thought he lost me in a cave, and I had never seen him so upset. And I don’t like being far away from him either.”

Daenerys had made plans to put him in a room far from her as possible. She would not outright imprison him – and risk upsetting Daemon – but she would keep her most vigilant guards at his door. But Daemon’s brows creased when she didn’t answer, and his eyes nervously kept flickering towards the door, where his father sat. She bit her lip.

“Of course not. His bedchamber will be a short walk away.” She answered, and his shoulders dropped in relief. But I will still be posting guards at his door. He is not allowed to roam her halls so freely, no yet.

Daemon settled himself on one half of the bed, snuggled into the pillows and pulled the silky red blankets up to his neck.

“Can you sing me a song?”

“A lullaby?”

Daemon nodded.

None immediately came to mind. But then she remembered one that she had heard a very long time ago, when she was just a little girl being tucked in her bed by Ser Willem Darry. It was not he who sung her to sleep – Ser Willem certainly did not have the voice of a bard – but a young maid who dressed her and brushed her hair while in Braavos.

The song was in Low Valyrian and reminded her of red doors and lemon trees.

She sat beside him, her arms around her son, and sang.

Her soft, melodious voice filled the chamber. And her eyes never left him, in the dim orange light of the burning candles, she watched as his eyes fluttered closed and he drift into slumber halfway through the lullaby. But she did not stop there, no, she had dreamt of this moment for too long. She lowered her voice into a whisper and finished the song with tears in her eyes and a smile on her lips.

She tenderly kissed his forehead and silently walked to the door. Her heart suddenly grew heavier with dread when she realised what was next to come.

When she opened the door and approached the area they had dined, the plates were cleared, and Jon was seated at the table alone.

“Jason has retired for the night.” He told her when she briefly looked around.

It was the first time he had spoken to her in seven years. The last words he ever said to me was ‘you will always be my queen.’ She clenched her fists.
“And you?” Her eyes narrowed on him. “Why haven’t you left as well?”

He stood. “Because we need to talk.”

Daenerys let out a bitter scoff. “There is nothing to say.”

Jon took a step towards her.

“DON’T.” She commanded. Her voice was as hard and cold as a winter mountain. Her violet eyes were sharp enough to cut through him where he stood. He paused, his eyes widened, and he gulped. She gritted her teeth and glared at him. The man she once trusted and loved. The man who betrayed her. The man who killed her.

She always wondered what she would do if she saw him again. Kill him, she decided long ago. Burn him, feed him to Drogon and level the North and end his bitch sisters and crippled brother, ceasing House Stark and relegating them to oblivion for all of eternity.

But that was before she knew they shared a son. A son they both loved so dearly, and a son that loved them both just as much.

She didn’t know what to do with him standing before her.

She was furious at him. She wanted vengeance. She wanted to do to him what he did to her. And it would have been much easier if they had met in different circumstances, as foes on a battlefield, not as a mother and father whose son slept in the room beside them.

And it would have been easier if he didn’t look so pathetically remorseful. He is a deceptive liar, she thought as she looked him square in the eye. Do not believe a word he says. He told you that he loved you, then he stabbed you in the heart.

She wanted to scream at him, claw his eyes out and make him feel the pain he caused her. And all these feelings accumulated all at once, as the silence descended them both. Both with so much to say, but unable to say anything at all. It weighed heavily on her shoulders, and it exhausted her. More than anything, she wished he would leave. Go, and never return.

“Dany–” He began, but she interrupted him.

“Do not call me that.” She snapped. “It is best you leave my chamber. Might I remind you that I am a queen, and I am surrounded by guards who can, and are itching to kill you where you stand if I give the command. You may have killed me once, but I will not let you do so again.”

He flinched at her words and muttered softly. “I’m not going to kill you again, Daenerys.”

“Oh? Then what are you going to do, hm? Apologise? I will not hear it.”

A dark shadow crossed his features and hardened his grey eyes. Beneath his thick beard, she could see his jaw tense. He lifted his eyes to hers, and Dany was taken aback. But still, she held her ground.

“Aye, there is a lot to apologise for, and I will, whether you want to hear it or not.”

Daenerys sneered. “How dare you…” She hissed venomsly, “I should kill you–”

“If you want to kill me, you may do so after I have said my peace. And there is a lot to say, Daenerys, you and I know that nothing is ever simple when it comes to the both of us.” Jon remained
calm, like a dead man who cared not if he was being marched to the gallows.

The audacity of this man! How did I ever come to love a fool like him? He mistook her stunned silence for an invitation to continue.

“I apologise for not comforting you when I should have. You lost your children, your closest friend and advisor, and I was not there when I should have been. I apologise for not listening to you when you told me not to tell Sansa the truth of my birth. I apologise for ever letting Tyrion poison me with his words, I should have known that he would do anything to ensure his survival. He laid a trap, and I fell right into it like he knew I would. And most importantly, I apologise for luring you into a false sense of comfort before I betrayed you. I could have at least tried to reason with you further. Instead, I did what I thought was the right thing, but was actually pure cowardice.”

Daenerys laughed bitterly. “Your words are just wind. Your apologies mean absolutely nothing to me. You are a fool, Jon Snow. A complete and utter fool. I told you that Sansa and Tyrion were not to be trusted, and you still conspired to protect them. You are a deceptive viper like the rest of them, you lied to me, led me to believe you loved me and then killed me and for what? Just for them to exile you. Just to be nothing in the end.”

“I never lied to you, my feelings were always true—”

“LIAR!” She picked up a vase beside her and threw at him. He moved to the side just in time, and it shattered behind him. “YOU NEVER LOVED ME!”

Like a kettle left on the fire for too long, her boiling hot rage could no longer be contained. She felt something tickle her cheeks, and she cursed herself for showing such weakness. Jon’s eyes widened as her tears fell, and they too glistened in the soft fiery light.

No… this is not what was supposed to happen! This is not how I envisioned it would go! There was supposed to be blood and fury and begging and fiery vengeance, not tears! And it filled her with burning rage and humiliation.

A guard stepped into the room and with one daunting look from her, he wordlessly retreated and closed the door behind him.

“I’ve always loved you, Dany.” Jon replied softly, unperturbed with the fact that she was reaching for another vase.

“I told you never to bloody call me that! You do not get to, not ever again!” She growled at him. “And if you lie to me again, I will cut out your tongue. You never loved me, you only wanted my throne.”

Jon huffed in disbelief, and his fists clenched beside him. “I told you I never wanted it and you would not believe me. I bent the knee to you, Daenerys. I gave up my crown for you. I gave up the entire North for you, despite knowing it meant losing the respect of my fellow Northmen. I said it was for the survival of the North, but it was clear why I did it. I did it purely for love.”

She held on tight to the vase in her hands as she glowered at him. “A bit hard to believe considering you conspired against me. You knew your sister hated me, you knew she yearned for my downfall. And yet you happily handed her the instrument, that one piece of information I begged you not to tell, to let it happen.”

He looked away, ashamed. “And I shouldn’t have.”

“I told you as much.” She spat.
"But I did because I thought it was the right thing to do—"

"Oh, bugger off with all of that! When will you realise that saying, 'I thought it was the right thing to do' does not excuse you from hurting the people you claim to love?"

Jon was stunned into silence. He bit his lip and avoided her cold, unforgiving eyes.

"You are right." He answered, his voice barely above a whisper. "I did not tell my siblings because I thought they had a right to know, I did it for selfish reasons. Not for a throne, but because I craved the reassurance I needed."

"Reassurance?"

"Aye. That despite not being a son of Lord Eddard Stark, they still considered me their brother. When Sam told me the truth, I felt as though I had lost my family. It is an exceptionally difficult and horrid feeling discovering that your entire life is a lie and that the man who you thought was your father deceived you, and was instead your uncle… I have spent my entire life wondering whether my mother was dead or alive, what she looked like, where she was, where she was from, if she loved me… and the entire time, she was buried in a crypt I have passed hundreds of times before.

"Not only that, but as it turns out, I was never a bastard! The bastard son of the beloved Lord Eddard Stark… it was my entire identity. It is why so many Northmen put their trust in me, why they followed me. Because they wanted Lord Eddard Stark, and they believed I was the next best thing. And it was false. A lie. Who was I, if not Jon Snow? Aegon Targaryen? That is just a name. And it weighed heavily on me, Daenerys, and nobody seemed to care."

Angry tears fell down his cheeks. He squeezed his eyes shut, sighed, then continued. "They could only think of how to exploit my pain for their own gain, or how it impacted them rather than how it impacted me. I was surrounded by friends and family, and yet I felt alone."

Just as I felt. Daenerys breathed and watched him wearily, she did not want to pity him. "You never approached me to talk about it."

He raised his brow at her. "You thought it was all a ploy to steal your birthright."

"Do you blame me? It was all too convenient."

Jon scoffed. "You truly thought I would conspire to steal your crown? Me? I would have never."

"I never thought you would be the one to kill me, and yet you did."

"And I never thought you would needlessly kill thousands of innocent people, yet you did." He replied curtly, and cut her, viciously and deep, like a freezing cold dagger. "I suppose we didn’t know each other as well as we had thought."

The silence that hung between them was heavy and suffocating, like a thick cloud of hot steam. Tears stained both of their cheeks, and neither could look the other in the eye. Jon turned away from her and sat down at the table, burying his head in his hands. Daenerys had forgotten that she was holding a vase, until it slipped from her hands and shattered at her feet. She stared at the broken pieces in silence.

"I regret it." She said softly, breaking the silence. Her eyes were still stuck on the broken mess before her. "I have thought about it everyday since I returned to this world, I am haunted by their screams, by the smell, by the terror they must have felt… You do not need to remind me of my mistakes, Jon. I have never forgotten."
“We have all done things we weren’t proud of.” He replied lowly. “At best, we can only acknowledge the past and try to do better. And I’m trying, Daenerys. I cannot change what happened, but I want you to know how remorseful I am and how much I regret how things soured between us.”

She lifted her head and looked at him. She didn’t know what to say.

“I still believe you have a good heart. While travelling here, I heard about all the good you have done and the magnificent things you have built. War can turn otherwise rational people into fools – looking at me, I think you can agree – but it can bring out a darkness we never knew we had. I’m so very glad you’re alive, I’m so glad you’ve built an awe-inspiring empire for yourself, and I’m so exceptionally glad Daemon has you for a mother.”

She didn’t know what to feel at this moment, but she was overcome with an intense wave of tiredness. Her tense shoulders sagged, and she looked at him wearily. She just could not bring herself to forgive him. *She just couldn’t.*

Dany approached the table and sat opposite him. She stared at him, a nondescript look on her face. “You said you thought you had lost your entire family when you discovered the truth of your birth.”

Jon looked up, surprised. “Aye, I did.”

“And yet… you never once thought that perhaps *I* could be your family. That we could build one together.” She said in a soft tone. “For so long I believed that I was the very last Targaryen alive. It is a painfully lonely existence Jon, and a terrible weight to bear. I didn’t always believe that you sought out my crown, I was actually… happy that you were Rhaegar’s son. I loved you and now, I thought, I wasn’t alone anymore. I now have someone to share my grief with, someone to share the burden of being the last of your kind with. But not once did you consider me your family. Even if the thought of laying with me disgusted you–”

“It never did–” Jon interrupted. She held up her hand to silence him.

“Even if you no longer wanted to lay with me, I thought that perhaps… you would still be loyal to me as one is to family. As loyal as you were to your pack. I suppose I assumed that… even if our feelings changed, we would still belong together.” Dany looked him in the eye, and she could see the overwhelming sadness in his. “Why was I never deserving of that love and loyalty, Jon?”

She hated the way her voice broke when she asked him that question. But it was a question she had pondered since the night of the feast several years ago.

He hung his head. “You were deserving of it. You were the only person deserving of it. You never would have hurt or betrayed me like my siblings did, and you never did. I will admit I am a fool, it took me losing everything I cared for so dearly to realise that. You are my family, Daenerys. You and Daemon both. I don’t expect you to forgive me, but I want you to know. You two are all I have, and all I care to have.”

“And your siblings?” She asked.

A dark shadow crossed across his face, sending a shiver up her spine. He looked at her and she saw a side of him that she hardly recognised. He leaned forward and repeated his words with a finality that was meant to leave little space for doubt. “*You two are all I have, and all I care to have.*”

She too leaned forward, challengingly. “So, if were to demanded their heads from you, would you present them to me?”
“You plan to return to Westeros?”

“No. I’m saying if I did.”

The shadow lifted and he looked away. “I still hold great love and respect for Lord Stark, Daenerys. And my brother, Robb. If I did, the guilt of disappointing them in such a way would haunt me until the day I die. No, I will not kill them with my own hand. I refuse to be a kinslayer again. But… if you did return to Westeros to claim its lands once more, I would not stand in your way if you desired the North.”

“A simple yes or no would suffice.”

“But nothing is ever so simple, is it?” He replied casually. “Much less Westeros, politics and family matters. I’m sure you’ve heard that the realm has gone to shit.”

She suppressed her amusement. “I have.”

“Well it’s shitter than you’ve heard.”

“Oh? Much shitter than your brother murdering thousands of men, women and children in King’s Landing?”

Jon was taken aback. Does he not know?

“What?”

“Yes.” She replied, smiling bitterly. “You murdered me for killing thousands of people, only to help your brother ascend the throne where he… proceeded to murder hundreds if not thousands of innocent people. Ironic, is it not?”

Jon stared at her, baffled. He shook his head in disbelief.

“I, of all people, shouldn’t speak on this but… I spent the entire day thinking of those people.” She said earnestly. “I couldn’t imagine being pecked to death by a murder of ravens. To have your eyes and ears and fingers ripped from your body while you’re alive to feel it… I heard the streets were painted in blood.”

It still made Daenerys shiver.

Jon was frozen. She could see it in his eyes, the disbelief that her little brother would do such a horrid thing. It reminded her of the look he gave her after she had burnt King’s Landing. He closed them, pained.

“I will be leaving soon.” He finally said.

“Leaving?”

“Aye. Leaving… to return to Westeros.”

Naturally, she wanted to ask why. But then she stopped herself. He had said ‘I’, not we. Meaning Daemon would be staying with her. And wasn’t that what she had been praying for?

“Oh?” She replied casually. “When?”

“I’m not sure, but soon. I… I can’t stay away for too long.”
She raised a brow. “Just a moment ago you were trying to convince me that Daemon and I were the only family you had left and now you want to leave us?”

“I have to.”

“Why?”

“Because… because the white walkers have returned, Daenerys. And they are planning another invasion.”

Daenerys blanched. She remembered their cold, soulless blue eyes, their icy skin, their army of the dead and… she remembered Viserion.

Her eyes narrowed on Jon. “You have come all this way to ask me to fight them again? To risk my life again? To risk Drogon’s?”

He shook his head. “No. I would not ask you to fight them again.”

She looked at him sceptically. “Then what is your plan?”

He shrugged. “I’m not sure yet, but I would prefer it if you and Daemon remained here, where it’s safe.”

Dany could only stare at him. Why do I care so much what he does?

“If you return to Westeros, you would be a fool.” She told him.

Jon was surprised. “Excuse me?”

“You heard me. You would be a fool.” She replied harshly. “You are a sea away, safe and with your son. You have escaped, it is none of your concern, let them fight the dead. Why would you return to save the same people who ruined us?”

She meant to say, ‘the same people who ruined you.’ And she kicked herself for letting her true emotions slip once again.

Jon stared at her for a brief fleeting moment, then looked away.

“I’m not fighting for them, Daenerys. I’m fighting for the smallfolk who have little say in the politics of their noblemen. As for Sansa and Bran… there’s another reason why I must go.”

“And that is?”

“I made an agreement with Jason. If he brought Daemon and I to you, I would return to The Reach with him where… where the Reachmen plot to overthrow my brother in favour of me.”

Daenerys’ lips parted in surprise, but only because two certain Reachmen not too long ago approached her with a similar proposal. Help overthrow King Bran and we will name you Queen.

What are those Reachmen up to?

“I take it someone approached you with the same offer?” Jon asked with a sly smile.

Dany blinked. “How did you know?”

He shrugged. “When we were being escorted to your chambers earlier today, Jason spotted two of
your courtiers. They looked oddly familiar to two Reachmen he grew up with.”

She sighed. “Lord Luthor and Lady Alyce.”

“Those were the ones.”

“I do not know what their plans are, but I have not accepted their offer. I have an empire to run, and you have so gleefully accepted the offer.”

So much for ‘I don’t want it’. She rolled her eyes. To be named King of the Seven Kingdoms… She doubted this was his plan all along, but it was strange how fate seemed to be pushing him closer to the crown.

He shifted uncomfortably. “I only accepted because he had a ship to bring me and Daemon to you, and I cannot go back on my word now. We seem to have built a friendship. As for taking the throne… I’m not too sure about that. Really, I’m willing to help bring peace to Westeros, any way I can. If it means wearing a crown, I will. But if it means clearing a seat for someone more willing…”

He looked at her expectantly. Me?

“Absolutely not. They all detest me.”

“Maybe you could–”

“The answer is no, Jon.” She stated with finality. He opened his mouth to speak but Dany glared at him, causing him to shut the door on the matter.

“And I’m hoping that perhaps if it is I who takes the throne, the North would be more willing to join the rest of the Six Kingdoms again. They too plot against Sansa – ah, I knew that would bring a smile to your face, don’t hide it – Westeros has never been more divided, not since before Aegon began his conquest.” He huffed. “If we do not unite, the entire realm is doomed.”

“I remember the stakes.”

“You do… I only want to make the world a safer place for Daemon. At any cost necessary.” He replied. He looked so tired in the candlelight. Not in a sleepy way, but in a way that told her the burden was heavy on his shoulders. “Which is why I must leave Daemon with you…” He looked towards the door to her bedchamber. “It is his nameday in two weeks.”

Daenerys straightened her back. “It is?”

“Aye. Seven years old… he is growing so quickly…” He looked away. The emotion was thick in his Northern burr, and Dany could have sworn there were tears in his eyes. She resisted the urge to pat his handcomfortingly. She understood why he would be so emotional… their little boy would not remain little forever.

“Children grow, whether you want them to or not.”

He stared vacantly ahead of him, a peculiar look upon his face. Was is… resignation? Fear?

He abruptly cleared his throat and stood from the table.

He straightened his back. “Have a good night, Your Grace.” He said with a smile that didn’t reach his eyes.

Daenerys tilted her head. What has gotten into him?
She stood and wished him farewell. “I wish you good rest, Jon.”

He bowed and hurriedly left her chamber, leaving her alone and confused.

She walked to her balcony and moved the draperies. The sky was pitch black, but the stars shined bright in the sky. Below her, the city of Volantis was asleep. Yawning, she decided to retire to bed.

But as she dressed in her silk gown and stared into a looking glass and let her hair down from its braids, her mind remained on Jon Snow.

Their conversation certainly didn’t go how she imagined it would. Firstly, he left her chamber alive. Secondly, somehow it descended into a civil conversation.

And it left her emotions absolutely scattered. *I should not be having a civil conversation with the man who betrayed and murdered me!* She mentally screamed to herself. And yet, she did.

She had not forgiven him. Not yet. Nor did she feel like she could trust him yet either. She didn’t know what to think about him, nor how she should feel about that, especially considering she had had seven years to think it through.

She sighed and walked to her bed.

Daemon was sprawled in her bed, lightly snoring. She smiled as she lifted the blankets and settled herself close to him. As if he knew she was close, he sleepily rolled towards her and allowed her to nestle him in her arms.

She kissed his wild curls and rested her head on his.

But still, as her eyes slowly closed, her thoughts were on Jon.

Why did he act so strangely towards the end? She wondered. Was it something I said? No… it had to have been something about his siblings, or the white walkers, or even Daemon’s approaching nameday... But why?

She frowned and sighed into Daemon’s hair. Her eyes began to feel heavier as sleep encroached upon her.

Jon… he returned to her a different man, she thought sleepily. But still a fool, a silly heroic fool. Why come all this way to Volantis then return to a land which is rotten with political instability, plots, war, famine, dangerous creatures and where your siblings have labelled you a criminal and likely a traitor? Why would you not stay here to seek peace with your son?

Is he afraid of her? He didn’t seem so. Does he desire a crown? He has said no multiple times, and his only reason for returning is because he believes in keeping his word. Does he desire peace and safety for the land he once ruled? He says so, but without her and Drogon, there is little chance he will succeed in another battle between the dead.

I think he only wants to be the hero. To save the realm. And then what? What is next?

Her eyes snapped open as a harrowing realisation descended on her.

*Perhaps… there is no next. For a man who has said that he does not want to rule the Seven Kingdoms, he was far too calm and casual discussing a possible kingship and was suspiciously accepting of a crown being thrust upon him.* She had assumed it was because he only never wanted to steal her crown, but with her saying no, then there was nothing stopping him.
A sick feeling descended into her gut as she realised that that was likely not the case.

Jon wants to defeat his siblings and unite the realm. Jon wants to vanquish the white walkers once and for all. Jon wants to achieve peace…

He had said earlier that he would do anything to make the world a safer place for Daemon… and he would pay any price to ensure the discord in Westeros was snuffed out for good.

*But why? Daemon is safe here! Unless… unless he believes that Bran, Tyrion and Sansa might find a way to hurt him, or worse… or perhaps he thinks that one day Daemon might want to return to Westeros when he is a man grown? He was born and raised there after all… There no doubt left in her mind that Jon strongly believes that Daemon’s life is in danger, even as he sleeps beside her at this very moment.*

She huffed. *Maybe I am wrong… maybe…* It did not quell the sick feeling in the pit of her stomach, and she hugged her son closer to her chest and silently cursed Jon for being so foolish, and herself for even caring.

*Jon wants to achieve peace, at whatever cost.*

*Even if that cost is his own life.*

Chapter End Notes

I’m honestly so grateful for the comments and kudos, you guys are the absolute best and the reason why I continue writing!

The road to recovery for Jon and Dany started pretty rocky and it still has quite a bit to go. But hey, at least Jon is still alive, and they managed to talk!

Next chapter: We leave Volantis for one chapter to journey to a new destination. With the attack on King’s Landing thwarted and the Crown knowing where to place the blame, Desmera and her mother have no choice but to run. But luckily for them, they find themselves being helped and sheltered by an unlikely ally.
Desmera II

Chapter Notes

Note: This chapter happens concurrently with Jon’s chapters, after he leaves Braavos and while he’s on his way to Lys.

Desmera has had many weeks to consider this, but she was absolutely certain of it now.

The one thing she hated most in the entire world, more than her husband and more than the king, was being left in the dark. Both figuratively and literally.

Hiding beneath piles of rags and sacks for weeks on end gave her ample time to think and ponder and fume with resentment at her current circumstances. There was little else to do but smell horse shit and listen to your own breathing.

As the old horse pulled the wagon to a destination unknown to her, Desmera had a sudden realisation. She had never, ever, seen her grandmother, the Queen of Thorns, angry before. Not once. She had never seen Lady Olenna Tyrell angry nor had she seen her full of hate and spite, but due to the circumstances leading to her current situation, she had a good image of what it could possibly look like.

The moment she saw her mother, Lady Mina Tyrell, read the letter from the King, signed by Tyrion Lannister, ordering her, her daughter and their bannermen to King’s Landing to receive ‘justice’ for their hand in a failed rebellion against the Crown or risk retribution… that was when she had a good indication of what pure, blinding hot rage looked like, fashioned on the face of a Tyrell.

Her mother had crumpled the paper tightly in her fist and ordered her out of the room. Desmera so desperately wanted to object, but one sharp look from her mother sent her scurrying like a scared little mouse back to her chambers. She called a meeting that lasted until the hour of the wolf, and before first light even touched the land, Desmera’s usually bustling castle was oddly quieter. Many of her mother’s men had left, but it was not from cowardice. Though the night was still, she could hear the drumming of war.

Desmera could hardly sleep that night. Word of what had occurred in King’s Landing had trickled in, and her handmaidens relayed every gory detail. Though Desmera knew how soft her heart was, she still listened attentively to every word they said and listened to their anguished and frightened cries as they wondered if they would befall the same fate.

She had assured them that they would not befall such a gruesome fate. But then she remembered her ‘lord’ husband, and while she was sure that their soft bodies would not be pecked by a murder of ravens, she was unsure whether they would remain unscathed once he and his company of uncouth men return from their pleasure house to storm Highgarden and angrily demand answers.

Lord Bronn was a man loyal to gold first, his depravities second, Lord Tyrion third and the King fourth. A war within ‘his’ land, plotted within ‘his’ castle, threatened everything he valued. From this day on, her husband and his men are without a doubt, enemies to her house and its allies.
They needed to escape. Now.

And unsurprisingly, her mother was already steps ahead in her planning. Before the rising sun cast shadows upon Highgarden, her mother barged into her bedchamber and demanded that she dress simply; one dress, one cloak and comfortable shoes. It distressed her; a lady should never have to flee her own castle, but she refused to be at the mercy of her sellsword husband, his murderous imp and cruel king.

Her handmaidens were sent elsewhere, likely as a decoy. She and her mother were hastily covered in whatever they could find – rags, old clothing and sacks of wheat – while four of their most capable and loyal guards, disguised as a band of travellers, escorted them to a destination her mother had purposefully neglected to tell her.

She was sure it was Oldtown, though. Why wouldn’t they go there? Her brothers are in Oldtown, the Hightowers are their closest allies, their castle is well defended, they’re located just a short sail away from her home, the Arbor, where her father and his fleet are, making a hasty escape possible if need be. And not to mention, they are just as entangled in this plot as they are. In times of great stress, we turn to our most trusted allies.

But why wouldn’t her mother just tell her that is where they are going? Why does it need to be a secret? Why should I be left in the dark about this? Is she afraid I will tell someone? I know better than that…

She sighed softly then sulked in silence. Her back and joints ached, she was tired, and she was sure she smelt foul. She hadn’t been able to wash in weeks, and the smell of horse shit clung to the air. If it bothered her mother – and this most definitely would – she did not say a thing. She only wore a hard and resentful yet determined expression on her face the entire journey.

They barely spoke, as her lady mother was sure that they were surrounded by the king’s ravens and insisted that they could only leave the wagon under the cover of complete darkness and would harshly chastise her if she took too long to relieve herself. Lady Mina Tyrell sounded like a mad woman, but who could blame her? They were surrounded by madness. Madness had gripped the realm in an iron fist and each and every single man, woman and child felt its suffocating grasp.

It was hard to find relief in such circumstances, but Desmera found it when she heard the sounds of many horses, numerous people shouting and chatting and the feel of smooth gravel beneath the wheels of the wagon. They had finally entered a city, and Desmera’s tired and weary heart nearly exploded in sweet relief. They had finally reached their destination, they were finally in Oldtown!

The wagon came to a complete stop and she heard the guards murmuring. Though the sound was muffled, she heard a man yelling, “Open the gates!” Then the wagon moved again, but not a terribly long distance. It soon come to a stop again, and she felt the weight of the sacks lift from her.

For the first time in weeks, she saw daylight. It stung her eyes, but it was a sweet pain.

“Lady Tyrell, Lady Redwyne?” One of their guards called. She forced her eyes open and found an extended hand. She hands shook as she lift them, all those weeks of travel and poor food left her body weak. She felt strong arms envelope her as she was lifted from the wagon.

Her legs wobbled quite a bit, but she was determined to be strong enough to walk. She was Desmera Redwyne, Lady of Highgarden, she refused to appear weak in the presence of her allies. She planted her feet on the stone ground and stood tall. She wobbled for a brief moment, but she did not topple to the ground. A small victory, she smiled to herself then finally looked up to admire the Hightower.
All the colour drained from her face and her knees betrayed her. She fell into the guard’s arms and hugged him close. *No, no, no… we cannot be here!*

Atop the sand coloured bricks of the looming castle was a banner. The lion was as gold as the metal found in their hills and the field was as red as all the blood they had shed. The Lannister banner swayed gently in the wind. Desmera’s panicked eyes travelled downward, and that was when she saw them. Soldiers, armoured in gold with flowing red capes, surrounding them in the courtyard.

She could have screamed. She *was going to* scream. But she felt a gentle hand squeeze her arm, and she found the calm eyes of her mother. She was not worried, not a single bit. In fact, she appeared much more confident than Desmera had seen her these past few weeks.

A figure tall figure appeared from the shadows of the entrance, walking beneath the arches of the castle and into the daylight.

She was a slim woman who moved towards them with the grace of a lady belonging to a fine house. She had high cheekbones, fine lines on her face and eyes that sparkled bluer than the waters of the Sapphire Isle. Her hair was long and cascaded down her back in honey coloured curls. Desmera’s body had become so numb to the cold, she barely noticed the chilling wind until she noted the fine, dark green velvet cloak lined with dark fur draped over the lady’s shoulders. A silver chain crossed her chest, fastening the cloak to her shoulders with a silver pin. A pin that looked like a sea-turtle.

Desmera’s eyes widened in recognition.

“Welcome to Casterly Rock.” Lady Jocelyn Estermont greeted with a warm smile. Her eyes roamed the mother and daughter pair, taking in their disgruntled and filthy appearance. “I take it your journey was smooth and uneventful?”

To Desmera’s surprise, her mother chuckled and returned a sly grin. “How observant! And you know how much I despise a long, boring journey.”

Lady Estermont grinned and pulled her mother into a hug. “You smell absolutely horrid.” She whispered into Mother’s hair.

“Better to smell like this than be beheaded, I suppose.” She replied and turned to Desmera.

Desmera bowed her head in respect. “Hello, Lady Estermont. It is so very nice to see you again.”

Lady Estermont laughed and pulled her into a hug as well. “The war can turn even the gentlest of souls into uncouth monsters. I’m relieved to find you are still as courteous as you are kind, Desmera. Now let me take a look at you, it was been such a long time since we last saw each other.”

Desmera stepped back and let Lady Estermont look her up and down, and her cheeks turned bright red. It was so unbecoming that a lady of her station present herself in such a way to another fellow lady, she found it positively humiliating!

Sensing her embarrassment, Lady Estermont rubbed her arms reassuringly. “It is quite alright, Desmera. I would never judge you, you have had such a terrible journey. All that matters is that you are safe within these walls.”

“Am I?” She blurted, and she wished he had just bit her tongue instead. But her eyes drifted to the banner, stitched with the roaring golden lion of her enemy. It was hard to believe she was safe standing beneath that banner, much less within these walls.

Lady Estermont took her hand in hers and smiled gently. “Let’s get you cleaned, dear. Then there is
someone you should meet.”

She remembered when she was a younger girl, a handmaiden to her cousin Margaery in King’s Landing as she was preparing to wed King Joffrey, she had imagined what type of castle Queen Cersei had grew up in. She had been dazzled by the Queen’s beauty, elegance and stylish fashion, and she had heard tales of Ser Jaime’s handsomeness and skill with a blade. And the tales of Lord Tywin’s vicious yet tactical nature struck fear and fascination in the hearts of all.

They were the proud golden lions of Westeros, and she was curious what a lion’s den looked like.

She knew it would be splendid, but strangely… this was not what she expected. She expected red velvet and gold, walls lined with gold and silver tapestries depicting the victories of House Lannister, chandeliers made of gold hanging from tall ceilings, dripping with gems and pearls… perhaps these were just the daydreams of an impressionable young girl, but she had fully expected indulgence and opulence.

It was still a sight to behold, however. Lining the walls of the halls were colourful tapestries depicting hunts and meadows and the rolling hills of the Westerlands during sunset. She passed dozens of vases filled with sweet smelling roses. The draperies were as white as snow and brightened every room. The golden wall sconces were twisted into spirals and so very clearly smithed with the upmost care. The carpets were from Essos, she could tell, and were stitched with the most beautiful patterns she had ever seen.

Casterly Rock was not just beautiful, it was welcoming. And it eased Desmera’s frantically pulsing heart a bit. Just enough to give her the courage to speak.

“Mother, why are we here? Why aren’t we in Oldtown?”

“Two reasons. Firstly, to reach Oldtown, we would have to pass Horn Hill. And though we have managed to beat the Dornish back, there have been reports that they might still be lingering close by, ready to attack again. It was too risky. And secondly, even if we managed to pass Horn Hill safely, our enemies would have anticipated that we would travel to Oldtown and sent soldiers or cutthroats to intercept us.”

“Oh… but… why Casterly Rock?” She asked nervously, lowering her voice. “Isn’t this the home of our enemy the most dangerous place to hide?”

Her mother chuckled. “On the contrary, my dear. It would be the very last place he would think to look.”

After a good scrubbing and wash, Desmera was dressed in a blue woollen dress that felt soft and clean on her skin, and a flowery yellow cloak lined with pale fur. Desmera had been placed in a spacious bedchamber fit for a lady, one which had a wonderful view of the colourful gardens below. As she combed her auburn curls in the looking glass, her eyes drifted the flowers below and her ears perked at the sound of the birds. It should have calmed her, it should have made her feel safe… but it didn’t.

She stared long and deeply into her reflection and watched as her chest rose and fell with each breath. Her hair comb lowered, and she remained still. A small frown settled on her face at snail’s pace, so slowly she barely even felt her own face contorting.

She looked at herself and felt utterly useless and powerless.

The tips of her fingers gently touched her cheeks. What am I? She wondered. Who am I?
She was nothing like her cunning grandmother, or her wilful mother, or her beautiful and witty cousin, Margaery. She was simply Desmera, a pawn in everyone else’s game. It was not her choice to marry the sellsword, it was not her choice to be Lady of Highgarden, it was not her choice to flee to Casterly Rock. Nothing is ever her choice, because she never has one.

As a pawn, you either live in ignorance or fear at what others have planned for you. She felt like a spectator to her own life, watching the various decisions that governed her entire life be made, whether it be good or bad. And it felt as though a weight had been unwillingly placed on top of her, it was as if she never even left the wagon that had brought her here. Was it her fate to remain motionless until someone saw it fit to move her in any direction they desired, with her thoughts and wellbeing secondary if not considered at all?

She was not asking to be at the forefront of any major plans, nor did she see herself discussing war strategies or leading her fellow noblemen in council meetings as they rally against the King and his poisonous ilk. But… it would be pleasant to be privy to these discussions and have some recognise her autonomy for once..

She bit her lip and stared deeply into her reflection. And perhaps I can start by not looking for permission and… and being motionless no longer.

She stood from her chair, walked to the door and found the guard stationed at her door.

“Take me to my mother and Lady Estermont.” She demanded, and with a wild beating heart, she marched the halls of Casterly Rock. I do not want to be a little pawn any longer. I will not.

They approached a large, curved double door, carved with roaring lions on either side. The guard gave it three hard knocks.

“Enter.” She heard, muffled by the thick wood. The guard pushed open the door, and with a deep breath, she entered.

And the sight before her took her breath away.

Her eyes widened, and she gasped. How could it be? She could scarcely believe it.

Cersei Lannister?

She looked over her shoulder. Her shining, golden hair cascaded down her back and over her shoulders. Her emerald green eyes glittered like gems. Her cheeks and plump lips were rosy, and her pale skin was wrapped in layers of red silk. A golden medallion bearing a roaring lion hung proudly around her neck.

Desmera paled, it was as if she was looking at a ghost.

But then the ghost turned to fully face her, and the apparition disappeared to reveal features softer than Cersei’s; she had a curious smirk, her intelligent eyes held a playful yet confident sparkle that welcomed her without a glint of malice or cruelty and she looked much younger than the dead lioness. In fact, she looked around Desmera’s own age.

She stood to welcome her with a warm grin.

“Hello, you must be Lady Tyrell’s daughter, Lady Desmera.” The woman approached her and took her hands in her own. “Tis truly a pleasure to meet you. I am Joy Lannister, Lady of Casterly Rock and Wardeness of the West.”
Desmera opened her mouth then closed it again, unsure of what to say next. Well, she knew what she was supposed to say: ‘Thank you for welcoming me into your home, my lady. It is an even bigger pleasure to be sheltered within your halls.’ But instead she said…

“Seven save me, I thought Queen Cersei had rose from the dead! At certain angles, the resemblance can be striking!”

She knew she had said the wrong thing the moment she heard her mother hiss her name.

Desmera’s eyes widened and she quickly looked away, ashamed at her ill-manners. She was prepared to beg Lady Lannister’s forgiveness until she heard her melodious laugh.

“Ah yes, I’ve been told that I favour my cousin at times. But I can assure you, and I hope it brings you great relief, that is where the similarities end.” She winked at Desmera, causing her to grin.

“Thank you for sheltering us, Lady Lannister. It is truly a great pleasure to meet you.”

“The pleasure is mine.” She gestured to the beautifully upholstered and embroidered chaises and settees where her mother and Lady Estermont lounged. “Please sit, I was wondering when you would join us. We were in the midst of an important discussion.”

Desmera looked to her mother, who did not look pleased but would not object to her joining their discussion.

“What were you discussing?” Desmera asked Lady Lannister.

Lady Lannister smirked. “How wonderful it would be to rid the realm of my cousin, Tyrion Lannister.”

Desmera tried to hide her scandalised expression but failed miserably. Lady Lannister laughed.

“I don’t blame you for being shocked. There used to be many Lannisters once, but the war did a terribly good job of culling us down to two. You would think our small number would inspire me to stick by my cousin to ensure the survival of our house, especially after he handed me Casterly Rock and legitimised me… but I am not a fool, contrary to what Lord Tyrion might believe. I want House Lannister to survive, and siding with him will only ensure its destruction.”

“He is arguably the reason why your family has dwindled significantly in numbers. If it were not for your existence, House Lannister would have ended with him.” Lady Estermont commented.

Lady Lannister hummed in agreement. “If Lord Tywin were to rise from his grave and see what has befallen House Lannister, he would rage so fiercely it would stop his heart again.” Lady Lannister giggled. “His own children were what killed the legacy he had tirelessly worked his entire life to build, and now the broken shards of his house and legacy have been left in the hands of his bastard niece. It is funny, you can laugh. But I intend to fix what his rotten sackseeds have ruined.”

She beckoned a maid to hand Desmera a cup. She lifted her drink and tasted the sweet Arbor wine.

“And how will you do that?” Desmera asked.

“The House Lannister you see now is different from the old. I am not my uncle, nor am I my cousins. I am not a bloodthirsty warmonger with a delicate ego. I am not a foolish, power hungry tyrant. I am not a drunk who deludes herself into thinking she knows all. I am Joy Lannister, a lady who cares about her people and wants what is best for them, my lands and the realm.”
Her mother agreed. “I suppose the golden question now, is what is next?”

“I understand your envoys have reached Volantis. Have you received word?” Lady Estermont asked her mother.

She nodded. “We have, and we have received pleasing yet bothersome news. The good news is that Daenerys Targaryen seems to have calmed in the seven years since her invasion. She shows no signs of madness, is regretful of her actions in King’s Landing and according to Lady Alyce and Lord Luthor, is an incredibly capable ruler.”

“That is a relief. But why is that bothersome?” Lady Lannister asked.

Lady Tyrell sighed. “They offered her an alliance, and she is yet to agree. It would appear she is hesitant to return to Westeros and is content with ruling in Essos.”

“But she has not outright said no.” Lady Estermont pointed out. “There is still a chance she could agree to an alliance if we give her time.”

“Give her time?” Lady Tyrell snarled. “We do not have any time to give! We are at war!”

Lady Estermont sighed. “I agree. It is not enough to have the Reach, Stormlands and Westerlands united against the Crown. We must have a monarch to rally behind, to lead us to victory…”

“But do we truly have the Stormlands?” Lady Tyrell asked Lady Estermont. “Lord Gendry has not called his bannermen to defend the King, nor has he called them to fight them either.”

“He is well aware that war has dawned on the realm. There is little doubt that the King has called on him, yet he has not begun marching. There is a possibility that Daenerys could return to Westeros, and I do not think he has much confidence in the King and Lord Tyrion. However, he is also reluctant to fight the Starks. My Cassandra tells me that he and Arya Stark were sweet on one another a long time ago, he does not want to fight her or her brother. Therefore, he is remaining neutral.”

“Neutral?” Lady Tyrell scoffed. “Is he a coward? He must pick a side and fight!”

“Remaining neutral is not cowardly, it is smart, my lady.” Lady Lannister replied. “If given the opportunity, I would have chosen to do so. But unfortunately, the Hand of the King is my kin, and choosing to remain neutral would be the same as siding with the enemy in his eyes. So I suppose I might as well just go ahead and side with his enemy, it would save us the uncomfortable discussion.” She shrugged.

Lady Estermont nodded her head. “I agree with Lady Lannister. Though I, as well as many, would prefer to know where the Stormlands stand in this war, I understand why Lord Gendry wouldn’t make it known. There are just too many ambiguous players in this game. Is Daenerys Targaryen returning to Westeros or not? Is Jon Snow going to fight with us or not?”

“Speaking of Jon Snow…” Lady Lannister said, picking red grapes from a bowl beside her seat. “You previously mentioned Jason Hightower was sent to search for him, any word from him? Has the last Targaryen Prince been found?”

Desmera’s heart stopped. *Jason*… She leaned closer in her seat. Her eyes flickered to her mother, who gave her a knowing look, causing Desmera’s cheeks to burn red.

And it burned brighter when she realised that her reaction amused her mother. “According to Lord Humfrey, it appears Jason has succeeded in locating Jon Snow...”
Desmera grinned widely. *He braved the cold and unyielding North in the midst of a long and harsh Winter for me! And not only did he survive, he succeeded in his mission! He will be coming home and finally we can be—*

“But…” Her mother added, interrupting her deliriously hopeful thoughts. “For some odd reason, he has insisted that Jason take him elsewhere before he returns to the Reach with him. He did not specify where, but Jason said that the journey would have him arriving in Oldtown moons later than expected.”

Desmera smile faltered. *It is better he comes back later than not at all…*

“Moons of travel…” Lady Estermont pondered softly then gasped. “Seven help us, is he sailing to Daenerys Targaryen?”

“That’s what we assume.” Lady Tyrell replied.

“What a foolish endeavour! Does he have a death wish?” Lady Lannister asked. “What if she kills him?”

Lady Tyrell sighed. “It would truly disturb the plans we have laid, wouldn’t it?”

“Maybe…” Desmera reluctantly spoke up. “Maybe Lady Alyce, Lord Luthor and Jason can intervene. Especially if we make it clear how dire our situation is here…” She wasn’t sure where she was going with this idea. But it was worth a try. “We need to make it clear that there is no more time to waste, if they do not act now, countless will continue to die ghastly deaths. Considering what we have heard of their character, neither of them will stand for such a thing. War is upon us, it is now time we convene and fight.”

All three ladies stared at her, and Desmera held her drink tighter in her hands, wondering if she had said something stupid.

Then slowly, her mother began nodding. “Pressure them… yes. We should make it clear that they no longer have the option to wait. War is here, and already blood has been shed. We are no longer offering an alliance, we are setting an ultimatum. If they do not come to our aid, then… they hereby forfeit all rights to the crown, for all eternity.”

“Mina!” Lady Estermont gasped. “You cannot be serious! Can… can that even be done?”

Lady Tyrell pursed her lips. “Perhaps, perhaps not. But we can no longer wait for them. Those shall be our terms. No more mulling it over, no more wasting precious time. If they cannot see the importance of this war, then we shall move on without them and from thereon, they, as well as House Targaryen, shall not be recognised as the true heirs to Westeros.”

“And if they do not answer the call? Then what?” Lady Lannister inquired. “What do we do without a true blooded Targaryen to rally behind?”

Lady Tyrell lifted her chin. “Then we choose our own monarch. *All* of us, we will convene and choose who we shall crown and follow into war.” She sipped her wine and cleared her throat. “I will admit, this is not the first time I have entertained the notion. The idea of crowning someone not of the blood of Aegon the Conqueror… But honestly speaking, it would be a messy affair.

“Everyone wants to be a king, everyone wants to be close to power, choosing our own monarch would cause more unrest and war. It is how we became stuck in this predicament in the first place, and it is most certainly not what will get us out. We need an established dynasty to rally behind, we need a Targaryen, but if they prove to be difficult then… we will have no choice but to choose the
messier option."

The room quieted for a moment as her mother’s words sunk in.

Lady Lannister sighed. “Then let us send word… and pray to the Seven that the Targaryens make the right choice.”

They all hummed in agreement.

The sun had begun to set, casting shadows into the Lady’s Chamber. It was then that Lady Lannister dismissed the room, giving them time to freshen themselves before supper.

But as they all stood to leave, Lady Lannister grabbed a hold of Desmera’s hand.

“Lady Desmera, would you mind staying for a moment?” She asked with a sweet smile. Desmera looked towards her mother, who nodded and took her leave with Lady Estermont. She internally cursed herself, it would take some time to unlearn how to not ask permission to do anything and everything.

They sat on the chaise as the room filled with the golden light of the setting sun. In this light, her hair shined like spun gold and her green eyes were bright and attentive as they sat opposite each other and regarded one another. Desmera envied her. How could a lady of the same age of her be so much more confident?

Lady Lannister tilted her head and whispered to her. “What are you thinking?”

Desmera, taken aback, blushed furiously. “I… Um… I was wondering how you became so confident, my lady.”

Lady Lannister blinked, then threw her head back in laughter. Making Desmera’s entire face burn as bright as a ripe tomato.

“Oh, don’t be embarrassed! It’s just that… I wasn’t expecting the question. How did I become so confident?” She looked away and pondered the question with pursed lips. “I don’t know… I suppose I just had to considering my circumstances. I used to be a sweet and quiet girl, but I suppose being thrust into lordship and surrounded by men who seek to control you will force you out of your shell, whether you like it or not.”

Desmera’s brows shot up. “Men who seek to control you?”

She nodded. “When I was made Lady of Casterly Rock, Lord Tyrion ensured that I would wield very little power in the lands I was supposed to govern. He chose the maester, the castallen, the stewards, the master of arms… I was surrounded by his cronies who governed the lands in my name but would not let me into a single council meeting because they did not think it was a lady’s place.”

She smirked at Desmera before continuing. “It took a while for me to take charge, but eventually I did. Surprisingly, it was after I married. My cousin does not only see me as a puppet, but as a broodmare as well. Marrying meant that I could carry on the Lannister line, especially if I coupled with a second or third born son from a minor noble house. For you see, if I bear a child, I can pass them my name because it is imperative that a house as significant as mine continues. It is the true reason why he made me Lady of Casterly Rock then legitimised me when I married, to carry on House Lannister because he knows he cannot.

“He even picked my husband, that choice was not mine. And he specifically chose House Hawthorne, a house of much less significance, not only because he wanted my children to bear the
name ‘Lannister’, but also because he wanted to exert his power and influence over them. Have them indebted to him.”

Lady Lannister sighed and leaned back on the chaise, a cheeky smile gracing her face. “Ever since I became Lady of Casterly Rock, most men have tried to control me. But not him, not my husband. Lewys prefers books and reading and tinkering and building. If he wasn’t my husband, he surely would have become a maester, I think. I leave him to his own devices, whether it be improving the roads or the sewage system in Lannisport, but he has no hand in the governing of the Westerlands. It is all me and the advisors I chose. Enforced and adhered to by men and smallfolk who are loyal to me alone. But you wouldn’t know that if you asked my cousin.

“I write to him and do you want to know what he does? He addresses the letter to Lord Hawthorne. It is my hand which writes the letter, clear as day, they are my words and mine alone… but he thinks I am simply my husband’s puppet on a string, because that is all I can ever be to him. A puppet. A pawn.”

Desmera looked upon her silently, feeling a kinship. “I know how you feel.” She replied softly, her eyes falling to her hands rested in her lap.

Lady Lannister lifted her head with her finger. “Don’t look down, Lady Desmera. Hold your head high.”

Desmera grinned, suddenly feeling more at ease to tell Lady Lannister her true feelings. “If I can be honest, I have been feeling quite lost lately. I have never felt this way before… it is not as if my mother and father have ill intentions for me but… I can’t help but feel used. I was married to a sellsword and became Lady of Highgarden because I was told to, because my mother wanted to ensure that Highgarden would remain in our family’s hands but… I hate being married to him! I… I wanted to marry someone else…”

“Jason Hightower?”

Desmera gasped and held her hands to her lips. “How did you know?”

Lady Lannister laughed. “Your entire face brightened at the mere mention of his name!”

Her cheeks turned pink. “Well… yes, him. And he still loves me, that’s why he went to retrieve Jon Snow. So that one day, when we defeat the Starks and Lannisters, I will be free from my dastardly husband and we will marry instead.”

She grinned brightly. She could see it now! A beautiful wedding in the sept, or maybe the gardens of Highgarden! We could be the true Lord and Lady of Highgarden and oh, the many puppies we will have!

“I don’t know why you think you are not confident, when you get excited you become so assured that you shine brighter than the sun!” Lady Lannister commented.

Desmera looked at her sheepishly. “I am capable of talking to people and performing the duties expected of a lady. I can receive guests and make them feel comfortable. I can do what is expected of me exceptionally well… It is just… with the war upon us, I feel as though I can be doing more. I want… or I think, I don’t want… to just be a pawn anymore. I want to help, I want to be confident and assertive, I want to make my own choices, I want… to be like my mother and grandmother, Lady Olenna.”

The sun bathed Desmera in a fiery glow, and she looked towards the window of the chamber with a
Desmera felt a hand land on hers and squeeze. When she turned, she found a soft smile on Lady Lannister’s face. And unexpectedly, she was reminded of her cousin Margaery. She would do this, place her hand on hers and wear the same smile when she whinged about her worries. It made Desmera’s heart grow heavy, and tears form in the corners of her eyes. I miss Margaery now more than ever.

“Don’t try to be like your mother or grandmother, Lady Desmera. You are your own person, you can be no one else. If you want to help, then learn, listen and speak up more and do the best you can. Do not worry about what others might think, if something feels right then do it. If it makes you uncomfortable, speak up and fight it.”

Desmera took her words to heart. “Thank you, Lady Lannister.” She replied softly.

“Call me Joy.” She beamed. “I just want you to be comfortable in my halls. You should know that you are safe here, surrounded by men loyal to me. I know arriving here made you uncomfortable, and I do not blame you.”

Desmera looked around. “Oh… yes. But honestly, Casterly Rock looks so nice and inviting, it eased my panic quite a bit.”

Lady Joy gasped and her eyes glittered with excitement. “Thank you! I had it completely redecorated. For all the gold my cousins and uncle had, they truly could not buy fine taste. I mean… if you can afford the finest carpets from Qarth and the most beautiful draperies from Myr, why not get it?”

“I did notice the beautiful carpets!” Desmera commented, finishing her wine.

“Thank you, I always hope people do.” Lady Joy chewed her lip. “I mean it when I say I don’t want to be like my cousins or Uncle Tywin. I may have lion’s blood, but I do not want to govern solely with fear, I want my people to love me and feel welcomed by me. I… I truly want to be a good lady and wardeness. I want to be remembered with fondness, and I want them to sing songs about me. Cheerful songs… joyful, if you will. Have you heard the Rains of Castamere? I hope whatever my achievements may be, they are not told in a song as dour as that one.”

The room had gotten much darker, signifying that not only would the candles and hearth need to be lit soon, but also that the time for supper was fast approaching.

Both women were in good spirits as they stood to leave, but it was as they were standing, she noticed something she hadn’t noticed before. The way that Lady Joy’s hand briefly rested at the base of her stomach as she rose… She was covered in layers, and though it could be assumed it was to ward off the chilly winter weather, it became apparent to Desmera that there were other reasons as well.

Her hand quickly dropped to her side. She is trying to hide it!

Whatever expression was on Desmera’s face betrayed what she knew, and for a moment, the ladies just stood staring at each other. Until eventually, Lady Joy lifted a finger to her lips.

“My husband is still in Lannisport, and I would like to tell him first.” She told Desmera quietly, with a small grin.

Desmera giggled and nodded her enthusiastically.

And together, they linked arms and left the Lady’s Chamber.
Though Desmera’s worries still resided in the back of her mind, neighbouring her persistent sadness of having to flee her home, she was grateful for a moment like this.

Because that was just her character. She knew that in the face of impending war and the uncertainty of living another day, it was important to cherish moments like this.

And for a moment, that weight she had been tirelessly carrying, was lifted from her shoulders.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for the comments and kudos!!!!!!!!!

Hope you enjoyed Lady Joy Lannister, the least ‘Lannister’ of the Lannisters! And here’s your dose of wholesome female friendship since D&D decided that Missandei and Dany should die and none of the other female characters can have one😢

Next chapter: Jon receives an unexpected visitor in his dreams. Daemon enjoys life as a prince. Dany and Ghost become better acquainted. And an urgent letter bursts their brief idyllic existence.

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