What Remains

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by MarigoldRose24

Summary

Canon up until the end of S8 Ep4.

The Last War is over and the Targaryen’s have won but Daenerys is lost in a world of her own grief and Jon will do everything in his power to lead her home, even if it means taking her away from the one thing she thought she wanted.

Notes

So in my version while Daenerys did have a psychotic break (yeah that's what I'm calling that) she did not destroy the whole of Kings Landing, though she did destroy much of the red keep (because I feel destroying the city itself was overkill on the writers part and done for no other reason than to drove home that she's mad) before a surviving Scorpion brought down Drogon. I'm honestly immensely disappointed in this season, I feel like so much previous foreshadowing was thrown out the window in exchange for a quick end. I started this story after last week's because I figured they were going this way with it and I expect it to end very badly so this is my way of coping. I based it on a couple things, one being the idea that Jon would be forced to kill her but be unable to do it, like he was unable to kill Ygritte in season 2. And because in the house of the undying (show version) she sees a destroyed throne room (got that!!) and she passes it over to venture beyond the wall where she meets Drogo and their son. We can do a little mental gymnastics on that one: she passed over the throne to go
north to fight for Jon which leads to her eventual death. But I decided to take it a bit out of context since prophecies are rarely literal and have her find her family beyond the wall.
'Are you sure about this?' Tyrion asked, not for the first time as he watched Jon ready the tack on his horse. 'Would you at least consider telling me where you're going?'
'I think it's for the best if no one knows.' Jon countered, again, they'd had this conversation numerous times in the last few days. 'Someone once told me that I should learn how to lie, I'm not sure I'll ever get there but maybe I can learn to just keep my mouth shut occasionally.'
'You don't trust me.' Tyrion concluded, it was fair he supposed. He'd made a lot of mistakes of late. Jon's hands stilled and he turned to look at the smaller man. 'I trust you to do what you think is right for the realm, that's all I'm trying to do. It's best for everyone if no one knows. Now go be King, and do something about the smell in this gods forsaking city while you're at it.'
'Im not king.' Tyrion protested. 'Just Regent. Until the rightful rulers return.' He said it with such conviction that Jon winced. He'd made a lot of mistakes of late. He thought briefly of Robb and the lessons he'd had as a child, it had been instilled in him that he would lead, that he was worthy to do so, Jon had been taught to serve, to differ to those that held titles, hard as he tried to overcome it he still struggled.
Tyrion shifted on his feet and tried a different approach. 'You could take her back to Dragonstone, the castle is yours, it belongs to House Targaryen.'
Jon turned to look at the figure that sat astride the other horse, her silver hair hidden beneath a hooded cloak, she stared straight ahead, not saying a word, Jon wasn't sure when she had last spoken. 'I don't think being cooped up in that dreary old Castle is going to do her any good.' Jon sighed. 'Maybe someday we will return. But it won't be anytime soon.'
Tyrion nodded, he'd known it was a lost cause before he'd even started, but he felt he had to try. In truth he knew Jon was right, this was the best path forward. He held out his hand. 'Goodbye your Grace.' Jon reached out and grasped his hand. A smirk tilted Tyrion's lips 'Bastard.'
Jon gave a faint smile. 'Dwarf.'
Horse ready, Jon swung himself up into the saddle and took hold of reins of Daenerys' horse as well. Together they set out from Kings Landing while Tyrion watched, one of the few unsullied who had remained behind to guard the city broke the silence 'What do we do now?' He asked
Tyrion grinned. 'Now we play the game.'
'What game?' The soldier asked.
Tyrion rolled his eyes. 'Gods help me.'

The journey North was long and difficult, Jon tried to stay off the kingsroad for fear of being recognized, this meant that they camped in the woods and avoided inns and taverns, most nights Jon barely slept for fear of wild animals or bandits, and of course there was Dany to worry about. He made sure that she was never out of his sight, most of the time she went where he told her to go and did as he asked but in the back of his mind he was still terrified that she would wonder off or try to hurt herself. He lay beside her at night, in their tent, close enough to reach out and touch her if he had to, close enough that she could reach out to him if she needed to, but she never did.
In the mornings he would wake, exhausted and cold, he would coax her to eat something before he dismantled the camp and they set out again. The days began to blur, the silence began to press in on him, he'd never been much for conversation but he had always been surrounded by people who
talked a lot, his younger siblings, Sam, Tormond, Tyrion, even Davos had liked to spin tales of his smuggling days. Eventually he started talking to Daenerys, though he might as well have been talking to himself. He spoke of his childhood, of his time at the wall, he told her stories old Nan had told him as a boy and recited the history of each kingdom as they came upon them, he had no idea if she was listening, he didn't know if she really understood what was happening anymore. She functioned well enough to take care of her basic needs but that was it. He wished she'd tell him to shut up as he rambled on but she remained silent, staring straight ahead. They were half way through the Riverlands when he realized they were being followed, not by men but by wolves. He'd seen the tracks and he'd heard stories on his way down about a giant wolf pack that had preyed on the Lannister Army during the wars. The locals had said it was led by a she wolf as big as a horse who could kill a man with one snap of her jaws. Though Arya had made no mention of Nymeria in their time together in Winterfell he knew she had let her go somewhere around the Crossing. He just hoped the wolf remembered him.

In the end the wolves never showed themselves and they caused no trouble, they passed into the Vale and Jon risked staying at a little Inn so that they would have something to eat besides Rabbit and hopefully wash. He let the Innkeeper believe he was a soldier coming home from the latest war, with a southern bride. He told the man that she had lost most of her family and she wasn't taking it well, he thought bringing her home to his people would help. As he'd told Tyrion, he was no good at lying and this was so close to the truth it barely counted. He paid to have a bath readied in their room while they ate, he'd bound her hair up as best he could that morning and tied a scarf about it to hide the colour. He would have been worried about someone seeing her eyes but she didn't look up long enough for anyone to see them. When he showed her the bath, there was a flitter of...something, she'd always loved hot water, she had told him once, on a boat, in what seemed like a different life, the hotter the better. The fact that she had responded to it, even just a little bit gave him hope, perhaps she could find her way back in time.

When he tried to help her undress, she stopped him, fingers curling over his, the look in her eyes told him she didn't want him to see her naked. He had no idea why, of the two of them, he was the only one who had any issue with their relation to each other and she had never been prudish about her nudity before. But he relented, he told her he'd been just outside the door if she needed anything. He listened to her, fearful that she would drown herself, but after what seemed like forever he heard her leave the tub and walk across the floor, when the sounds stopped and the bed creaked he let himself back in and found her under the furs, eyes closed, he didn't believe she was asleep but he let her be. After he had bathed himself, scrubbing what felt like a pound of dirt from his skin and washing his hair several times, he dressed and joined her in the bed, there seemed little point in sleeping on the floor and he wasn't passing up the opportunity to sleep in a bed. Where they were going there wouldn't be any.

They crossed into the North on a day that almost felt like spring, the snow was, in places, starting to melt and the sky threatened rain though it didn't come. If history was to be believed a long summer should be followed by a long winter, however with the Night King gone perhaps things would be different. The North posed the greatest risk of discovery for Jon, the people here knew him so he was extra cautious about avoiding settlements and road ways. He didn't want word reaching Sansa that he and Dany were in the North, he had no idea what she would do but he no longer trusted her. The precautions added extra time to their journey and it was with a huge feeling of relief that Jon finally saw the wall come into view.

They made it to Castle Black in the mid afternoon, the gates had been left open and the free folk had long since passed through, that was alright, Jon was sure they would find them eventually. Jon tethered the horses in the old stables, and took Daenerys up to the rooms that had once belonged to Maester Aemon, he sat her down in a chair as he got a fire going in the hearth, he was hoping there would still be some provisions in the cellars, thankfully the cold meant that food lasted longer here. Once the fire was blazing he left Daenerys to go look and was rewarded with a few potatoes and a
turnip, he found additional supplies in the kitchen, he was shocked that Tormonds people had left anything behind on their way North.

He made a soup with the vegetables and the grouse he'd killed earlier. He wouldn't say his cooking skills were anything to brag about but it was better than being hungry. He handed Dany a bowl and urged her to eat, sometimes she did so without much fuss, sometimes she seemed to forget what she was doing, and her food would go untouched unless he prompted her repeatedly. Today she sat staring into the flames as if they held answers to questions she didn't know how to ask.

'Why are you doing this?'

It had been so long since she'd made any noise at all that Jon almost dropped his bowl. He sat staring at her for what seemed like forever, he was hoping she would elaborate, that by staying silent perhaps he could coax more words out of her but she didn't say anymore so he gave in. 'I needed to take you somewhere safe, somewhere you can heal.'

She didn't say anything for a long time and he was sure she was gone again, off into whatever corner of her mind she had retreated to, to hide from the pain. Then: 'Why are you doing this'

Jon sighed and put down his bowl, he left his chair and knelt in front of her, as he had after the victory feast in Winterfell. But the pledge was different this time. 'Because I love you. Because we are the only family each of us has left now.' It was true, Bran was not Bran anymore, not the boy he'd taught to hold a sword, who had climbed every wall in Winterfell, Arya was cold and distant, she didn't need or want anyone, and Sansa...Sansa had made her choice, for all her words of family she had stolen what was left of his mothers heritage from him when she told Tyrion the truth of Jon's Birth. The Starks were not his family anymore, as much as that pained him and there was only one other Targaryen alive.

'I'm not mad.' She whispered, she sounded so broken that he wanted to cry.

He took the bowl from her hands and set it down, taking her hands in his. 'I know you're not, you're angry, you're hurting, you have every right to feel those things. We're going to go up with the free Folk, away from all the intrigue and the power struggles. You told me once that when you were on the Dothraki sea you felt free, I can't take you back to Essos, it's too dangerous, you have too many enemies there but the Free Folk live much the same, and the rest of your blood riders are going to join us later, I think they'll be happy up here, once they get used to the cold. '

'You almost killed me.'

Jon cringed. 'Aye, I did. You were...dangerous. After Drogon, you weren't thinking properly, I couldn't let you go down that path. But I've never been very good at killing women.' He said the last part softly, another girl, another time.

'I'm not the mother of Dragons anymore.'

'Dany...'

'What am I if I'm not the mother of Dragons?'

'You're Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, and you are still alive.' A single tear traced a path down her check, but she turned her attention back to the fire. Jon didn't care, she'd spoken, there was hope, that's all that mattered.
In the morning Jon ventured out to the bath house and light the fires, the water in the pools was only partially frozen so he assumed the Wildlings had made use of the place during their stay, still it would take a while to heat the water enough to use. He planned to stay for awhile, give the horses and them a chance to rest before going on. The army of the dead hadn't come anywhere near Castle Black and so the buildings themselves had not been damaged, but Jon noticed that the air was warmer than he could ever remember it being up here and the wall was weeping terribly. There were old story about the wall keeping winter at bay, and Jon knew first hand that the white walkers dropped the temperature whenever they were near. Was it possible that with the Night King gone the North would become warmer? Would the wall eventually melt? It would take several generations no doubt but if it continued to weep like it was now it wouldn't be long before the castles along the wall became dangerous.

He spent most of the day wondering the empty halls, remembering the men who had lived here, but for a chosen few he couldn't say that he missed them. Criminals: thieves, murderers and rapers most of them, and even the ones who were not eventually learned to be hard to survive, hard is what you get when you strip men of hope. Maester Aemon's words drifted back to him through empty rooms 'Did you ever wonder why the men of the Night's Watch take no wives and father no children? So they will not love, for love is the bane of honor, the death of duty.' What would the old man think of him now he wondered. What would his Uncle think of him? In the evening, after another sad meal of wild bird and root vegetables, he led Daenerys down to the baths, she seemed even more forlorn today than she had before she'd spoken, but maybe that was a good thing too. It was something besides the still numbness she'd displayed since King's Landing. He assumed she'd want her privacy again but she made no move to ready herself for the bath so he took it upon himself to help her, he loosened the ties of the cloak she wore and let it fall, the clothes she had on underneath were nothing like the dresses the Queen had once worn, they were dark and loose and plain. He undid the ties at her neck and eased the tunic down, her collarbones stood out prominently marking how much weight she'd lost but her breasts were fuller than he remembered, when the garment fell to the floor he choked back a sob, now he understood why she hadn't wanted him to see her back in the Vale, Despite the marked lose in her size her belly stand out, round and slightly swollen, he looked up into her lavender eyes, she was watching him, waiting for his reaction. How many moons had it been since they'd last lain together? It had been back at Winterfell, before Sam had turned everything upside down, Four moons perhaps, maybe five. He had a vague memory of Lady Catelyn carrying the younger children and she had always seemed bigger but then again Jon had been smaller then, and Dany barely ate.

'Dany. You should have...' Should have what? She had barely spoken in months, he was sure this truth, if she had even fully acknowledged it had only made it harder. He sighed and laid his forehead against hers. 'I'm so sorry, I wish I had known.' He whispered as he stood there, eventually he stepped back and guided her to the water.

He undressed and joined her, helping her wash the dirt from her hair. He concentrated on the task, trying not to think too hard about this new truth, he didn't know how to feel about it. In the months since he'd discovered who his parents had been he had been struggling to make sense of everything, his feelings for Daenerys most of all, even in the depths of her despair when it had seemed no one could get through to her he had still loved her, still believed that in under all the pain she was a good person. The side of him that had been raised in the North by Ned Stark wanted to recoil from the very idea, in the North such relations, while not entirely unheard of, were certainly not encouraged.
But there was another part of him, not the Targaryen part, for he had not been raised as one, but a part that wanted to say to hells with everyone else and their rules, he had spent his life being told what he was worth, what he could and couldn't have in life. He had suffered and died for the people of Westeros, people who had named him Bastard and who would have looked down on him for a circumstance beyond his control. If being with Daenerys made him happy, made them both happy then maybe after everything they had been through they should be allowed that. It was almost funny, know that he had come to a place where he thought he could accept their relationship, she was in no condition to have one. He wasn't sure if she would ever be as she was before or if she would want him again. But he had no intentions of turning his back on her, especially not now.

After they were finished bathing he led her back to the room, and stoked the fire. Being from the north Jon was used to the cold and would have kept the room cooler but he knew she liked the heat, was it just what she was used to he wondered, having been raised in Essos, or was it some part of her Targaryen heritage that had passed him over, like their colouring and their resistance to fire? In the end the only thing it seemed he'd inherited from his fathers side was the ability to bond with dragons, and what had that gotten him in the end? He thought mournfully of Rhaegal, and what it had felt like to fly. He'd been bonded to the dragon for such a short time and yet he felt his absence acutely. He could not imagine what it felt like for Daenerys, she had raised them from hatchlings, had ridden Drogon for years. People looked at her strangely when she referred to the dragons as her children, he had looked at her strangely, but he understood now that the bond between Dragon and rider was unique and powerful and the common tongue lacked a term to describe it.

Jon bolted the door and put a chair under the handle, he had closed the gates but he still feared looters. Daenerys had managed to ready herself for bed and had climbed under the furs. Her behaviour baffled him, sometimes she seemed present, sometimes she didn't respond to anything he said or did and sometimes she followed direction like she was under some sort of spell. It was perhaps an improvement from where she had been back in Kings Landing but it still unnerved him. He wondered what would happen when the babe came, would she be able to care for it? He shook his head, he had to find the Free Folk before then, the women would be able to help. Jon certainly didn't know what to do with a newborn, or during the birth for that matter. He'd held his sib-cousins when they had been babes but the actual care had fallen to their mother and the nursemaids. He suddenly wished Sam and Gilly were here, they would at least know what to do, though Jon couldn't imagine Sam making it through a birth without passing out or throwing up. Gilly should be due any time now he knew, and he'd had word from Sam before he left the capital that they would be staying in Winterfell until Gilly and the baby were well enough to travel and then they would be making their way back to Hornhill, with the Night's Watch dissolved and Randyll and Dickon dead, Sam was Lord of Hornhill, they hadn't wanted to risk going back while the fighting had been going on for fear that the Reach would get caught in the crossfire and now they were stuck up North as Gilly was too far along. He wondered if he'd ever see them again, when he'd said goodbye he'd known the odds were slim, but not this way. He hadn't expected to be making his way up passed the wall again.

He stripped down to his underclothes and climbed into bed, to his surprise she moved closer to him. Whether for heat or comfort he didn't know nor did he expect an answer. He laid awake for a long time that night, his mind whirling with shock of Dany's pregnancy and when he finally drifted off he found no comfort in his dreams. Instead he found himself in front of an ancient weirwood, it looked familiar and yet he couldn't place where he'd seen it before, it wasn't Winterfell's nor did it belong to the grove just North of the Wall. The air was warm, the grass at his feet was green and lush, summer then. The word brought a sense of recognition, he hadn't seen the face of this weirwood before but he'd seen the tree, the last time he'd seen it, it had been Bran's face that had looked out at him as he'd watched through the eyes of Ghost, through another dream. It wasn't a surprise then when he turned to find Bran standing in amid an assortment of rocks that seemed to spiral out from the tree. Bran looked more alive than he did in the real world, more like he expected Brandon Stark would have looked had he not become the Three Eyed Raven. 'Hello Jon'
He greeted, his voice too, held more emotion than he'd heard in it since his fall.
'Bran.' He said by way of greeting.
Bran's eyes did a sweep of the horizon and Jon followed him, he noticed the arrowhead mountain in the distance, they couldn't be far from the lake then, where Viseron had died.
'This is where it started you know.' Jon didn't need to ask what, he had a feeling he already knew.
'This place was sacred to the Children of the Forest, they were losing the war with the First Men and so they captured one, tied him to that weirwood and turned him into that abomination, but they lost control of their creation and it was only with the help of the First Men that they were able to confine him to the Lands of Always Winter.'
'Why are you telling me this now?' Jon asked, the Night King was dead after all.
Bran shrugged. 'Sometimes I feel the need to share the things I've seen. It gets lonely, watching the past.' Jon gave him an incredulous look and Bran sighed. 'It's harder out there, there's so much to process, here I'm free, it's difficult to explain.' He paused for a moment. 'I've been tracking your journey North.'
'I hope that's not something you feel like sharing.' Jon replied, a dangerous edge to his voice.
Bran smiled, and for a moment Jon could see the little boy who chased him and Robb everywhere. 'What was it you and Arya used to say? Don't tell Sansa?'
Yes, that had been part of their bond, he and Arya, Sansa had delighted in getting them in trouble and so his constant reminders to not let Sansa know they had stolen treats from the kitchen, or snuck into the armoury, or that he was teaching her to shoot a bow had become a sort of motto. 'I wish I'd listened to my own advice.' He whispered bitterly.
Bran wandered closer to Jon and the weirwood. 'It would have ended badly either way. Except you wouldn't have been in a position to save her.' Jon didn't need to ask who he was referring to. He'd used his rightful claim to the throne to stop Daenerys, then he'd used it to save her from execution. 'I'm still not sure I can forgive Sansa.' He said honestly.
'No, perhaps not. You and Sansa have never gotten along, I know you both tried for a time. Perhaps that's all one can ask.'
'Is this why you're invading my dreams? So we can discuss my relationship with Sansa?'
Bran didn't answer, instead he stepped closer to the weirwood, he seemed drawn to it the way he was to the one in Winterfell. 'I understand why you're going North, it's for the best right now but it won't be forever.'
'I thought you couldn't see the future.' Jon replied. That would have been a useful talent, though he suspected Bran would have only shared what he felt like sharing.
'I can't, not really. But sometimes I see glimpses, possibilities.' He ran a hand over the rough bark next to the carved face. 'One day you will have to go back. We will see each other again then.' Jon shook his head, 'I won't return to Winterfell.'
'Not Winterfell, the God's Eye. You'll find me there.' Bran continued to study the face of the weirwood and Jon had the impression that he was seeing more than bark and sap. Then he pulled his hand back and turned to Jon, 'For now, this is goodbye.'
'Goodbye Bran.' Jon could feel the waking world pulling at him, the details of the landscape around him beginning to blur.
'And Jon?'
Jon struggled to hold on to the dream, to Bran's voice as he began to slip back into wakefulness.
'Yes?'
'You'll be a good father.'
Her world was a tapestry of pain and anger. She thought she had understood both, she had said as much once, given a long speech about it to .... someone, him. About the suffering she had endured. It was nothing compared to this. When the last of her children had fallen, when the whispers of another heir had reached her. She'd built armour around herself years ago, she was Daenerys Stormborn, the unburnt, the broker of chains, the mother of....

Each title was a layer of defence, a way to protect herself from the pain she'd known when she was nothing but the beggar king's little sister, the bride of a Horse Lord her brother had sold her to, when she had been a thing to be sold and used for the benefit of men. She had promised herself long ago that she would never be that girl again and with each achievement she had added another layer to her armour.

How foolish she had been, she hadn't realized her armour could crack, that underneath it all she was still as vulnerable and weak as she had ever been.

Her children were...her children were...gone. And he had betrayed her. Somewhere in her anger she knew he hadn't meant it that way, she knew he didn't want the throne, but if he had just listened to her about his damn sister, for it was Sansa Stark's doing she was sure.

His strength was different, he was a man, and men could hold their strength in their bodies, they could fight on the battlefield and swing swords to protect themselves. But women, women had to find other ways, and Sansa was like her, she'd been hurt, used. Just like her Sansa wanted to armour herself in titles, Lady of Winterfell wasn't enough, it was only temporary, she would lose it the moment Jon married. She had to find better armour, she wanted the North, of that Daenerys was absolutely certain. She had wanted Jon gone and she'd wanted the North. If only Jon hadn't been so trusting.

Something had happened. What? She wasn't sure, why was everything so foggy? Why couldn't she recall what had happened to her? Everything was a blur of places and people, blood on dirt, a body falling, dragon scales. Yelling voices, flames. So much noise!

The first moment of clarity came in the darkness, it was cell perhaps. On Dragonstone she was sure, she was in a cell on Dragonstones. She wanted to laugh, maybe she had. Someone was watching her from the other side of the bars, the old smuggler, she'd liked him, he'd reminded her of Ser Barristan.

What would the old knight think of her now? He would have been so disappointed.

Would he have left her for Jon, as Tyrion and Varys had? The traitors! It was Rhaegar Barristan she had loved, Rhaegar he would have followed, would he have left her for Rhaegars son?

Was she to spend the rest of her days here? A prisoner in the castle she had returned to her family. Family, Jon was family, that meant something to him, meant a lot to him it seemed, too much. He wouldn't hurt her, wouldn't let them hurt her. She was family.

But that wasn't right, Jon had tried to hurt her, she remembered... she remembered....

They had given her clothes, dark and drab, she had refused to do anything with them. They sent handmaids, she didn't know them, they had stripped her and washed her, and dressed her in the rough spun clothes of a peasant, was she a peasant now? They fastened a heavy cloak around her and brushed her tangled hair, tying it back in a single thick braid. She didn't protest, she didn't care. Maybe they were going to execute her now, that's what happens were you play the game and you lose. She'd always known death was the only other option.

Guards had led her to a horse, it was silver. She'd had a silver horse once, she remembered that, she remembered the tall grass and the sounds of the horde travelling across the Dothraki sea, how much
Sometimes Ser Barristan told her about his childhood, in the North, about playing tricks on his younger siblings. No that wasn't right, Ser Baristen wasn't from the North, and he had never rode with the Khalasar. Where was she? The Dothraki sea had disappeared, she saw trees and grass, and snow in places, Ser Jorah had died in the snow. But she'd seen him, they had been riding together. No, no that wasn't right either, it wasn't Ser Jorah, it wasn't Ser Barristan. She knew that voice, that gruff Northern accent. She remembered what it had done to her when he whispered in her ear at night. She remembered that voice screaming at her. Screaming something, she couldn't make out what, she didn't want to. What was he saying now, it wasn't anything important, a story, something about a giant, she'd seen dead giants. This was about a giant who's eye was the world. That wasn't... She tried to focus on his voice, she wanted to stay here. Everything was so confusing where she was, if she could just focus on his voice maybe she could stay.

Something was nagging her. Something trying to get her attention but she ignored it in favour of the Essos Sun, the heat against her skin, she loved the heat. They were ridding to Vaes Dothrak, her and the Khal and his Khalasar, they told her she was to eat the heart of a stallion. It didn't sound very pleasant and Viserys thought them all barbarians but Dany didn't care, she was going to have a baby, she could feel the life inside her fluttering around. It was something that would be hers and she would love her forever, for she was certain it was a girl. The Khal would be.... the khal wanted a boy, she had given birth to a boy.... a dead baby boy, the stallion that mounts the world except he never had. But she was carrying a girl, she was sure, she was...
She looked around her, the Khalasar spread out in all directions, and endless sea of people, she searched for Drogo, where was he? There! Up ahead. She kicked her horse into a faster trot and made to ride next to her husband. She reached out her hand to touch his shoulder and he fell from his horse, half dead with fever. This isn't the way this happened! What was happening to her? She shut her eyes and screamed. Screamed for all she was worth, until her throat burned and her lungs were on fire, maybe she could breathe fire, maybe she was the dragon. She opened her eyes to the darkness of a tent and the chill air of a Westerosi winter. She was dimly aware that she wasn't alone, she was never alone, ghosts haunted her, anger and hate kept her company, her regrets walked with her day after day. The remnants of her dream clung to her like frost, she closed her eyes and tried to recapture what it had felt like to carry a child, to create life, she'd be the cause of so much death, but she could still remember the flutters and then the kicks, the squirming and nudges from within. She could feel the flutters still, gentle and unassuming, a barely there brush against the inside of her belly. Her hand wander down to lay against her abdomen, the skin was taunt, pulled tight against a gentle swell....
That wasn't right, she couldn't bare children, she had been cursed long ago, by a witch in the desert. She would never be a mother again, her children were dead, her boy, her dragons. Gone, all gone. She sunk beneath the waves of her misery once more.

Someone pushed something into her hands, Jorah and a plate of fried goat. No, it wasn't, Jon had given her bread and hard cheese, was there nothing else? Her stomach rebelled and she let it sit in her hand forgotten. She didn't know where she was, it was only the two of them, everyone else was gone, dead and gone.

'Dany you need to eat.' Jon urged. He was sitting beside her, he wouldn't start to pack up their things until she gave in and ate, sometimes she spit it out when he wasn't looking, she didn't feel hungry, or maybe she did and she just couldn't tell anymore. She brought the cheese to her mouth and bit it dutifully. He was watching her, she forced herself to swallow so he'd go away and leave her alone.
Why did he care if she ate? She didn't care. She forced another bit and another, he held a waterskin up for her to drink and she took that too. Eventually he was satisfied that she had eaten enough and he readied them to leave. She climbed up into her saddle without instruction, she didn't care what happened to her or where they were going, none of it mattered anymore. She let the sound of the horse hoofs carrying her back to earlier days, when she had rode across the plains of Essos with an army at her back.

One morning Jon bound her dirty hair up in a bun and tied a scarf around her head, he told her he was going to find a Inn out of the way but that no one could recognize her so they had to hide her hair. Suddenly she was seven again and assassins sent by Robert Baratheon had gotten too close. One of them had almost succeeded in killing Viserys and they had fled whatever city it was they had been living in at the time. Viserys had tied a dirty brown scarf around her head then too, it had itched but he had slapped her when she tried to take it off. It itched now but she wouldn't try to take it off, she had learned her lesson, she tried to do what Viserys told her to do, she tried to be a good girl but he was always mad at her anyway. She didn't understand why people wanted them dead, they hadn't done anything wrong they were just children. She really just wanted to go home, to the house with the red door and the lemon tree. Viserys would slap her for bringing that up too so she didn't. She didn't want to get slapped again, her cheek still hurt from the last time. Except it didn't, that had been years ago and half a world away. She was a woman now and Viserys was long dead. She shivered against the cold.

That night they stopped at an Inn, she heard Jon explain to the man that she was his wife, traumatize by the war and he was taking her home. Where was home? Did he mean to take her back to Winterfell? Was Sansa Stark going to be the one to end her? She would rather Jon be the one to do it, better to be killed by another dragon than that wolf bitch. Jon led her to a table, he ordered food, she ate what was in front of her, some part of her acknowledged that it was better then anything she'd eaten lately. When they were done he led her to a room with a...bath, steam rose them the water, warm water! God's how she missed the heat, the feeling of being clean! Was this for her?

Jon's hands went to the ties at her neck, a sense of panic rose through the fog, he meant to undress her, he couldn't, he'd see....that, he couldn't see, it would be real if he did and he would know. She could do this. She had conquered cities, she had brought magic back into the world. She could take off her own clothes and bathe herself. She could.

She forced her hands up to cover his, she stilled his hands, she couldn't talk, she had been silent so long she feared the words would never return to her, but he seemed to understand and after a moment of hesitation and the reassurance that he would be just outside, he left her alone. She pulled off her dirty clothes, disgusted by the state she was in, she had never been so dirty. The water wasn't nearly as hot as she would have liked it to be. But it was warm and she couldn't remember the last time she had been warm. Or maybe she could, maybe it had been on a boat, huddled under fur and blankets, Jon's body pressed against her, his lips gliding over her skin, the feeling of fullness as he rode with her to their release. Her hands found the swell of her belly again, was that when this had happened? How long ago had that been? Or maybe it had happened later, at Winterfell, before... before he had pulled away.

She forced herself to push the past away and focus on the there and now, on the feeling of water and warmth, she grabbed a cloth and a bar of soap and scrubbed, she focused on the sensation, the roughness of the cloth, the smell of pine and something spicy she didn't recognize. Just be here, be here for a little while, she told herself. She wet her hair, and used the soap to clean it. And then clean it again, and again. Eventually she accepted that she was as clean as she was going to get, and she forced herself to get out. She dried off and put on the clean underclothes Jon had left on the bed for her. She Climbed into the bed and pulled the furs up to her chin, struggling to stay warm, struggling to still in the present. The present didn't hurt right now, not if she didn't think.
It slowly became easier to stay in the present. She started keeping track of the days, started noting the changing landscape as they edged North, she knew they were going North, she'd learned to judge such things on the Dothraki sea. They stayed far from the roads and rarely passed anyone at all. Sometimes Jon spoke to her, sometimes he asked her things but she never answered, she wasn't sure she knew how anymore, he didn't seem to expect her to anyway. Sometimes the pain became too much, when the memories surfaced and she got lost in the pain of losing so much, sometimes she heard Drogon scream and the world melted away and she would find herself somewhere else, she was four and Ser Willem was reading her a story, she was riding her Silver next to her Khal, she was laughing with Missandei, Darrio was grinning at her over a glass of sweet red wine. But even the past wasn't always pleasant, good memories blended with the bad and she found herself retreating instead to the present and the mundane reality of travelling.

Eventually the wall came into sight. Ominous in its magnitude, so they weren't headed for Winterfell, they had to be far far passed it. They made their way to the abandoned Castle Black as Jon informed her. They left the horses in the courtyard and settled into one of the bigger rooms, he left her there for a time, and she found herself watching the flames in the fire he had started. She remembered other fires, other places, fires she had started, she had been a creature of fire, a dragon. Now, now she was nothing.

Jon returned, he made food, one of them should really learn to cook. She left the bowl in her lap. She wanted to know, she wanted him to explain. 'Why are you doing this?' The words broke feel like a dam breaking, part of her wondered if she'd really said them or if it was all in her head. He didn't say anything for the longest time and she began to suspect that she hadn't actually spoken but then he answered her, told her they were going North with the wildings, she remembered his loud redhead friend, the one who had been singing his praises the night of the feast. He wanted her to heal, heal? Could she heal from this? Could anyone?

But that wasn't what she wanted to know, so she asked again. 'Because I love you. Because we're the only family each of us has left now.' Family, were they? Jon had called the Starks family, had told them the truth of his birth even after she had begged him not to, because they were family and he trusted them. What was family? The Starks had betrayed him, Viserys had betrayed her. What good was family? 'I'm not mad.' She said, the thought was more for herself than him but he started to reassure her, he didn't think she was mad, maybe he would if he understood what had been going on in her head, maybe he would take his sword and end her the way Jaime Lannister had ended her father. But no, Jon wasn't like that, Jon would never.... Except he had.

'You tried to kill me.' She remembered, she didn't want to but she did. She wished he'd ended it. 'Aye, I did. You were...dangerous. After Drogon, you weren't thinking properly, I couldn't let you go down that path.'

'I'm not the mother of Dragons anymore.' It was true, they were gone, her children were gone, felled by men and monsters. The magic she had birthed into the world was gone. 'We grew small, without them, we became like everyone else.' She was small now, small and normal and unimportant. She didn't know how to be any of those things.

'Dany...'

'What am I if I'm not the mother of Dragons?' Weak.

'You are Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen and you are still alive.' His words were clear and strong and she wanted to believe him, wanted to believe that that mattered, that she was enough. She felt a tear slip down her cheek, she knew if she let them come she would cry until the end of time, she would scream and wail and weep and she would never be able to stop so instead she turned her
attention back to the flames.

She couldn't retreat like she used to, something had shifted inside her and now she couldn't block out the present anymore, so she lay on the bed as the sun made it's journey across the sky and allowed the waves of sorrow to crash over her again and again, she didn't dive too deeply into what she was feeling but she didn't hide from it either, she had never hidden from anything before in her life and there was a shame in knowing how far she had gone to hide from this pain. She thought she had been strong, she thought she could do anything, the truth was ugly and vulgar.

At some point Jon returned and made more food, they ate in silence this night and afterward he led her down to the courtyard and into one of the other buildings, a bathhouse. It had been weeks since the Inn and the idea of bathing was soothing but she couldn't, she was too tired, too sad to bother. This time when he made to undress her she didn't stop him, she could see the moment he realized the truth in his eyes, in his struggled gasp. She wants to tell him she's sorry, she's sorry for a lot of things, things she did, things she tried to do but she can't. She doesn't understand why he still cares. He pulls her close and rests his forehead against hers, he whispers that he's sorry. She isn't sure what he's sorry for, almost killing her, betraying her, taking the only thing she had ever wanted. She wants to hate him, but she's so very tired and it seems he's the only thing she has left now.

When they return to the room they've been using she manages to ready herself for bed and when he joins her she slides closer without much thought. She has barely touched her since...before. And she hates herself for admitting how comforting it was when he held her earlier. She is...was a queen, a conqueror and she doesn't need a man to held her because she's sad and broken. Except that maybe she does and that thought hurts as much as everything else.

He didn't rush to get up the next morning as has been his custom since they left King's Landing. Instead he gently, almost hesitancy reached over and laid a hand upon her stomach. She flinched first and she feared he would withdrew from her but he didn't. She wanted to say something, anything, but it felt so strange now, words had come easily to her once, now she felt as though she had to fight for every syllable. Just when she had decided that she will remain mute the words found their own way out. They are not kind.

'You betrayed me, I was your Queen and I begged you not to tell anyone the truth, and you betrayed me.'

Jon stiffened.

'You say you love me, but you can barely stand to touch me, our relation to each other disgusts you. How is that love?'

'Daenerys you have to understand, that was not how I was raised. Such pairings are not common in the North.' Jon withdrew his hand, body tense for a fight.

'You are Targaryen, it's what we do.'

'I wasn't raised one, I've never been one. I'm more a Stark than I have ever been a Targaryen.'

'And yet the Starks betrayed you.' She countered, she was pleased with herself for managing to maintain a coherent conversation.

'One Stark betrayed me. One Stark sacrificed his honour to protect me, that matters too. The good people do, the good you've been, it still matters.'

She sat up, the furs falling around her waist, her hair a mess without it's once customary braids. 'Does it? I know what I did, I know what I did to my own people, I’ve become the thing I always dreaded becoming, I am the mad queen.'

Jon sat up as well, one hand propping him up, the other gently grabbing her arm. 'You broke, you lost so much so fast and you broke, people break.'

'You didn’t, you lost your home and your family, and your life and you didn't break.'

'But I did. I didn't have a dragon at my command or maybe I would have burnt down castle black.' Daenerys felt a smile grace her lips, it’s an odd sensation, she couldn't remember the last time she smiled, but it wasn't a pretty smile. 'NO, you wouldn't have, you’re a better person than I am, it’s why I feared you so much. I knew why the people love you, for the same reason I loved you.
Because you are good and kind and true and I am none of those things.'
'Daenerys...'
'You should have killed me.' She wished he had, then she wouldn't have to live like this.
'I couldn't.'
'I would have killed you.'
'I don't believe that.'
She sneered at him. 'I would have. I hated you, you betrayed me.'
He was silent at that, he withdrew his hand from her arm and climbed from the bed. He dressed in silence before turning back to her. 'I have to start preparing to head North, We'll give the horses a few more days to rest before we leave.'
Jon spent a good deal of time combing through the store rooms looking for supplies, the wildlings had stripped the main buildings of most anything of use but they didn't know Castle Black like he did. He found one of the slides they had used to carry provisions and began loading it up and securing it. The day was warmer than the last and Jon found himself sweating despite having removed his cloak and leather armour. He had joined the Night's Watch in summer and had never experienced such temperatures at the wall.

While he worked he mulled over his conversation with Daenerys, he had assumed, naively perhaps, that things would get easier once she started talking again, the silence had been unnerving after all. He'd been wrong. Jon had never been particularly good at conversing with people, he preferred to keep his thoughts and opinions to himself, Daenerys seemed hells bent on dragging up every uncomfortable typic she could think of. He knew this was going to be difficult, she had a long road to travel to get back to the woman he had met at Dragonstone, if that was even possible.

'They say when a Targaryen is born the gods flip a coin and the world holds it's breath.' The simpering voice of Lord Varys drifted back to him, of course Jon had known what the man was getting at when he'd said it, Bastard raised or not he had been educated alongside his siblings – cousins. Jon wasn't however particularly inclined to believe that Dany was destined to be mad. Her father, if memory served has been a good king once upon a time, until he'd been captured and tortured. Jon thought of Theon, the husk that had been hollowed out by Ramsey. Though Jon and Theon had never gotten along very well the changes in him when they met again had been rattling. If Aerys had spent half a year in the hands of his enemies only to return to the snake pit of Kings Landing, with eager manipulators whispering in his ear it was no wonder the old king had succumbed to madness. Jon would absolutely not let that happen to Daenerys, nor would he fail his child.

Once he had finished loading up the sled he returned to the castle, there were still a few things he was hoping to find before they left. It was odd seeing the place so empty, it had always been a dreary and unwelcoming castle, not the sort of place anyone would actually want to call home. Jon could still remember the bitter sting of disillusionment he'd felt when he first came here. Both Lord Stark and Uncle Benjen had sugar coated the truth about the Night's Watch, While Uncle Benjen had tried to warn him away when he'd first suggested joining, it hadn't countered the years of stories he had told them as children. It hadn't taken long for Jon to realize that the stories Benjen told were highly slanted, of course he hadn't wanted his nieces and nephews to know what kind of place he had bound himself to. What had hurt worse had been his father. Lord Stark had surely known the truth about this place and yet he had agreed to send Jon to be bound in service to this corrupt old order for life with barely a word about it. At the time Jon had felt a ferocious sort of anger at that, on some level he had wanted his father to talk him out of it, to insist that Jon had other options, he's immediate agreement had felt like a dismissal. That feeling that only intensified when they picked up the criminals on the way to the wall and then again when they had actually made it to Castle Black. Jon had carried that resentment for a long time, if he was being honest with himself about it, it had even tainted the grief he had felt when his father had been executed. Now Jon understood why Lord Stark had not stopped him, why he had promised to tell him about his mother the next time they met and not before. The next time, after Jon had taken his vows, after he had sworn away any right to the titles he had been denied all his life. Jon wasn't sure what hurt worse; the idea that the man who had raised him thought he would want that damn chair or the fact
that he had taken that choice away from him in the first place. Eventually his feet led him back to Maester Aemon's old rooms and the library adjacent to it. Unsurprising the place had been left untouched by the free folk, and it was strange to visit it without the company of Maester Aemon or Sam. He'd had little reason to visit this place during his time on the wall, but what memories he did have of the space were as close to home as Castle Black ever got. This time however he was looking for something, the maester had kept books on healing herbs found North of the wall, it had been required learning for the rangers but of course Jon had never been a ranger.

He walked slowly through the aisles of books and scrolls, a thick layer of dusk covered everything and cobweb were starting to form in the corners, evidence that this room at least hadn't been used since Sam left. He was sure that Maester Aemon must have used some system to organize things but for the life of him he couldn't figure it out. Of course, the maester had been blind for decades before his death and many of his stewards had been illiterate. However, he would have thought Sam would have seen to it during his time in the Maester's service. He'd have to call him out on it should they ever cross paths again.

At long least he spied what he was looking for, a thick leather-bound tome embossed with faded gold lettering 'A guide to medicinal Herbs from the far North.' Written by one of the Wall's first Maesters, a fact Jon only knew because Sam talked incessantly when he was nervous and Sam was often nervous. As he flipped absently through the pages, he noticed a couple of plain spine books that had been shoved behind it. With idle curiosity he closed the book and reached for the others, there were three of them, they're fronts just as plain as their spines, he opened one to discover that they were journals, probably written by someone at Castle Black, Jon almost put them back on the shelf when his birth name caught his attention, a bit of further information helped deduced that they had been written by Maester Aemon himself in his youth, before he had come to the wall. They probably should have been sent to the Citadel but he imagined that someone had accidentally placed them here instead.

He considered putting them back anyway but quickly dismissed that, in a sense the books belonged to him and Daenerys as Aemon's last living relatives and though he was loath to admit it he was curious about the Targaryen side of his family, not the stories that everyone in Westeros knew but actual first-hand accounts of the people who had come before him. When he returned with his finds to the room next door, he found Daenerys exactly where he'd left her still abed, furs drawn up to her chin. He was struck again by the marked change in her appearance, save for a few rather wild nights on the way to Winterfell he had never seen the queen be anything less than presentable, her appearance had been polished to perfection long before they had met, after Rhaegal and Missandei had died her appearance and demeanour had begun to slide, she often appeared on the brink of tears, exhausted and dishevelled, in her grief it had been understandable, only a fool would have not been able to tell she was in pain, only a fool would underestimate a grief stricken queen with a fire breathing dragon and many of them had been fools. Jon wished he could change a lot of the things that had happened in those last months, if he had never learned the truth he was certain things would have turned out differently, he would have had no reason to pull away from her and he would have been there to comfort her in her grief. If he had kept the truth to himself even, if he had just accepted what he felt for her and stayed by her side, if he had never told his sisters.

He knew it was pointless to wonder, just as it was pointless to contemplate all the other what if's in his life. What if Lord Stark had told him the truth, what if he had never gone to the wall, what if his parents hadn't died. As much as he tried to ignore it that last one had become a large one of late, he was plagued by thoughts of who he would have been in that other life, a prince of the realm, son of a king, with two parents and no Lady Stark glaring daggers at him from across the room. He would have known Daenerys his whole life, and wasn't that a strange thought? Would they have still felt something for each other? Would they have regarded each other as siblings? would that have changed anything if they had both been raised as Targaryen's? Would his father have held with those old practices? It was an exercise in futility but nevertheless, his mind drifted there again and again.
Of course he would never know the answers to any of it. And in the present he had other things to worry about.

'You should get up.' He told her.

No reply.

He regarded her warily for a minute, and then did what he had done countless times in the past when he'd been sent to drag reluctant siblings out of bed, he grabbed the furs and pulled them off. While he was shocked at the warmer climate at the wall he knew she still found it cold.

'keep your queen warm Jon Snow.' The memory sent a shiver up his spine. The words playful and silky, filled with promise. How had they ended up here? What gods had seen fit to punish them in such a way?

Daenerys shivered as well, though probably not from the memories of happier times. She slowly dragged herself to sit up on the edge of the bed. Her hair was a tangled rats nest of silver, the bags under eyes and the loss of weight made her look years older than she was.

Jon felt an inexplicable wave of anger roll over him and he clamped it down as best he could. Temper of the dragon, maybe that's what it was, he'd been fighting with it all his life, for all he appeared calm to everyone else inside it was like a beast ready to attack at a moment's notice.

'Daenerys, you have to try. It's been months, and I know that it's hard but you have to try.'

'What do you know about it?' At least he could get her to talk. 'You're not the one that went crazy, you’re not the one that lost everything.' She didn't look at him as she spoke, the old Dany would have, she would have looked him in the eye like she had that last evening at Dragonstone.

'You think you're the only one who knows loss?' Jon felt his grip on that beast start to slip. 'I lost my father, two brothers, I spent years believing Bran and Arya were dead as well, I watched as the men who murdered my brother; my best friend, stole my family home, I lost my uncle, my mentor, my friends, I was murdered!! Right out there in that courtyard by men I trusted. My sister betrayed me, not once but twice, I lost my identity! And then the woman I loved turned on the people she was supposed to protect!' He cursed himself the minute the words left his mouth, she turned to him, violet eyes more alive than he'd seen them in months. She stood, grabbed her clothes and her boots from where they sat on the trunk at the foot of the bed and, deliberating meeting his eyes this time, she stormed passed him and out the door.
chapter six

What Remains

Chapter Six

He watched her as she made her way across the courtyard, a part of him had been worried she would actually try to leave, but she headed toward the bathhouse so he let her go. Now that he'd said his piece the anger had faded to it's usual simmer, he couldn't decide if he should regret what he said or be thankful that it had roused a response from her. He had thought the last thing he wanted to do was fight, but maybe that wasn't entirely true. The truth was in under the need to protect her he was incredibly angry with her, he had been for some time, maybe since he'd told her the truth about his birth. It had stung that she thought he would seek to claim the throne, he had thought by then that she knew him better than that, he would have happily stepped aside, he would have hid the truth from the world and been Jon Snow the bastard Warden of the North for the rest of his days. Of course she had every right to be angry at him for telling Sansa, he should have listened to her, should have understood that Daenerys' own experiences would have made her an excellent judge of his sister's character. He had felt at the time that he owed it to Sansa and Arya, they were his family, he needed them to understand.

In truth it wasn't Sansa and Arya he had wanted to tell, it had been Catelyn, a fact he only acknowledged to himself a sensnight later as he sat huddled by a fire on the way to Kings Landing. It was a need borne partially from the desire to erase the shame Lord Stark had carried all those years to protect him from Robert, to explain that Eddard Stark had been faithful in his marriage. The other part of him was not so altruistic, he simply wanted her to know that the boy she had been so cruel to had been born a king. It wasn't a part of him he was particularly proud of but it was there all the same.

Suddenly overwhelmed with exhaustion he turned from the window and collapsed in a chair by the fire. How were they ever going to make this work?

He found her later, as the sun began to set, in the great hall, her back to the door as she stared off into the shadows. He took a seat on the bench across from her and she shifted slightly, more acknowledgement of his presence than he usually got from her. 'What I said earlier - ' He began, 'It was true. I did horrible things. Countless people died because I wanted to destroy Cersei.' She continued to stare off into the corner of the room. Jon knew she was wrong about one thing, it wasn't countless people, he had a number, he didn't think that information would ever help her.

'You weren't yourself.'

No? Are you sure? I've done horrible things before.'

'Have you killed innocents before? He knew she hadn't,

'No.' She breathed the word out, like a gust of wind. 'But I've burnt people, the witch that cursed me, the slave masters and the Khals. I once crucified 162 men.

Jon felt bile rise in his throat despite himself, He forced it down. 'Why?'

'Does it matter?' She asked, her voice was full of contempt, for herself he knew.

'Usually.'

'They crucified 162 children so I crucified them.'

Jon sighed, something like relief washed over him. And he wondered for himself then, when had his view of the world become so grey? He would have been horrified once, regardless of her reasons.

'You once told me that strength is terrible.'
'I would know.' she whispered. 'Our world isn't a pretty one. It sees mercy and kindness as weakness, I wish that weren't so. I wish I could live in a world where I could lay down my sword, but that world doesn't exist. I lost all of my parents because they choose to live like the world is a better place than it is. And he had died too, for the same reasons. Because he choose to believe that other people would see the necessity in his actions and put aside their hate for the greater good when he should have known better. 'I wanted to make that world.' she answered bitterly. 'Instead I became the monster.' 'Daenerys. You are not a monster.' He meant it, he'd known monsters, this place had been home to plenty of them and of course there was Ramsey Bolton. 'You were hurt and you got lost.' 'What about Cersei Lannister? She'd known lose too, was she just hurting?' 'Cersei was bitter and cold long before Joffery died. I'm sure losing her children didn't help but she never cared for the people.' He could see her in his mind, younger and beautiful, her long golden hair styled in curls, her green eyes full of scorn and disdain as she'd surveyed the Winterfell courtyard. People had looked at him like that all his life, but he had never seen anyone look at his highborn family that way. He thought of the similar way Sansa regarded the Targaryen forces when they had arrived and suppressed a shudder. 'You almost sound as if you admire her.' 'I learned a great deal from her.' 'How can I ever make up for the grief I've caused?' Jon thought about it for a while, he wasn't sure she would ever been seen as anything other than another mad Targaryen in Westeros but he couldn't say that to her right now. 'I don't think you should worry about it right now. You're pregnant Dany, something you didn't think would ever happen again. You need to focus on that, you need to get healthy for the babe.' He didn't mention his other concerns either, both of their mothers had died in childbirth and right now Daenerys could barely dress herself. He was genuinely concerned that she wouldn't have the strength deliver when the time came. He reached across the table and grabbed her hand in his, she flinched but she didn't pull away and he was thankful for that. 'Will you try? For the child.' He asked. Slowly she nodded. 'For the child.' They stayed another three days, Daenerys proved true to her word and attempted take care of herself, though her appetite was still poor she forced herself to eat without constant prompting and on the second day she asked him to help her braid her hair, though it was nothing like the elaborate styles she used to wear. Still he knew she had a long long way to go. She was distant and often forgot what she had been being moments before, she didn't engage in conversation, answering any questions he posed as briefly as possible. On the evening of the third day, after he had finished preparing everything for their departure the next morning they found themselves sitting quietly together by the fire, Daenerys slowly picking her way through her dinner. It was taking awhile but he was glad to see that she seemed determined to finish it. Jon had opened one of the journals he had found and had been engrossed in it for an hour or more when she broke the silence. 'What is this?' She asked. He looked up to see her looking at the meat he had given her. 'Squirrel.' He answered honestly, the closer to the wall they got the scarcer larger game had become, the army of the dead hadn't left much in its wake. Daenerys raised an eyebrow questioningly. 'A rodent, lives in the trees.' He clarified 'I don't think we had them in Essos.' Dany replied. 'There's not much to hunt up here. The dead didn't leave much. If we make it to the Free Folk without eating one of the horses I'd be surprised.' He wasn't looking forward to that, he could still remember the taste of raw horse. At least he'd never had to eat anything worse. 'I ate a horse heart once, raw.' Jon put his book down and focused on her. When they had traveled to Winterfell they had often spent the evenings talking about their pasts, they had shared memories both special and painful, she
had already told him about the ritual performed in Vaes Dothrak during her first pregnancy but if she wanted to tell him again he would listen.

'That was the first time I ever felt like I belonged. The way they looked at me, I – I never wanted that to end.' He reached over and squeezed her hand, he wasn't sure that he understood how she had felt in that tent half a world away, he had never truly felt like he belonged anywhere, not the Winterfell of his childhood certainly, nor here at Castle Black, he'd been on edge the whole time he'd lived with the Wildings and his return to Winterfell had been awkward at best. People had looked at him in awe, they had proclaimed him King but the weight of that responsibility and the nagging sense that he wasn't good enough had ensured he'd felt no joy in it. 'Everywhere I went, every city I lived people looked at me at that. Like I was a queen, a goddess even, and then I came here. All my life I dreamt of coming home, I knew better than to think the people were crying out for the return of the Dragons but I thought, I thought this was home.'

Jon watched her for a moment, still holding her hand, he found he had no words of comfort to say so he just sat with her, eventually she went back to eating and he picked his book up again, he had originally planned to give them to her, thinking that a connection to one of the better members of her family might help her. He had started one out of boredom and quickly changed his mind. While much of what Aemon had written was mundane and at times deathly dull, chronically his training at the citadel, he did speak in several early passages about his brothers, including the infamous Aerion, reciting news he had received from the future King Aegon the fifth. While Aemon had clearly loved Aegon there was little doubt that history's version of Aerion was not an exaggeration. Jon was certain that reading about one of their more unstable relatives would not do her any good. So for now at least he intended to keep the journals to himself.

In the morning they loaded up the last of their things and readied the horses, they ate a cold breakfast of dried fruit and hard cheese and Jon silently said goodbye to Castle Black one more time. The black gate had been left open to the North and the tunnel was slick with water as the wall continued to weep. Jon had a good idea of where Turmond had taken the Wildings, certainly not toward Hardhome but up the milk water toward the Frost Fangs where they had camped years before. But before they really set out he had one last thing he wanted to do. He slowed his horse and they approached the grove of weirwoods where, years before he had taken his vows. Despite everything that had happened between then and now he still felt a strange sense of calm in this place. There was magic here. In his youth he would have shrugged his shoulders and dismissed the notion, though he had held with the old gods all his life, and had believed the weirwoods to be sacred he hadn't given much thought to the idea of magic. Now of course he knew better.

He left his saddle and tethered his horse to one of the ironwoods nearby, Daenerys followed suit, he had no idea if she felt any connection to this place or if she was simply following him but she seemed to understand that it was something special for she walked forward almost tentatively. 'It's the only grove of weirwoods I know of beyond the God's Eye. I came here to take my vows.' He told her as he approached the first tree. He reached out and touched the bark as Bran had done in his dream. 'I was kneeling here in the snow when Ghost brought me the arm of one of the brothers who had disappeared with my uncle. We took their bodies back to the castle. Those were the first weights I ever saw.'

Daenerys didn't say anything to that, the weight of that war was not something anyone who had fought it was likely to forget. She moved closer to one of the other trees, one whose face was sad and mournful, eyes forever looking skyward as red sap trailed down its face like bloody tears. She seemed entranced by it, and he found he wasn't surprised when she sank to her knees and removed a glove so she could lay her hand against the craving. He watched her for a moment before something moved in the corner of his vision, something large and white, behind him the horses whined. He tensed for only a fraction of a second, he had suspected the wolf was close by, yesterday as he had secured the last of the supplies to the sled he had felt the subtle brush against his mind, he had known Ghost would find him at some point.
He circled around Daenerys and knelt at the edge of the grove extending a hand in his direction. Red eyes regarded him reproachfully, his ear had healed, his leg too by the looks of it and his coat was pure snowy white. He was relieved to see him in such good shape, though his missing ear saddened him, he supposed they were both scared.

'Hello old friend.'

Ghost tilted his head, Jon wondered if he was considering ripping his throat out for leaving him behind. It had been the right choice, he wanted to say. The South wasn't safe and the North was home. Perhaps Ghost understood that, it wouldn't have been the first time Jon suspected the wolf could read his mind, for he decided to forgive his old friend it seemed and with three large steps Ghost was there, pushing his muzzle against Jon's face. He buried his hands in his soft white fur and breathed a sigh of relief, a piece of himself snapping back into place. Warg; two halves of a whole. He pushed aside the sting of pain that followed that thought, ignoring the void that had been left behind by the loss of Rhaegal.

Jon stayed that way with his face buried in his companion's fur until he heard the crunch of snow behind him. Turning he saw that Daenerys had withdrawn her hand from the weirwood tree. She looked oddly peaceful kneeling there in the snow, a small sad smile on her lips. He wondered if she'd seen something, if the old gods had spoken to her. Whatever had happened he had the distinct impression that it was private and he had no intentions of pushing her about it. If she wanted to share she would when she was ready.

Slowly she turned toward him, noticing the direwolf for the first time. The smile slipped from her face, replaced with a look of grief so profound it physically hurt him to see it. Jon's companion had returned, hers never would.

Seemingly summoning something of her former inner strength she pulled herself to her feet and walked over to join them, her hand wondering out for Ghost to sniff. The great white wolf touched his nose to her hand and then pushed his head against it. She dutifully stretched him behind his full ear and he sat back on his haunches and watched her.

'Do you know where Tormund is boy?' Jon asked. Ghost titled his head again and then looked back the way he had come. Jon smiled up at Daenerys. 'It seems we have a guide.'
Their pace was slow and arduous, the melting snow made most of the terrain difficult, even dangerous to navigate by foot let alone by horse. Despite the thaw all around them Daenerys found herself chilled to the bone and unable to get warm. She had never worn so many layers in her life, in a strange way she found the unpleasant sting of the cold to be welcome, whenever she found herself slipping back into happier times, to the heat of the Essosi sun, she would concentrate on the pain the air brought to her.

They had been following Ghost for nearly a sensnight, living on wild birds and rabbits and a few other small creatures Jon had managed to hunt. At night they huddled together as close as they could, still bundled up from head to toe in their tent. Ghost had taken to sleeping in on the other side of her so she was wedged between the two. Though she found his presence saddening she was grateful for his warmth.

'You never told me how you came to have a direwolf.' She announced one afternoon as they continued their journey along the rushing river Jon had called the Milk Water. It was true, though Jon had told her that he had found the wolf as a pup along with his litter mates he had never gotten into the specifics.

'It...'

'What?' Jon frowned before he continued. 'It's where it all started I suppose, though I've never thought of it that way. There was a deserter from the Night's Watch, We went out to witness the execution, Robb and Bran and I. The man, he kept going on about the white walkers, but my father simply though he was...' Jon stopped himself.

'Mad?' Daenerys supplied. 'It's alright. You can say the word.'

'Aye, Lord Stark dismissed it as the ravings of a mad man. On the way back we came across a stag that had been killed by a wild animal. We followed the trail and came upon the body of a direwolf, she had died from an antler to the neck. Her five pups were still at her teats.' He seemed lost in the memory for a moment. 'Father wanted to kill them, thought it would be a mercy with their mother gone. But the look on Bran's face, I just couldn't let it happen. I told father that there were five pups, one for each of the Stark children. As the direwolf is the symbol of house Stark it had to be a sign from the gods.'

'Five, but weren't there six of you?'

'But I am not a Stark.' The reply rolled off his tongue with the ease of long practice. 'Father reluctantly agreed to let the children keep them, provided they look after them on their own. We were leaving the clearing when I heard something. I found Ghost by himself, he had wonder off or had been pushed aside. He was the runt of the litter back then, by the time I left for Castle Black two moons later he was the biggest of the lot.'

Dany could hear the slight hint of pride at those words. She understood the feeling all too well, she had once taken much pleasure in the size and strength of her children. Now they were nothing more than memory. 'And the others? Is Ghost the last one left?'

Jon shook his head. 'Nymeria hunts in the Riverlands with a giant pack of regular wolves, they stalked us as we made our way North. She was Arya's wolf but she was forced to push her away to save her from Joffery. The rest are all dead. Sansa's Lady died first, on orders from the King when Nymeria couldn't be found. Grey wind died with Robb a the Twins, Shaggy Dog was killed by the Umber's when they took Rickon hostage and Summer died North of the wall protecting Bran from wights.'
Daenerys felt suddenly sorry that she had asked. She wondered if either of them had a typic that didn't involve lose or pain. She looked around for the subject of their conversation but found him no where to be seen. When she asked Jon where he was, Jon simply shrugged and said he was hunting. His connection with the wolf was different than the one she had shared with the dragons, where as she was certain the dragons would appear if she needed them, Jon seemed to know where Ghost was and what he was doing. She hadn't questioned him on this yet. She wasn't sure she wanted to know the answer. The bond he shared with the snow white wolf was already hard enough to witness. Without warning Jon stopped his horse and raised a hand for her to do the same. Jon was listening to something she couldn't hear, his hand reached for his sword. Dany put a hand on her belly, instinctually thinking to protect the child.

For a moment nothing happened and then something jumped out from the tree line, something large and mottled brown, Jon's horse reared and he lost his hold on the reins, he threw himself from the saddle with the ease of a lifelong rider and hit the ground with a thud. Dany's horse startled but she was able to bring it under control as jon's went galloping off.

On the ground Jon lay still, she couldn't tell what he had hurt but she screamed at him to move just as she started to register what had come from the trees. A cat. A huge cat, with paws the size of plates, it's lips drawn back to reveal glistening white fangs. It stalked toward Jon and Daenerys found herself frozen in fear, that wasn't like her, she was better than that! She who had ridden dragons, she who had faced down armies and slave masters and khals. But this was different, she was different. Before she could berate herself any further a snarling ball of white raced across her vision and barrelled into the cat, they went tumbling, cat over wolf, snarling and snapping, teeth and claws slicing through the air. They broke apart and stalked low to the ground, circling each other, lips curls, fangs exposed, shoulders haunched ready to spring at each other again. Dany held her breathe.

An arrow sailed through the air, the cat roared as it pieced its hid, in fury the creature turned toward the source of the pain and another arrow embedded itself in its eye, the thing fell to the ground, blood seeping across the dirty snow.

Daenerys could feel her heart pounding in her chest, she looked toward the tree line for the source of the arrows but she saw nothing. She dropped to her feet from the horse and ran to Jon, still laying motionless in the snow. She could see blood now, fanning out from his head on the other side. He had hit a rock when he fell. She fell to her knees as another scream welled itself up inside her.

'Done this couldn't be happening. It couldn't be, not after everything that had happened to them already. He couldn't leave her like this! He couldn't...

'One day dear sister I will be King and you will be my Queen. We will take back what was taken from our family with fire and blood and we will dance as they burn.' Daenerys looked up into the eager face of her brother. She was twelve now and she had heard this a thousand times, she wondered again where the other Viserys had gone. Oh he had always spoke of going home, he could wax poetic about how they would make the Baratheon's and the Lannister's and the Stark's pay for what they had done but he could be kind too, sometimes he had told her nice stories about home, about their mother and their older brother and the beauty of the red keep. That brother had played games with her and had held her when she was scared. Somewhere along the way he'd gotten lost.

Lately he had started looking at her differently, sometimes he touched her in ways she didn't like, the way men touched women in the alley ways they sometimes had to resort to sleeping in. He talked about marrying her, she knew what that entailed, Viserys had been blunt and vulgar about the whole thing when she had asked. She didn't want to do that with anyone but certainly not with him. He had hit her when she told him so, 'It's what Dragons do.' He had told her, maybe it wouldn't have scared her so if he was nice to her but he wasn't.

'Did you hear me sweet sister.' The tone was no longer pleasant. Don't wake the dragon

'Yes brother.' She whispered, dropping her head in submission. Make him happy and he'd leave her alone, for now at least. She wondered if doing that thing would make him happy, if he'd be nice to her then.
'They destroyed our family, and we'll make them pay, that filthy usurper and his dog.'

'His dog?' Daenerys frowned, she knew this speech, knew of whom he spoke but something wasn't right.

Viserys scowled. 'Yes! His dog, Ned Stark, fucking Northern Barbarian, they led the rebellion, because Rhaegar took his cunt sister.' Viserys was quickly losing his temper now, thankfully it seemed to be directed at people he could see only in his mind and not at her.

Still something pricked. 'Why did he take her?'

Stupid, she shouldn't get his attention.

'How should I know! She was beautiful, they say. And he was a man and a prince, he could take what he wanted. When I am king I will make it law, I will take whatever women I want, just as Aegon the fourth did.' He turned toward her and grabbed her arm as his other hand came to grab her breast. 'And I'll take you and you'll give me sons, we'll name the first one for our brother.'

Daenerys felt tears in her eyes but she fought to hold them back. It wasn't right, Rhaegar didn't take Lyanna Stark. 'He married her.'

Viserys' scowl deepened. 'What are you talking about.' His finger pinched the delicate skin on her nipple and she winced.

'Rhaegar, he didn't hurt Lyanna, he loved her.'

'Loved her?' He twisted his fingers. 'A Northern whore? Why the fuck would you think that? Have you gone soft in the head?' He tilted his head to the side and observed her. 'No matter, I don't need your mind anyway.'

'They had a child, a boy. A king. He was supposed to be king, not you, never you!' She screamed the last as the memories returned to her, she wasn't twelve, she wasn't in Essos, Viserys was dead, she'd watched him die.

Someone pushed something warm into her hands, she gripped it like her life depended on it and looked up to see an old woman staring at her. 'Drink child' She said softly. Dany looked down to see a mug of some steaming liquid in her hand. She looked back at the woman. Suspicion must have shown on her face. 'Tea, it's just tea, drink it will warm you up and calm your nerves.'

'Where am I? Where's Jon?' Is Jon alive? She couldn't ask that one. She looked around her, was she in a cave? A rather large cave, torches glowed here and there giving enough light for her to register the rock walls and floor. She was sitting on a pallet of blankets, there were other woman mulling around. Wildings she imagined by the look of them. But she didn't recognize any of them from Winterfell.

'The crow will be fine, hit his head good, but that one's toucher than he looks,' Crow? Jon hadn't been dressed as a crow so this woman had to have known him before. 'Were you at Winterfell?' She asked

the woman frowned. 'Never left the North child. But we know the Crow and his wolf too, we owe him our lives. Rest easy girl, we'll take care of him. You should take care of yourself and that babe.' She pointed to Dany's midsection.

How...?'

'If there's one thing I do know, it's birthing babes, You've got the look, I could see it in you as soon as they brought you here.' Her hard-weathered face turned soft as she looked at her. 'You weren't with us when they brought you in. I know all about that too, the places we go when it hurts too much to be here.' She frowned then. 'It wasn't the crow was it? Owe him or not we'll skin him if it was.'

Daenerys started, 'No! No, not him, he didn't hurt me.' I hurt myself, she thought, but she didn't say it.

The woman seemed satisfied. 'Drink you tea girl, and get some sleep. The Crow is in good hands.'

The woman turned and pulled a sheet across, creating privacy between Dany and the rest of the cave. She sniffed the tea, it smelled of berries and mint. She sipped it cautiously, it did warm her and she hadn't realized she was so damn cold. She drank it down and curled up on the pallet dragging the furs over herself. She didn't plan to sleep, not when she didn't know where she was or how Jon was doing or who these people were. But sleep claimed her anyway.
Daenerys woke to confusion, for a moment she couldn't remember where she was or what had happened, when she began to put the pieces together she felt panic start to raise up in her, Jon had been injured and she had retreated back into her mind, why? Why did that keep happening to her? She could have been killed, or taken hostage while she was busy living in the past. Truth be told she wasn't entirely convinced she hadn't been kidnapped, she had no idea where she was or who these people were and she had seen nothing of Jon.

The Dragon Queen reared up inside her, ready to scorch her enemies and it was with an air of superiority that she stepped from her makeshift room and out into the main area of the cave. All around her woman worked and laughed and tended to children. Once the first one noticed her a hush seemed to fall over the group like a wave, one of the women got up from her work preparing food and came over to her, she was a little older than Daenerys, a plain looking woman with dull brown hair and big eyes, actually as far as she could tell many of the women shared a similar look, family? A rather large one, and as far as Daenerys could tell with the exception of a few young boys there were no men at all.

'Hello.' The woman greeted. 'Someone's gone to fetch Merta, she's the one who gave you the tea last night. Said we should get her when you woke up. Are you alright? Hungry?'

'I -' she was hungry truth be told, 'I want to see the man that was with me yesterday.' Food could wait.

The woman turned to look at the others, as though seeking advice, she turned back to Dany again. 'Merta will see to it, the Crow's still sleepin' far's I know. But I can offer you some broth and bread.' Daenerys composed herself, lifting her chin up in her most regal pose. 'Do you know who I am? I am Queen -'

'We ain't got no Queens, and no kings either.' Daenerys turned her head toward the new voice and found Merta, the older woman from the night before staring at her from the entrance to a tunnel on the far side of the cavern. 'We are free folk.'

'The free folk had a king once.' Daenerys shot back, pleased somewhat that she remembered this. 'We never followed Mance and those that did choose to. Titles mean nothing North of the Wall.'

Dany suddenly felt flustered herself, she wasn't used to dealing with people without the protection of her titles, even among the Dothraki she had been held apart, above. Jon had told her back at Castle Black that she was still Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, but who was that if not a queen?

'I want to see Jon.' She expected some sort of resistance but she didn't get it. The woman simply nodded and gestured for her to follow. She picked her way through the crowd, women turning to watch her as she walked by, she supposed up here they probably didn't see many outsiders.

'Who are you people?' She asked, it sounded rude to her own ears but she felt off kilter and strange here.

'Crastor's women.' The woman replied as though that cleared things up.

'What is a Crastor?' She asked

Merta snorted. 'Good question. Near as I can figure a demon disguised as a man...barely.'

Daenerys raised an eyebrow at her as they made their way down a narrow tunnel, further into a system of caves, the older woman held a torch to light the way.

Merta sighed. 'Crastor was born to a woman of the free folk and a crow for a father. Neither side wanted to claim him, he had a keep not far north of the wall and he ran information for both sides. We were his wives, when we gave him daughters he made them his wives too and on and on it went.'
Daenerys recoiled slightly in disgust. It was true house Targaryen was no stranger to incest, it was true she held no qualms about sleeping with her nephew but what this woman described was something else. 'And if you gave him sons?' She asked, thinking of her own boy, gone before he drew breath.

Merta gave her a hard look. 'offerings for the cold gods.' She said, a shiver ran down Dany's back. Merta said no more, though Daenerys couldn't blame her, she wondered how many sons Merta had lost and how many daughters she had watched bare children for their own father. She wanted to inquire about the fate of this monster but she got the feeling Merta wouldn't appreciate more questions.

The tunnel uneventually opened up into another cavern, smaller and warmer than the first. They were deeper underground now Daenerys suspected. There were more makeshift rooms here though most appeared to be empty. 'This is where we keep our sick and injured.' Merta explained. 'Your crow is here.' She said, drawing the curtain back on another room, candles lit the small space and she could see that Jon was in fact asleep, A bandage wrapped around his head.

'Will he be alright?' She asked

'Aye, I expect so, took a good smack to the head, nasty cut. We've cleaned and stitched it. Right now we're making sure he doesn't sleep too long. You can stay if you want, someone can bring you something to eat.'

Daenerys sat down on the edge of the bed, and stared at Jon's face, he looked peaceful enough she supposed but she felt agitated seeing him this way, it took her a moment to understand why: Drogo. She forced herself to push it aside, fearful that she would find herself reliving his death in the red waste. Murder, not death, she had murdered him, her sun and stars. His was the first life she had taken. She swallowed thickly and tried to focus. What had Merta asked? Food. 'Yes, thank you I am hungry.'

Merta nodded and turned to leave but before she did something else occurred to Daenerys. 'You said you owe Jon, how?'

Merta turned back to look at her, that hard look had returned. 'Crastor played friends to the watch, they often sought us out for food and shelter, One day a group of them came down from the fist, masqueraded they'd been by the cold ones. Those that were left started fighting with each other and with Crastor, I can't say as I was sad when the old pig took an axe to the head but life got no better for us, the mutineers were worse than he'd ever been. Your crow led a group up from Castle Black to kill the fuckers, he offered us protection but the North is our home.'

'You survived the white walkers?' How? How could anything survive that?

Merta's look was even colder now. 'We are their mothers child.' And with that she was gone, the light of her torch disappearing down the tunnel. Daenerys watched as it flickered to nothing, sacrifices. Merta had said their sons and been offerings to the gods, Dany had assumed they'd been killed but like many things in her life it seemed the truth was worse.

She turned her attention back to Jon, someone had removed his furs and leathers and she could make out the even rise and fall of his chest through his think undershirt. She reached out and took his hand in hers, aside from sleep and a few rare moments besides they had avoided most contact that wasn't necessary but at that moment she didn't care about the awkward state of their relationship, she was stranded in a strange place with stranger people and he was her life line. It rankled her that she was so dependant on him, she had been... been what exactly? A princess who relied on her abusive older brother, a terrified bride who did as her husband demanded in all things, a khaleesi with bloodriders and handmaids, a queen with an army of soldiers and another of servants, she had never been on her own, she had no idea how to survive without people to take care of her more basic needs. Despite having been sent into exile at her very birth she had managed to avoid much of the hardship that befell the people she had sought to rule, oh she had gone to bed hungry as a child, and she had slept on the streets but she had never cooked or cleaned, she had never hunted or mended clothes, she had no idea how to start a fire or pitch a tent. If Jon died she would be at the mercy of these women and she doubted they would take to kindly to her ineptitude.

'Please don't die on me.' She whispered to him. 'If you die I don't know what will happen to me, or
She held a hand to her midsection, she still couldn't say it out loud, it hurt too much to do so.

'I'm not plannin' on it.' He muttered and she felt herself jump in fright, his accent was thick and slurred with sleep but it was the most pleasant thing she had heard in ages.

She felt her bottom lip tremble but she refused to give into tears. 'I thought you were sleeping.'

Jon opened his eyes and stared at the ceiling, then squeezed them shut again. 'I was. But I heard you talking to one of the women.'

'Does it hurt?'

'I've had worse.' Her eyes automatically wandered to the crescent shaped scar on his chest that she could see poking out of his shirt. 'How are you?' He asked her, he kept his voice low and she did the same suspecting that the noise wasn't doing him any favours.

'I'm fine, they brought me here and put me to bed. It's you I'm worried about.'

'Are you sure? One of the women mentioned that you were quite out of it when they found us.' Jon squeezed her hand in support when he said it.

'I – I'm not sure I'm ready to talk about it.' It took a great deal of effort to refrain from snapping, she wasn't used to feeling vulnerable anymore, queens don't have to answer uncomfortable questions about themselves.

'Fair enough.' He whispered.

'Do you wish to sleep again?' She asked, he seemed to be fading out as he spoke.

'No. I should try to stay awake, perhaps you could talk to me.' He suggested, Daenerys eyed him warily. 'You don't have to talk about anything serious, you must know a story or two from Essos, come now, there was a time you loved the sound of your own voice.' She glared at him and withdrew her hand. 'It was a joke Dany'

Daenerys sighed, pushing away the hard feeling that had curled itself around her gut, she didn't want to fight, but she felt on edge here. 'Fine a story.' She said reaching back to her childhood and the servants who had once told her bedtime stories. She felt foolish at first, reciting them to a grown man as she would a child but he had done the same for her as they made their way through the Riverlands, she imagined he had felt foolish at the time as well but his voice became a tether for her, anchoring her to the real world as she struggled to find her way back. She could do the same for him. Later, after he had fallen asleep again and she had eaten the bread and broth one of the women had delivered to her she wondered back toward what seemed to be the main area.

The women were still working as they had been earlier, One of them, not the one who had spoken to her earlier but another with very similar features was weaving something on a loom and Daenerys found herself entranced by the motion.

'Would you like to try?' She asked when she noticed she had an audience.

Dany started. 'No, no, I wouldn't wish to mess anything up on you, I haven't much experience with such things,'

'It's calming. I like to do it when bad memories creep up on me.' She held the shuttle out to Dany who reluctantly took it in her hand and sat next to the woman. 'I'm Polly.' She said with a smile. '

'Daenerys.' Polly nodded and started instructing her on how to weave, it wasn't difficult, but it was oddly soothing, Dany had never learned any of the womanly arts, having spent most of her childhood running from assassins, had she been raised in the Red Keep she would have been taught to embroider and sew, to sing and play the high harp, perhaps her brother Rhaegar would have been the one to teach her. It was an odd thought now; what that life would have looked like, She and Jon would have been raised together. It was a bittersweet dream, one it didn't do to dwell on. Instead she focused on the thread, running back and forth across the loom.
Jon woke to find Daenerys curled into his side. His head pounded with the force of his blood but it was less the before. When he repositioned himself she stirred and turned to face him, he was suddenly caught by his desire to reach out and touch her, to kiss her lips. In the days and weeks after Sam had told him the truth he had withdrawn from her, conflicted by his feelings for her and generally overwhelmed by a revelation that had destroyed his very sense of identity. In all honestly he wasn't entirely sure he'd dealt with the second part yet. But the first part was becoming easier as she slowly came back to herself. He had been raised to believe that such relationships were not acceptable unless they were politically necessary, it was an affront to the Gods, new and old. In his youth Jon had believed in the old Gods, he had preyed before the heart tree and tried to hold with the teachings his father had instructed him in. But even than he had had his doubts, he suddenly remembered Sam asking to take his vows before the weirwoods because the Seven had never answered his preyer. The old gods had never answered his, or when they had the price had been so steep he wished they hadn't. Unlike Sam however, Jon didn't believe he would find better favour with the Seven, he briefly wondered what the faith of R’hllor believed in regards to incest but he dismissed the thought as quickly as it had come. He was done with the gods and the religions of men.

He watched Daenerys sleeping beside him, her brow furrowed in the mist of a dream he imagined, she had looked peaceful a moment ago but now something unpleasant seemed to be marring her sleep. He reached out gently to smooth the wrinkle from her forehead and then ran his hand through her loose silver hair. The motion was enough to wake her, she pulled back sharply, a look of confusion and fear passing over her features. He pulled his hand back as she tried to school her expression to something neutral. 'Dany, it's just me.' He whispered to her softly. 'I – I'm sorry, I was having a nightmare, you startled me.' She explained, but she slid further away and seemed to close herself off, something unreadable settling behind her eyes, yet it was a look he had seen before, he just couldn't figure out where. 'I apologize.' he replied, she shook her head, though to dismiss his apology or to shake away some remnant of whatever it was that was bothering her he didn't know. She took a deep breath and climbed to her feet. 'I'm going to get some fresh air, maybe check on the horses.' She informed him and left before he could form a reply.

When Merta came with food to break his fast he attempted to sit up fully, it proved to be a bad idea as what little he had managed to eat came back up shortly after. The old woman made a tutting sound and shook her head at him. 'I told you it was too early.' she scolded. 'I can't stay laying down here forever. We need to move.'

Where are you headed?' Merta asked as she fixed the furs over his body and called for one of the girls to come clean up.

'We need to catch up with Tormund and the rest of the Free Folk, you're welcome to come with us you know.'

'You offered us that once before, to come with you. And I'll tell you the same thing I told you the last
time. We'll survive on our own. We survived Crastor and Carl and his lot, we survived the Night King and his army and we survived the winter. What can the Free Folk give us that we don't have here?” She asked, lifting her hands in a gesture meant to encompass the series of caves they seemed to call home.

Jon nodded and sighed. "We still have to leave and soon. I don't know how long it will take to find them and I don't want Daenerys to give birth in the middle of the North with only me to help her. 'You'll be good as new in a few days, plenty of time to leave.' She regarded him for a moment, with her hands on her hips and her expression shrewd and unrelenting she reminded him uncomfortably of Catelyn Stark. 'Is the babe yours?' she asked.

'Aye.'

'She's been hurt. She says it wasn't you. Was she telling the truth?' Jon got the feeling he'd be gelded and strung up for the bears if it had been.

'What happened is complicated, but no, I didn't hurt her. She's had a hard life.' Merta scoffed at that. 'Is there another kind?' She asked. Jon had no answer for that and Merta seemed to have run out of things to say, she checked his forehead and declared that he did not have a fever then she left him to rest some more. He fell into a fitful sleep not long after.

When he woke next Dany had returned. She was sitting in a chair in what Jon supposed passed for a corner, when he stirred she looked up at him, for a moment he could see the Queen he had bent the knee to on the way back from Eastwatch, posed and regal and heartbroken, then the moment passed and heartbroken was the only quality she seemed to retain.

'Are you all right?' He asked.

She fidgeted with the hem of her sleeve, six month ago he couldn't imagine the Dragon Queen having a nervous habit. 'I had... an uncomfortable dream. It stirred up memories I would rather forget. You caught me off guard when you touched me.'

'May I ask what it was you dreamt about?'

Daenerys tilted her head and regarded him seriously. 'You may ask, but I don't wish to answer, not now at any rate.' The answer was honest and he respected her privacy so he simply nodded, the pressure in his head seemed to have gotten better so he attempted to sit up again, Dany came over and rearranged the pillows so he could recline against them. When she pulled back he caught sight of the swell of her belly against the tunic she wore. It had grown since last he saw it, he wanted to reach out and lay his hand against his child but he held back afraid that she would react as she had earlier. She seemed to understand where his thoughts were though and she reached out and took his hand, placing it flat against her belly.

'Dany...'

'Shush, give it a moment.' She told him, so he waited. At first he wasn't sure he had felt it, he had never felt a babe kick before, he had known few pregnant women in his life who would have permitted him to feel such a thing. The second time, however he was sure. It was a gentle feeling, a barely there press against the palm of his hand. He felt something indescribable well up inside him, this was his child, his son or daughter, growing there inside this woman that he loved more than his own life. It was a situation he had never expected to find himself in and although the circumstances weren't ideal, at that moment, as he felt life stir within Dany he wouldn't have changed anything about the past.

Daenerys smiled at him. 'It will get stronger, By the end you should be able to see it as well as feel it.' Jon glanced up at her face and was surprised not to see the shadows of grief upon her face, usually, on the few occasions they had spoken about children she had seemed distant and haunted by the death of her son. It was a pain Jon couldn't relate to, he had never had the opportunity to love anything as much as she had loved her child.

'How are you, other than your dream? You seem to be doing better.' He said as he reluctantly removed his hand, he could have stayed the way, waiting for the child to move again all day but he didn't want to push his luck with her.

Daenerys seemed to truly consider her answer, she moved around the bed and sat down next to him. 'I want to say that I feel like myself right now, but I don't know if that is true. For so long I was a
queen, it had become part of my identity. I don't really know who I am now, but I do know that it doesn't hurt as much as it did at first.

'I'm glad that it's getting easier for you. And I do understand how you feel about not knowing who you are.' He replied, Dany grimaced.

'I know, I should have been more understanding when you told me about your parents. I reacted badly.'

'I think we both reacted badly.' Jon agreed. 'But it's done and we have to move on, we have time to work it all out, without lords and advisors and family breathing down our necks.'

Daenerys nodded. 'I'm sorry that things became so strained between you and the Starks, I know that you love them dearly.'

Jon closed his eyes and tried to collect his thoughts. 'Growing up, all I wanted to be was a Stark, it wasn't just about the name, I never felt like I was really a part of the family. I was always outside looking in. Even father and Robb treated me differently on occasion, Arya was perhaps the only one who never treated me as anything other than her brother. I think...' He stopped for a moment, unsure if he wanted to continue, then: 'I think I loved the idea of them more than they loved me. I think I was so desperate to belong that I was willing to overlook things I shouldn't have.' Like Sansa's desire for a crown. 'In the end, maybe family isn't defined by blood.'

'No, and yet we all still desire to be loved by those that share our blood.' She reached out and took his hand in her much smaller one. 'Viserys was not a good brother, at least not when we were older and I have little memory of him when we were younger. I'm afraid I don't know much about family.'

'You were married once...' He started. The response was subtle but noticeable, she flinched just a bit, her fingers spasming gently where she held his hand. She had talked about her marriage to Khal Drogo on the boat to Winterfell as they shared their evening meals together, she had given him the impression that it had been a happy affair despite it having been arranged by her brother for an army, she certainly seemed fond enough of the Dothraki, but something in her demeanour now told something different. He wondered if he was reading more into it than he should, perhaps it was just the unpleasant end that caused her reaction. 'What is it?'

She shook her head. 'Nothing.' She answered, her face taking on that neutral look again. 'I'm just not sure that relationship is what I'd like to emulate, different time, different place.'

Jon nodded. 'Of course.' he sighed, he wanted to draw her closer to him but he feared unsettling her again. 'We are family, in more ways than one. We will find out own path.' He assured her.

She gave him a small smile, one corner of her lips turning up just a bit. 'Yes.' She agreed. 'We will.'
chapter ten

Chapter Notes

One brief thing, the Thenn's I'm using are the ones described in the books, not the self scarred cannibals in the show. The thenns were highly organized and more like the southerns than the rest of the wildings. Also for the sake of this story I've used the book version of Jon and Ygritte's relationship, the show version is far more romantic and doesn't suit my needs. When I first started this story it was a response to the horrible ending I saw coming and it was supposed to be about Jon helping Dany recover from the trauma of season 8. In writing it I've realized that 1) Dany has a lot of baggage to deal with and you can't tackle some of it without diving into the rest of it. And that 2) Jon also has a lot he needs to deal with, the show didn't do a poor job of dealing with the emotional fallout of everything that happened to these characters, in the end they did no job at all and just left it. And that just isn't fair.

Over the next few days Jon continued to recover while Daenerys split her time between keeping him company and spending time with the women, apparently one of them was teaching her to weave, it was this odd bit of information, delivered to him by Olma, the girl that had helped him kill Carl, that finally forced him out of bed, he wanted to see the great Dragon Queen working a loom. He watched her from the entrance to the tunnel that led back to his room, her movements were slow but the girl teaching her was patient and she seemed mesmerized by it. He remembered Lord Stark putting a practice sword in his hands after a particularly angry outburst on his part, he'd been vicious about something Theon had done though for the life of him he couldn't recall what it was exactly, His fath – uncle, had taken him out to the tilt yard, handed him the sword and pointed him toward a practice dummy. 'It's best to do something with that anger. Put it to good use, but don't take it out on anyone.' He'd said. He had used the piece of advice time and time again, it was probably one of the reasons he had become better than Robb, if he was angry, or sad, or lonely he had returned to the tilt yard, often punishing that practice dummy until the wee hours of the morning. He supposed the principle was the same here, Dany needed something to focus on, some task to occupy her hands and her head.

'You look better crow.' Merta greeted and she came to stand near him, 'We need to get moving soon.' He told her, now that he was up he felt the urge to move on though he wasn't sure that sitting a horse for hours at a time would do him any good. 'The ones you're looking for headed up toward the Thenn Valley about a moon past.' She informed him. 'How do you know?' He asked, as the eldest she seemed to be in charge, the girls looked to her for most things he had noticed. 'Can't stop 'em. Wouldn't want to, Crastor used us, the crows used us too, we need some power over our own lives and that means making choices to please ourselves.' She gave him a curious look then. 'One of the girls left with a Crow years passed, Had herself a boy child and disappeared before he could be offered up. Do you know what happened to her?' Jon nodded, thinking of his friend and the unexpected happiness he had found in the midst of so
Much destruction. 'Gilly. She's still with the man she left with, they were expecting another child when I saw them last.' He supposed the child had been born by now, but it would most likely be years before Jon heard anything about it, he felt a pang of sadness at the thought. But life moved on and this was what was right for them right now, Daenerys and the child she carried were his family, his priority.

'Is she happy?' Merta asked, it took Jon a moment to remember she was talking about Gilly. 'Aye, she's happy, Sam is a good man.'

'Good, that's good.' Merta replied though it seemed her mind was elsewhere. She wondered off shortly after, leaving Jon to watch Dany in silence.

Do you like the loom?' He asked her later as they sat eating a meal of meat of some kind of stewed root in the room that Jon had been given. After his brief walk through the caves that morning he had returned exhausted and slept most of the afternoon. Daenerys looked thoughtful about the question, 'It's relaxing, I doubt I'll ever be very good at it though.' She gave him a curious look. 'Do you expect me to learn to tend house? Cook and mend your clothes?'

Jon nearly choked on a piece of root. 'Why in the hells would you think that?' He asked between coughs.

Daenerys sighed. 'People always expect something, Men always expect...' 'Dany, I don't expect anything from you. I know that's not who you are.' He hesitated for a moment and she prompted him to go on. 'They say my mother wasn't much for such things either, she preferred ridding to sewing and I over heard Uncle Benjen say once that she swore like a soldier.' Daenerys smiled at little at that. 'I'm sorry I reacted badly when you told me about your parents. I shouldn't have been worried about the throne.' She sighed. 'I should have helped you deal with it.' Jon looked down at the stew still left in his bowl as he tried to gather his thoughts, he couldn't deny that her reaction had hurt, though it was understandable in hindsight. 'There was so much going on, for both of us. I'm sorry that I was too lost in my own problems to realize that you were falling apart. I'm sorry that I couldn't give you what you needed.' He told her instead. That was true too, he wished the timing had been better, if he hadn't been struggling with his identity and his relation to her he may have been able to keep her from the edge of reason, perhaps they'd be in Kings Landing now and she would be Queen.

'I suppose we are both sorry for many things.' She whispered. 'Do you think there's still hope...for us?' He knew she must hate to ask, she hated to sound vulnerable, 'I've never begged for anything before, but I'm begging now'

'Of course I think there's hope.' He assured her. 'I love you and you will always be my queen, even if you don't have a kingdom to rule.' He reached out and took her hand, she flinched slightly, it was subtle but he noticed it, he stared at her silently for a moment as if to ask, but she shook her head gently and squeezed his hand. 'I needed time before, to come to terms with our relation to each other and what that meant to me.'

'I'm not....' She took a deep breath. 'I'm not ready now.'

'I know.' He assured her.

'There's something...' She paused again, struggling, it seemed to find the words. Jon waited patiently, whatever it was she had to say, he wanted to hear. 'After Kings Landing, I was lost. In my own head.' She clarified. 'I was somewhere else most of the time, in the past, in a better time. It was an escape.' She shifted on the bed and stared passed him at the flames of the torch that provided most of the light in the room. 'Sometimes I still get lost.'

'Is that what happened when I was injured?' He asked

She nodded. 'Yes, but it wasn't pleasant, That's one of the reasons I started fighting to stay present. At first the memories or whatever they are, they were pleasant, but over time it changed, I started remembering the bad things.' She took a shuddering breath. 'There have been a lot of bad things, I
thought I had dealt with them, but now..' "You can tell me anything." He reminded her gently, he wanted her to. He hadn't been there for her when she needed him, he wanted to be there now.

'I'm not sure I'm ready to talk about it. But being here with these women, hearing their stories? I thought I'd dealt with my past.' She said again. Jon closed his eyes and nodded. He remembered the first time they had met, in the throne room of Dragonstone. It seemed like another life, another woman. She had been so confident so..arrogant, how he had envied her for her poise, she looked regal, like she belonged on a throne while he stumbled along completely out of his depth. Now he understood that there was a girl under that regal mask, and he was honoured that she felt safe enough with him to take it off. He remembered how she had listed all the things that she had endured, like they couldn't touch her anymore.

He wasn't sure he should ask the question that had been bothering him for days now but he pushed forward anyway. 'It was your husband wasn't it?'

She flinched again and withdrew her hand. That was answer enough, Jon felt something cold and powerful building inside him, he remembered the stories she had told him as they journeyed North to Winterfell, how she had professed that she had loved her husband before his death, how he had given her the strength to become what she was. They had bonded over that, both having loved and lost, both having been involved in the deaths of those people closest to them. Now a different picture emerged and he couldn't seem to reconcile those two versions with each other.

'I loved him.' She whispered, her voice suddenly harsh and wobbly, he realized she had tears in her eyes. 'I learned to love him. And I didn't think about the beginning anymore, except that it happened. Now, when I close my eyes, when I sleep, I remember what it felt like, what I felt like. And I can't make the two fit together. Was I a fool? How do you learn to love the man who...' She stopped and drew a deep breath.

'We accept strange things to survive.' He assured her. When he thought about it, really thought, he knew that he too had forgiven things he shouldn't have, had gone out of his way to please people because they offered the promise of something he'd so rarely experienced; Love. In the end those people had never given him what he'd needed, it had always been tainted or weak. 'You can talk to me about anything, I hope you know that.'

Daenerys smiled, but it was pained. 'I do know that and I thank you.' She seemed to pull herself together, fitting the mask back on even if it was cracked and chipped now and not as regal as it had been. She gathered up the dishes and moved them off to a small table. 'Are you tired?'

Jon shook his head. 'Benefit of sleeping all afternoon.'

'perhaps we could take a short walk.' She suggested and he readily agreed. He was started to feel a little trapped. Together they ventured out of the caves and over to where their horses were being kept, fortunately one of the women was able to catch Jon's after it had run off. Jon watched as Dany patted the white mare with the same gentleness she had once used with her dragons. He felt an describable feeling of loss then, not just for the three magnificent breasts but for what they represented in the world. It seemed so cruel for dragons to be born again to the world only to be snuffed out a few short years later. What was the point? Was it all meaningless? Just a series of random events that in the end served no purpose. Daenerys had believed in destiny once, she had as much as told him so, she believed it was her fate to sit the iron throne. Jon had never truly believed in such things because he had been raised a bastard with little hope for the future, he had certainly never given any thought to the idea that he had a destiny. But when he had meant Dany, when he had seen the Dragons he had wanted to believe. The Dragons had moved something in him, perhaps it was his Targaryen blood, but he had felt as though he were in the presence of something powerful and mystical. And then in the span of a year they were all gone. It didn't seem right. But then so much of the last few years didn't seem right.

When Daenerys was done with her horse they returned to sleep, Jon had assured her that she didn't have to stay the night with he, worried that his presence may make things worse for her but she insisted that it was quite the opposite. 'I feel safe with you.' She told him with a slight smile. Those were perhaps the sweetest words he'd ever heard.
chapter eleven

So like Jon's relationship with Ygritte (which I hope to get into later) Dany's relationship with Drogo is more based on the books, both were equally messed up as far as I'm concerned though the flavour is a little different. Also if Jon seems a little deeper, again Books. People do think in the books, Seems that got cut out of the show at some point.

'Do you know where we're going?' Daenerys asked early on the third day out from Crastor's women. Ahead of them Ghost trotted happily through the snow, here and there moss and dirt were beginning to appear around rocks and streams, though the woods to the south was still piled deep in a blanket of white. She had never really given much thought to the nature of snow before, even as they had ventured to Winterfell so many moons before. It had never occured to her that snow in the forest would stay longer than snow in the open, though Jon had laughed at her when she had voiced that observation. She also hadn't been aware of the difference between wet snow and dry snow, she was now and she had quickly decided that wet snow was a special kind of hell.

'He knows were we're going.' Jon told her in all seriousness, nodded his head in Ghost's direction. Daenerys scowled. It was true she had trusted her dragons explicitly to know where to go and how to find her, but that bond was her's, trusting Jon's direwolf was an entirely different matter. Jon however took that opportunity to give her a slight smile and she glared at him. 'You do know where we're going.' She deduced.

'Aye, I know. Merta told me before we left. Still I would trust Ghost's instincts on the matter. This is his land and he's very intelligent.' She didn't doubt that, she had seen the keen intellect in those ruby red eyes and she knew Jon's bond with the wolf was something more than just master and pet, not that she would dare to call Ghost a pet anymore than she would have called Drogon a pet. The thought gave her a sharp pang of grief through her heart, she wondered if she would ever be able to think on them without feeling such pain. A part of her doubted it. To cover the hurt she looked over at Jon expectantly until he continued. 'The Valley of the Thenns.' he explained.

'That means nothing to me.' She retorted, he was being deliberately difficult with her now, something she had noticed he did from time to time, perhaps in an effort to draw her out more, goading her into conversation with him. It was such a strange turn of events that she almost snorted, Jon Snow who didn't seem to like stringing two sentences together unless he was forced to was trying to get her to talk.

'The thenns are one of the clans of Free Folk, vicious fighters but more disciplined and organized than the others, they mined copper and tin, farmed the land and built stone buildings. They also had hereditary rule. I can't say as there's more than a hand full of them left but I imagine Tormund is heading there because it will provide solid shelter for everyone until they get back on their feet. Once the spring storms pass and the animals return I expect most will wander again.'

'Most but not all?'

'Not all, the Free Folk did have villages, not all of them were nomadic. What's left now are mostly women and young children, some of them may not want to wander the North scavenging for food and fighting the elements.'

Daenerys considered him for a moment before she asked her next question. 'And what of us?' Jon raised an eyebrow at that. 'Will we stay in this valley or are we going to wonder all over the North?' 'That's up to you.' He told her. 'What do you want?' He asked.
'I wanted the Iron Throne.' The words were out before she could think about them or temper the bite in her tone. She expected some sort of reaction from him for that but not the one she got. He smiled at her, actually smiled. 'That's funny?' She asked.

'Funny? No, but it's the first time in a long time you've sounded like the woman I met back on Dragonstone.' he sighed, all traces of the smile gone as quickly as it had appeared. 'The throne hasn't gone anywhere, it's waiting for you. Do you really think you could handle ruling the Seven Kingdoms right now?'

Daenerys choose not the reply to that but they both knew the answer. Last night she had awoke crying, her body shaking and dranched in sweat. The dream had unnerved her enough that she hadn't slept for the rest of the night and she had been unable to bear the feel of Jon's hand on her back as he tried to sooth her fears. She had thought for a brief moment in time, before they and found the women, that she had been recovering, now though other ghosts had come to call, Viserys and Drogo haunted her when she closed her eyes, past horrifies undoing the things she thought she understood about her own life. In her minds eyes Drogo had been her protector and her muse in a way, she had learned from him what it was to lead and he had been the first person who had ever stood up to Viserys for her. She had felt safe with him, or so she had thought.

Now the picture had morphed into something else. Drogo's face twisted in pleasure as she cried, The feel of his rough hands on her hips, the pain between her thighs. She tried in vain to recall the happier times but her mind returned her to those early days over and over again. She had known logically that he had raped her, repeatedly. She had even made mention of it the first time she and Jon had spoken, she had listed it like some kind of accomplishment, 'look what I've survived, see how strong I am?' She felt like a fool now, faced with the truth that she had never honestly dealt with those things. She had pushed them as far back in her mind as she could.

If I look back I am lost How right she had been.

That night as they sat by a fire Jon handed her a rabbit he had killed and a knife. He had attempted this before but she had refused, part of her shocked that he expected her to do something like skin an animal. He had sighed and told her she needed to know in case something happened to him, still she hadn't taken to body and he had relented, apparently though he wasn't giving up that easily.

'I'm not doing it.' She said now, looking down at the knife. 'Please, Daenerys. If anything happens to me I need to know that you can survive long enough to get to Tormund.' He pleaded with her, his voice laden with some emotion she found it hard to label: fear, love, determination?

With a huff she reached out and took the carcass and the knife, if only so he would stop talking about the idea of something happening to him, she had lost so much and so much more seemed so distant to her now, she couldn't lose him too. He was her family, her love, the father of her child. Her way back and her way forward.

When he set about showing her what to do, he was patient and blunt with his instructions, he held her hand to show her how much pressure to apply. When she pulled 'Harder, don't be afraid of it' and the skin began to peel back she felt bile rise in her throat and she had to look away and catch her breath. She expected him to laugh at her as he had when she'd gone on about the oddities of snow but instead he looked sympathetic, taking it from her and finishing the job.

'I threw up the first time I did it.' He told her with a shrug. 'How old were you?'

'Seven of eight I imagine. Theon laughed himself senseless over it.' He gazed across the flames for a moment as if he could see the Ironborn boy in the smoke. Then he shook himself and readied the spite to roast their meal. She knew he had grown up with Yara's brother but he hadn't spoken much about him other than recounting his betrayal and that they hadn't gotten along particularly well.

'You miss them.' She said softly.

'Theon? ' Jon asked her with a incredulous edge to his voice.

'All of them.' She clarified. 'Theon too.'
'Aye I do, Or maybe I just miss the past.' He placed the rabbit over the fire and watched as the flames licked up over it. 'Maybe it's more the idea of the past. It wasn't ever all that good.' Daenerys watched him but didn't speak. Just like her, she knew he had demons too, The bastard name he had been forced to wear all his life and everything that came with it, coupled now with the weight of a truth that had nearly destroyed them. She wasn't sure where he stood when it came to the revelation that he was a Targaryen, a trueborn one at that, he was even worse at sharing things than she was and they had spent so much time it seemed, dealing with what was happening to her that his issues had been pushed aside. One day, she knew, they would have to talk about it. All of it.
Fat popped in the fire and the smell of roasting meat made her mouth water, she had been hungry all the time lately and her belly was starting to become more and more noticeable, the effort it took to climb up onto her horse increasing everyday and she had been sure Jon was going to have a fit when she had them to stop for the seventh time today so she could make water. Time it seemed had softened her memories of her first pregnancy for she could not recall it being this big of a nuisance. When the rabbit was ready she ate with abandon, uncaring of the grease running down her hands, when she was done with her half Jon handed her some of his insisting that she needed it more than he did, that the babe needed it. Reluctantly she agreed, wolfing that down as well while he smirked at her lack of etiquette. Afterward they sat staring at the fire in silence both seeming to be lost in their own thoughts.
Eventually, when the silence grew too heavy to bear any longer Dany forced herself to ask him how much longer he expected their journey to last.
Jon blew a gust of air as he thought about it. 'A fortnight perhaps.' He told her. 'If you're tired you can go sleep, I'm going to stay out here until Ghost returns.' He said after. 'I'd rather stay out here with you. Sleep hasn't been all that restful of late.' She told him softly.
'I thought perhaps you would sleep better if I wasn't with you.' Jon replied quietly, Daenerys felt herself bristle at that, she had already told him she trusted him, but she also understood that she had reacted badly several times now upon waking near him.
'It's not you. I hope you know that.' She forced the words out, willing him to understand. She felt as though she were balanced on the head of a pin, any wrong move and she would fall off into the raging storm of her own emotions, and yet the pin teetered no matter what she did, reminding her that she would fall eventually regardless of her decisions. Perhaps then it was best to dive in, a controlled descent. 'He wasn't unkind the first time.' She finally said, she clinched her hands into fists to control the tremor in them. 'After that I didn't have a choice, he would come to my tent every night and he...'
'Dany, you don't have to tell me.'
'Dany, you don't have to tell me.'
'I do, though. I've never told anyone. Everyone knew of course. My handmaids, my brother not that he cared. He told me before the wedding that he'd let all Drogo's Khalazar rape me, all 40,000 men and their horses too if that's what it took to get an army. He didn't care. And Jorah, he would look at me every morning with such pity but there was nothing he could do. Eventually I asked one of my handmaids, a former pleasure slave to teach me how to please my husband. I thought if I could please him perhaps he would be kind to me. And so she did, and I did. And all of a sudden things got better. I had some control. Or at least that's what I told myself. The truth is, I did as he commanded, if he wanted me, he had me, even if I didn't want to, even if it was in public, in front of everyone. I convinced myself that I was alright with it, that I wasn't being forced because I was willing. And that he loved me, I don't know if he loved me. I was an exotic pet, a rarity, something to be fawned over and paraded around, when I freed the first of my slaves and his bloodriders complained he said 'That's my son in her belly, he makes her brave.' That's all I was and I convinced myself I was more than that. I was such a foolish little girl.' The words stumbled out over themselves in a rush, years of denials and twisted truths. 'I was little more than a slave who had convinced herself she loved her chains.'
When she ventured to look at Jon she found him watching her with understanding instead of pity. She felt such a warmth of affection in that moment that she considered taking his face in her hands and kissing him.
'Daenerys, I am sorry. I know this is hard for you.'
'I thought I was strong.' She whispered.
'You are.' He assured her, he seemed to believe it, she didn't know how.
'I'm broken.' She told him. 'Strong things don't break.' Jon got up and came over it sit closer to her, he took her hands in his and squeezed them gently.
'Everything breaks, even Valyrian steel can break, it can also be reforged.'
Daenerys found herself smirking slightly. 'That was deeply philosophical, I didn't think you had it in you.'
Jon sighed and looked off toward the trees, something moved in the shadows and Daenerys felt her heart rate increase in fear but it was only Ghost, returning from his hunt, maw bloodied with a recent kill. 'Everyone seems to think if you don't speak much it's because you have nothing to say.' He complained. 'I think about plenty of things, I just don't bother talking about them, what does everyone assume I'm doing when I'm broody?' Daenerys gave him a gentle smile.
'I'm sorry.' She told him sincerely. 'I have never questioned your intellect, but your self-confidence could use some work.'
Jon nodded. 'I wasn't raised to find value in myself.' He shrugged. 'I suppose we both have things we need to work on.'
'Perhaps we can help each other.' She suggested raising one of her hands to cup his cheek gently. 'Aye, we will. And we will make sure that this child has the things we never had; a home, a family, love...confidence.' He added the last one with a slight grin.
'A name.' Daenerys added.
Jon hesitated. 'We're not married.'
Daenerys considered that, proof be told she didn't care anymore, she would name this child her heir and to hells with anyone who disagreed with her but she knew it mattered to Jon and to the lords of the Seven Kingdoms, the Kingdoms she still had hope she would rule one day and pass on to her child. 'How do the Free Folk do it?' She asked after a moment.
'If a man wishes to wed a woman he steals her from her village.'
Daenerys grimaced, the screams of girls long dead by Dothraki blades whispering in the night air. 'That's not - '
'It's mostly for show' Jon assured her. 'It's usually arranged to some degree. The man has to come alone, and if she doesn't wish to be taken or if her family disagrees with the match the men in her village will fight him off.'
Daenerys still thought it barbaric, of course the Dothraki were just as bad. 'Well,' She began slowly. 'You took me away from my people. Dragged me all the way up here and no one fought you off. I suppose by Free Folk standards we would be considered married.'
Jon looked taken aback for a moment and she feared she had upset him, had she misread his feelings for her? He had told her he had moved passed his misgivings about their relation, had she been wrong? Then he smiled, a soft, slow smile. 'I suppose you're right.' He whispered, his voice husky and deep and despite their conversation earlier and all the trauma of the past she felt the first stirrings of longing deep inside her, distant and faint but they were there. In that moment she had hope, for the first time in a long time that things were going to be alright in the end. That she could indeed be reforged into something stronger and sharper.
Jon cleared his throat as if trying to keep similar yearnings at bay. 'I don't think the southern lords would consider a wildling marriage good enough however.' He said, Dany grinned, not allowing anything to ruin this moment of peace. 'Then we shall make a decree, that all forms of marriage in Westeros are recognized by the crown, be it the Faith of the Seven or the old Gods or the Free Folk.'
Jon nodded. She knew it wouldn't be that easy if some cantankerous lord wanted to make an issue of it, and she was sure Jon did too but for right now it was enough. 'Now if you don't mind your wife is tired and she and your wolf are going to bed.' She informed him. As if he knew what she'd said, Ghost, fur now snowy white again, walked over to her as she stood up, nudging for hand with his wet nose and then prodding her belly gently as she scratched behind his ear.
'Well far be it for me to argue with my wife or my wolf.' Jon replied, he stood and followed her into the tent, and that night, warm between her dragon and his wolf she finally slept without waking. The memories were still there, the past still called demanding its dues but for now at least they were at bay and she was calm and content.
A spring storm hampered their movement four days out, by Jon's reckoning, from the Valley of the Thenns. They had set up camp near an outcropping of rock that provided some protection from the wind and served to shield the horses, which they had covered with extra furs from the sled. Daenerys still fretted that the poor beasts would not make it through the night or the day that followed, though the temperature wasn't nearly as bad as it had been in true Winter, during the great war, it was still miserable, and high winds blew icy snow until the world appeared to be nothing but a field of white.

'What happens if the horses die?' She asked as they sat huddled next to each other in the tent. 'We walk and I'll hitch the sled to Ghost.' He replied, she wasn't sure if he was serious or not but Ghost looked up at him with a tilt of his head and she got the distinct impression that the wolf was not amused.

She blew out a gust of air and watched as it appeared before her like a cloud, she had found it fascinating the first time she had noticed it, on the boat back from Eastwatch. She was sure it had been noticeable before that but she'd been too preoccupied to notice, it had been Ser Jorah who had laughed at her that time. She grinned at the memory of her old Bear, how she missed him.

'you're smiling.' Jon observed.

'I was thinking about Ser Jorah, the first time I noticed my breath, you Northern's love to make fun of people who don't understand the cold.'

Jon chuckled a little. 'The cold is the only thing we have. It makes us tougher than southerns, we like to remind you all of it.'

'How does anyone stay warm up here?' She questioned with a real note of concern in her voice.

'Well according to Tormund, walking is good, fighting is better and....' He hesitated, a subtle blush colouring his cheeks despite the cold.

'What?' She prompted, a hint of amusement in her question, she could wager a guess as to what Jon's boisterous wilding friend had said but since it seemed to make him uncomfortable she really wanted him to say it.

'Fucking, fucking is best.' He answered, cheeks getting redder.

'Why are you turning red? It's not like you've never done it, it's not like we've never done it.' She asked. To be fair he had always been more reserved than her, her time in Essos and particularly with the Dothraki had stripped her of any shyness in regards to sex but Westerosi were different and the Northerner's in particular seemed very prudish about such things. Of course she was well aware that that wasn't the only reason for Jon's shyness about the subject. He had explained on their journey to White Harbour months ago, after they had fallen in bed together what the life of a bastard, even a privileged one, was like. He had grown up believing himself unworthy of a wife and had vowed to father no bastards of his own lest he subject another child to the life he had led. Still, he was hardly a virgin when he had come to her bed and he had shared with her stories of his wildling girl.

'Aye, true.' He replied and it seemed he had nothing else to say on the matter.

'She sighed in frustration. 'We can talk about it. I can talk about it.' She assured him.

Jon groaned. 'You know, I doubt my father ever said the word 'fucking' in front of his lady wife, certainly not in that context.'

'Well I'm not that delicate.' She told him, it was true after all, you can't conquer nations and squirm at naughty words. 'But for your sake we can call it making love.' she teased.

'Oh, is that what we did by that waterfall?' he teased back with a hint of a grin. Dany's smile widened and she felt her own cheeks flush. 'No, I'm fairly sure that was the other thing.'

The memory was intense, to avoid being stared at by ever curious dragons Jon had led her to a wide ledge behind the falls, explaining that he and his brother had found the place while hunting as boys. The setting had been surreal in it's beauty and he had taken her eagerly, back against the rock wall, legs wrapped around his waist, it hadn't been gentle or sweet, they had been playing with each other, a continuation of their earlier dance in the air. Looking back she is sure it was the last time she had
felt happy, it was the last time they had been together. 'I don’t want that to be the last time.' She said out loud.

Jon regarded her for a moment. 'Then it won't be. I’ve told you, I needed time but I've made my peace with it. I will be here when you are ready.' He looked over at Ghost who was taking up half the tent with his massive form. 'But I'm telling you now, I'm no more keen on being watched by wolves than I was by dragons.'

Daenerys found herself grinning. 'All right then, we can't ask him to go out in this storm but perhaps his master wouldn't mind if we kissed in front of him.' She felt suddenly foolish, as if she were a silly maiden who had never lain with a man before, giddy at the prospect of her first kiss. She realized she had never felt quite like this, there had been no sweet first kiss, no silly girlhood fantasies, she had lost that naivety with Drogo and she had never looked back. She leaned toward him with something akin to nervousness and ran her hand along with jaw, scruffier now than she was used to.

Jon brought his hand up behind her head, bringing her closer to him, he lowered his face to meet hers and pushed his lips against her own. It was soft, a gentle, barely there touch but it sent shivers down her back, heat pooling between her legs as her heart rate picked up. She leaned closer and deepened the kiss, Jon responded in turn, his other arm wound around her, pulling her closer still, the urgency of their kiss intensified until she felt like she was on fire, a frantic urgency she knew how to quell but she knew she would have to be content with this. Still she slid forward more, coming to sit half in his lap, he groaned at the contact and she realized she wasn't the only one caught up in the blaze. But then slowly he began to pull away from her lips, frantic motions turning to gentle caresses. He pulled back and stared at her, his eyes were wide and half crazed with a need she understood all to well. He leaned in, resting his forehead against hers as they both fought to bring their desires under control.

'See.' she whispered. 'I'm alright.'

Jon smiled 'I'm glad of it.' He told her softly, pulling back from her just a little and taking both her hands in his. 'I want you to know that I am sorry for pulling away from you, and for telling my sisters the truth.' Daenerys felt herself stiffen at the mention of his sisters but she let him continue. 'I was wrong about Sansa.' He drew a shaky breath. 'I didn’t want to be wrong about Sansa, I wanted...'

'What?'

Jon frowned, something bitter passing over his face for a moment. 'Sansa and I were never close, as I told you once before, she didn’t like me much. Growing up, Sansa wanted to be a perfect lady like her mother and her mother hated me. Sansa was often petty and spiteful towards me, we didn’t even say goodbye when we went our separate ways, even knowing that we probably would never see each other again, we simply had nothing to say to one another. When we met again at Castle Black after she had escaped the Bolton’s we were the only family either had seen in years, the only family we believed we still had left. We tried to put the past behind us, we tried to act as brother and sister. But the truth is Sansa never had any respect for me and if I’m honest deep down I didn’t really trust her.'

'Then why tell her?' Daenerys asked, truly confused.

'I think I wanted her to prove herself, to prove that after everything we had been through that she could love me.' Jon shook his head in a gesture of disbelief. 'I was a fool, I should have known better.'

Daenerys wasn’t sure she could argue with that so she didn’t. Instead she cupped his cheek and gave him a chaste kiss. 'I do understand. I would have done anything to make Viserys love me. Once upon a time at least, but it does no good. We can’t force people to love us.' Her words held more weight than she had expected, it was true both of family and small folk alike, no one could force love, not even a queen.

When the storm passed the horses were no worse for wear, the rock face and the furs having taken most of the chill. They set out as early as possible, both eager now to see some sign of civilization. Months of travelling were beginning to wear them down and Dany’s pregnancy had progressed to the point where she was becoming increasingly uncomfortable. Thankfully Crastor's Women had taken it upon themselves to alter her clothes to accommodate her growing belly otherwise she would
have been out of luck. The day before she had looked down and wondered what on earth had happened. She had spent most of this pregnancy very underweight, her belly much smaller than she imagined it should be and then without warning it seemed she had grown overnight. Her balance was off, her ankles hurt and she couldn't pull herself up into her saddle without Jon's help. She couldn't remember her first pregnancy causing this much interruption in her life but then again there was much of those days that she suspected she didn't remember quite clearly. Jon had said that they accepted strange things to survive, and he wasn't wrong.

On the second day an eagle circled above them for several miles, even swooping down low enough to unnerve the horses. Daenerys watched it with wary curiosity for she was certain that it was not acting as such creatures should. Jon on the other hand, had simply nodded to himself as if this were something expected and then picked up the pace a bit.

'What was that about?' She asked as she spurred her horse forward to ride along side him.

'Scout.'

'The Eagle?' She asked, slightly confused.

'It was a warg.'

'A warg. Like your brother?'

'Aye, like Bran.' Jon sighed, 'Like me and I suspect all the rest of the Stark children. They're not common but certainly more so among the Free Folk, they serve of scouts, especially those that bond with birds.'

Daenerys tried to absorb that fact, she had suspected there was something more to Jon's bond with Ghost, he seemed to have an uncanny ability to communicate with the wolf. Tyrion had explained the lore behind the wargs months ago in Winterfell when the word had been used in reference to Bran, she supposed she should have realized then what Jon was but she hadn't. 'So you can see through his eyes?' She asked for clarification.

Jon nodded. 'I can, I don't do it often. At first it was only when I slept, I would have wolf dreams, I would hunt with him and wake up to the taste of copper. But after I... after I died it became easier to share his mind with him. It's how I know where he is and what he's doing.'

Daenerys felt a slight stirring of jealousy at the idea. 'I had a bond with Drogon.' She said, taking a deep breath and repositioning herself in the saddle as a baby gave her a rather hard kick to the ribs. 'He usually came when I needed him, and when we flew together it was as though he could read my mind.'

'I remember.' Jon murmured, a hint of sad smile on his face. They had had so little time to talk about it before everything down south had gone to hells, Jon and Rhaegal hadn't had long together but Jon had been his rider.

Daenerys cleared her throat, forcing herself to push passed the grief. 'I wish I could have shared such a bond with him though, it see through his eyes would have been remarkable.' Another thought occurred to her then. 'Were you able to do that with Rhaegal?'

Jon shook his head. 'No, I think in time I may have been able to, but we never got there.' Jon sighed and looked off to were Ghost was walking a hundred feet or so ahead of them. 'I miss him, I'm sure it isn't nearly as profound as your grief, you were their mother, you hatched them, you raised them and you rode Drogon for years, Rhaegal and I had such a short time together, but I want you to know that you are not the only one who mourns them. All of them.'

Daenerys felt tears burning in her eyes, but she held them back. 'Thank you.' She replied with a sad smile of her own. It mattered to her more than she knew how to put into words. Even among her own advisors the dragons had been something to fear, few loved them as she did, few saw them as anything other than monsters. Jon had formed some sort of connection with them early on, a result, no doubt of his Targaryen blood. To know that someone else and loved them, that they would live on fondly in someone else's memory helped to ease the pain in her broken heart.
chapter thirteen

Chapter Notes

Don't kill me for having Dany drink during pregnancy, given the time period it would hardly be unusual and she does drink in the books during her first, sour mare’s milk for the morning sickness (Sure, why not?)

A day’s ride from their destination they reached the top of a ridge and found Tormund waiting for them with a group of Free Folk, his windburned face split into a huge grin. Jon jumped down from his horse and was quickly swallowed up in the big man’s embrace. ‘I knew you couldn't stay away!!’ He said with a laugh. ‘You belong to the North.’

Jon pulled back and looked up at him. 'It's not that easy. Things down south didn't end very well, we needed to get away for a while.' He gave Tormund a pointed look. 'Maybe a long while.'

Tormund looked over at Daenerys as she brought her horse to a stop next to Jon’s. She had a hand on the now obvious swell of her stomach and Tormund's eyebrows disappeared into his hairline before he threw his head back and laughed in delight. He slapped Jon on the shoulder hard enough to dislocate the joint then turned to the others still waiting behind him. 'Seems the pretty crow is going to have a baby crow.' He yelled back.

Daenerys bristled, though Jon didn't think she was truly offended. 'A dragon.' She corrected him. Tormund turned to look at her, taking in her face for a moment before he replied. 'Aye, a dragon, an ice dragon. Like the legends of old.'

Jon watched Dany for her reaction and was pleased to see her smile. He walked over and helped her down from the horse, she didn't complain much about her condition but he could tell that it was getting harder, now on the ground she held onto his arm discretely as her hips readjusted. He would be glad to get to the settlement so that she could rest for the remainder of her pregnancy, her body had been through enough in the last few months and while she was certainly doing a great deal better mentally, he still worried about her physically. Would she be strong enough when the time came? Did strength matter at all? What he knew of his own mother suggested that it didn't. He pushed that line of thought out of his head as they joined the other Free Folk, they were starting a fire and had brought provisions with them.

'Ve thought we'd have a bite before we headed back with you.' Tormund said as they took up spots round the fire. 'There's plenty of room down in the valley. Those Thenn Fuckers knew how to make a good strong house I'll give them that.'

'How long are you planning to stay?' Jon asked as someone handed him a horn of.... well what passed as ale up here. Jon frowned as the taste hit his tongue, he had never developed a liking for sour goats’ milk.

Tormund shrugged. 'Who's to say? At least til the spring storms pass.'

Jon nodded; the free folk were just that; free. They would come and go as they pleased. Tormund leaned forward giving him that intense stare of his. 'What happened down there?' He asked.

Jon looked over to see Dany watching them quietly, one of the men had handed her a horn as well but it was gripped in her hand, forgotten. 'It's a long story, and not a pleasant one. Perhaps another time.' He deflected, he’d rather explain things without an audience. Tormund looked like he wanted to press the matter, ever one for a good story, but Jon gave him a warning look and he backed off. Instead he turned to Daenerys and gestured to the horn in her hand.

'That is a true Northern drink. Not like that piss they drink in the south.' He told her with a grin.
Dany looked at the liquid in her cup, took a cautionary sniff and then downed half of it in one go without so much as a wheeze as it hit her throat. Jon looked at her in mild shock, Tormund threw back his head and laughed like a mad man and the other free folk grinned and laughed. 'I like her.' Tormund informed him. 'She holds her drink better than you do!' Jon couldn't argue with him there, ale was one thing, this stuff was entirely different. As Tormund jumped up and headed over to help one of the others with the food Jon looked back over at Dany, who was now staring absently into her horn, which she hadn't drank anymore of. 'That was unexpected.' He told her.

'Hum?' She looked up at him questioningly and he gestured to the horn. 'Oh, the dothraki drink sour Mare's milk, it's much the same.'

'Ah.' He gave her a slight smile. 'Any other talents I should know about?'

Daenerys grinned, the shadow of whatever she had just been thinking of leaving her face. 'One or two, but I'm not going to share them with you. You'll just have to wait and see.' Jon felt a warmth flare up inside as she flirted with him. Gods but he did love her, he hadn't realized the depth of it until he had nearly lost her. He reached over and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek, feeling the chill of her skin against his lips.

They reached the valley, at long last, just passed dusk, it looked more like a village of the North than anything else he had seen beyond the wall. A group of Thenns and some of the other clans had abandoned Hardhome and returned here before the dead attacked, but according to Tormund there was no sign of them, it was hardly surprising but it rattled him all the same. Tormund and the others believed they must have been ambushed by the army of the dead before they made it home as there were no signs of struggles to be had, the village seemed to have been bypassed, of course the Night Knight had cared only for warm bodies (or cold ones) to add to his collection, unlike a regular army the dead cared not for grain stores and armories.

Being as it was quite late in the evening, there were few people around save a few who seemed to be working as guards patrolling the stone wall that ringed the settlement. They seemed to recognize Tormund from half a mile away though and they gave them no trouble as they passed through the gates and onward toward the middle of town, where they found a small town square that seemed to be the centre of the place. Jon dropped to his feet and tethered his horse and Dany's as she awkwardly maneuvered out of the saddle, Tormund grunted as he walked passed them in what Jon assumed was a request to follow him, arms full of their supplies. The gruff old warrior led them down a narrow street and then off to the right where he opened the door to a small stone house that sat just off the road.

'This one's not being used. I had some of the women get it ready earlier. Wood for the fire, extra furs for the beds. There's food enough for the morning. I'll come back then and we'll talk.' Tormund informed them as he stacked some of their things in the corner. He seemed too small for such a space, of course Jon had rarely seen the wilding inside, even in Winterfell he had returned time and time again to the frigid winds of winter. Jon could understand the need to be outside, to feel free, not just in name. Now though after travelling for so long he looked forward to standing still for a while. He nodded his thanks to his friend and the man took his leave, Jon bolted the door behind him. There were candles lite and someone had built a fire earlier which Dany was stoking back to life. She looked up at him as he came closer, her eyes leaving his to explore the tiny, unadorned room.

'It's certainly not the Red Keep.' He commented softly.

Daenerys shook her head. 'It's safe. That's all that matters for now.' She stood and rubbed her hand over her belly, she seemed impossibly big now, the way Lady Stark had once seemed toward the end of her later pregnancies. Jon reached out a hand and pressed it against their child. Their child. It still seemed hard to believe. Jon had never entertained the idea of having children, he had been relatively young when he began to understand the differences between himself and his trueborn siblings, and so he had realized that marriage was not in the cards for him before he reached an age where he would have given it much thought. And even though he had dreamt of being legitimized right up until he decided to join the Night’s Watch, he had never let himself contemplate the idea of having a
family. Some dreams are too painful to dream. ‘She’s been very active today.’ Daenerys told him with a smile, a real smile unhindered by ghosts or demons. She moved his hand so he could feel the babe, something rolled against his palm, he gave slight gasp.
‘What was that?’ He asked her, hand still pressed to her belly hoping to feel it again.
Daenerys shrugged. ‘A hip? Her back? All I know is she hasn’t stopped and there’s very little room in there.’ She moved her hands to her back to brace herself against the strain, closing her eyes for a moment.
‘Let’s go find the bedroom, it will be nice to sleep in a bed again.’ He suggested.
Finding it didn’t take long of course, there were only two other rooms, both had beds but all the furs had been left in one. They took to that one as neither honestly cared one way or the other. The dreariness of the place reminded him of Castle Black and for a moment he longed for Winterfell or Dragonstone or Kingslanding.
‘What are you thinking?’ Dany asked as she pulled off her thick fur lined cloak, and started untangling the strings of her furs, the ones Crastor’s Widows had given her.
Jon Sighed as he sat on the edge of the bed. ‘I was thinking that I miss the south.’ He admitted.
‘Oh? I thought you had the true North in you.’ She teased and despite their surroundings Jon left his blood stir at her playful tone.
‘Honestly I think I have some competition.’ She continued, dropping the furs on a nearby chair which left her in a linen undershirt and a pair of rough breeches.
Jon felt slightly confused by that. ‘Competition?’
Daenerys gave her a playful grin. ‘He seems very fond of his ‘pretty crow’’
Jon felt his cheeks redden at her suggestion.
‘Tormund? Don’t worry, he is certainly not my type.’
Dany stalked closer, until she was standing between his knees, she put her hands on his shoulders and leaned in, brushing her lips against his.
‘Really I thought you liked red heads.’ She whispered as she pulled back.
‘Daenerys!’
Daenerys gave her a playful grin. ‘I’ve been with women.’ She told him, and moved her hands to work the lacings on his furs. He just stared at her for a moment, his Northern upbringing meant such things were considered taboo, but he would be lying if he said the image of her and another woman didn’t cause his cock to throb painfully against his breeches, he took a shuddering breath and pulled her undershirt over her head. Her breasts were unbound and heavier than he remembered them, His heads ran over the sides of her belly, up to her chest, he tested the weight of them in his palms before he found her pink nipples at rolled them between his fingers, causing them to harden and stand out, an invitation to be licked, sucked. She sighed and leaned forward, resting her forehead against his, her efforts to undress him forgotten for the moment.
‘Are you sure you want this?’ He asked, he had to ask, had to be sure. Everything they had been through, separately and together he had to be sure they were both in the same place now.
‘I’m sure.’ She whispered back, hands finding his ties again, he helped her this time, peeling off layers of furs and underclothes until they were both naked in the dim light of the candles. It wasn’t a hurried thing, but gentle and slow and despite the time they had spent together before it was at least slightly awkward. Jon had certainly never been with a woman so far gone with child and though he found her new body appealing in a warm protective sort of way, it did make for a challenge when coupling. He certainly couldn’t lay atop her, they laughed when her hips protested her ridding him, she cringed at the suggestion that she be on her hands and knees and he knew better than to ask her why, in the end they lay spooning together under the furs, her leg thrown back over his and he finally slid inside her. They both gasped and shivered at the sensation, he set a languid pace, kissing her neck as she moaned, one hand wrapped around her chest the other playing with her delicate bundle of nerves. Twirling his finger tip around it until she cried out, her walls convulsing around him, one hand thrown back pulled at his curls as her release rippled over her, he followed shortly after spilling himself inside her as he moaned against the porcelain skin of her neck.
When they had both come down from their high Jon pulled the furs up higher to stave of the cold and then wrapped his arms back around her. She turned herself around in his arms so she was face to face with him, her growing belly in between them. Jon kissed her gently on the tip of her nose and
she tilted her face up to kiss him again on the lips. Jon rubbed his hand up and down her arm and pressed his forehead against hers, he wanted to ask her if she was alright but he was afraid to ruin the peacefulness of the moment. Eventually though his curiosity got the better of him and he asked her anyway.

‘Of course.’ Came the response without hesitation. ‘Although I am not particularly impressed with my mutinous hips.’

Jon gave a slight laugh at that. Dany loved to be on top and Jon would never be one to complain about it, as it did provide a glorious sight. ‘It won’t be forever.’ He reminded her.

‘I love you Jon Snow.’ She whispered and he felt a flush of warm affection for her followed by something else, something distant and indeterminate. He must have stiffened for she pulled away and regarded him with a look that bordered on panic even in the dim candle light.

‘I love you Dany.’ He told her hastily, hoping it wasn’t too late to spare her feelings.

‘Then what?’ She asked, the iron in her voice of a quality he hadn’t heard from her since his earliest days on Dragonstone.

Jon sighed. He wondered how he could put it into words, this strange feeling, this thing he had shoved to the furthest corner of his mind. ‘It’s not you.’ He said, realizing how trite that sounded.

‘It’s the name.’ He felt her relax at his admission, when she spoke again, she sounded like his Dany and not the conqueror he knew well she could be. ‘Would you prefer to be called Aegon?’ She asked sincerely and this time it was his turn to stiffen.

‘No, I – I don’t know anymore. I don’t feel like Aegon, I hear the name and it sounds like it belongs to a stranger and yet Jon Snow brings about feelings I don’t know how to deal with anymore. Growing up I hated my name and all it represented or didn’t represent. I would have given anything to be Jon Stark but the older I got the more I clung to that name. Tyrion once told me to never forget what I am for the rest of the world would not, he told me to wear it like armour so it could never be used to hurt me.’ Jon thought back to that night, back before everything had gone wrong, but that was just perspective, the wheel had already been turning even then, the dye cast long before. ‘Jon Snow became the armour, Stannis once offered to name me a Stark if I would call the Northern Banners in his name. I turned him down. I had many reasons but part of me was terrified of taking off that armour, now I worry it no longer fits. I also fear I am making no sense.’ He sighed.

Daenerys shook her head. ‘I think I understand. But it seems to me that names do not mean the same thing beyond the wall as they do south of it so perhaps there is time to figure it out. I will only call you Jon from now on.’ She paused for a moment. ‘You could simply keep your first name and use your real last name, my name. Jon Targaryen has a nice ring to it don’t you think?’

Jon gave her a gentle smile. ‘Aye, it does. I will think on it. For now I’m content to simply be Jon, perhaps by the time we venture south again I will have found Armour that fits.'
Chapter Fourteen

What Remains
Chapter Fourteen

Tormund fiddled with his beard as he listened to Jon’s tale, his wide blue eyes watching him intently. ‘So the dragons are gone?’ He asked when Jon finished talking and took another long drag of ale, real ale not that sour piss Tormund liked to drink.
Jon felt a pang of pain and guilt at the question, not just for Rhaegal but for Drogon and Viserion as well, they were creatures of myth and legend, fire made flesh, lost centuries ago only to be returned and then taken away again, what was the damn point in that? ‘Aye, they’re gone. It’s not a topic I’d bring up with her if I were you.’
Tormund grunted in agreement and downed the rest of his drink. ‘It’s a shame, beautiful fucking things they were.’
Jon nodded. ‘How are things going up here?’ He asked, trying to change the subject. They were sitting at the table in the house Tormund was using, it was only the two of them as he had left Dany to nap in the bright afternoon sun, Ghost standing guard, though he had little to fear from the Free Folk, while the Northerns had never warmed up to the Dragon Queen and they were just as likely to look at Jon as a Bastard as they were a king, the free folk saw them both as heroes in the war for the dawn and tended to treat them accordingly, a fact that had been made clear by the abundant amount of gifts they had received just after they arrived. Furs, blankets, clothes for the baby, an axe, a cradle and so far someone would show up with food at each meal and refused to take no for an answer. Jon had tried in vain to stop it, not wanting to put anyone else out on their account and honestly overwhelmed by the hospitality. Daenerys on the other hand accepted everything graciously and looked forward to each arrival of food like a child awaiting their Nameday.
Tormund sighed at the question and leaned back in his chair, wood creaking under his weight. ‘There are so few of us left. Whole clans; gone. Most people understand that if we are going to survive we have to work together. Doesn’t mean it’s going to work though, you know what they’re like the Nightrunners hate the Hornfoots, the Cave Dwellers hate the Thenn’s an’ the Thenn’s hate everybody. Can’t tell you how glad I am that the Ice River clans decided to stay up North, only ones I know made better wights than people.’ He chuckled a bit at that, Jon couldn’t argue with him there, Cannibals were hard to feel sorry for. Tormund spread his hands in a gesture of uncertainty. ‘We could split up and wander off on our own but would we make it?’ He shrugged. ‘We need to stay close right now, get to making babies.’ He said with a grin and a wiggle of his eyebrows.
Jon rolled his eyes at his friend. ‘You’ve got a head start on that part.’ He said. ‘Never thought I’d see the day. You turned out to be a fucking miserable crow.’ He commented with a grin.
Jon could hardly argue with that either, He had sworn to take no wife, hold no lands, father no children, wear no crowns and seek no glory. The last one was perhaps the only one he had never broken only so much in that he never sought it, though it had found him anyway. ‘Daenerys thinks it’s a girl.’ He said with a smile.
Tormund jumped up to refill his cup and thumped Jon on the shoulder with enough force to knock him sideways. ‘She’ll be a pretty thing. You’ll have to keep that sword sharp when the boys come calling!’
The red headed wilding banged his mug back down on the table and dropped himself back in his chair, the thing protesting the force again, for a split second Jon imagined it might collapse beneath him, it would be a sight worth seeing, alas it held up. ‘You know you two are welcome as long as you want.’
Jon nodded. ‘Aye, I did get that impression. We can’t stay forever, we left too much unfinished. We
will have to go back and settle things eventually.’ He wasn’t looking forward to that day, but he knew it would come. The God’s Eye, Find me there. Bran’s words echoed from a half-forgotten dream.

‘Aye.’ Tormund agreed. ‘But as I said, now is the time for making babies.’ He leaned forward, resting his arm on the table and gave Jon that intense half crazed look again. ‘Now tell me, the King Killer? Did he live?’

After he left Tormund’s Jon went looking for a couple people he’d been told could help him with a small project. He found them easily enough and offered whatever service he could provide in exchange for their help, they refused to hear of it, citing what a honour it was the help the man who got them south of the wall. Their praise made him feel uncomfortable, he wasn’t used to it and didn’t know how to handle it. He thanked them both, perhaps a little awkwardly and silently swore he’d find some way to repay them.

When he returned to the small house that, at least for the time being, was now home, he found another meal waiting on the table and a very satisfied looking direwolf who was still chewing on what looked to be a leg bone from an elk. ‘I see they’re feeding you too.’ He complained with at least a hint of amusement. ‘I was trying to work out the answer to a very difficult question.’

Daenerys pulled herself up into a half reclined position with what seemed to be great difficulty. ‘I’m a mess.’ She said. ‘My clothes are drab, my hair is a disaster and I have somehow managed to be both grossly underweight and horribly fat at the same time.’

‘Hungry again?’ He was truly in awe of her appetite. It seemed not that long ago he had had to beg her to eat anything at all.

‘Hungry still.’ She corrected, dragging herself up to her feet and pulling one of the furs from the bed over the shoulders. In that moment, watching her stumble half asleep across the small room, hair tussled and unbound, belly round with his child, he felt in indescribable wave of affection for her, she was without a doubt the most beautiful sight he had ever seen.

‘You are the most gorgeous thing I have ever seen.’ He told her.

‘You are too kind husband.’ She told him, snatching her hand back to cover her mouth while she yawned. ‘Now you did mention food, did you not?’

Jon nodded and he led her over to the table, pulling out a chair for her and then sitting down himself,
he watched as she ate, somehow still relieved by the sight. ‘Did you have a nice visit with your friend?’ She asked when she finally stopped long enough to talk, she made the question seem suggestive. And Jon sighed.

‘Dany.’ He replied in warning.

She just grinned at him. ‘Alright, I’ll leave you alone. But if you don’t mind me saying it is a rather unusual friendship.’

Jon could concede to that. ‘Aye, it is.’

‘He makes you laugh though, that’s good. You should laugh more.’

‘There hasn’t been a lot to laugh about in recent years.’

Daenerys nodded, suddenly looking quite serious. ‘No, there hasn’t been.’

‘Tormund said one of the midwives would be by tomorrow to check on you.’ He told her, changing the subject before things became too heavy. He didn’t want to feel heavy anymore, he was tired of it.

‘That would be good.’ She agreed, hand traveling to rest on her belly again. ‘I’m not sure how far along I am. Maybe she can tell us.’

Jon tried to recall how long ago it was that they had sailed from Dragonstone but he too had lost track, judging by her size she had to be close, but perhaps it was just her tiny frame that made her look so big.

Suddenly Daenerys looked serious again, a dark cloud passing behind her violet eyes. ‘I worry about losing her like I did Rhaego, The witch, she promised I would never bare another living child.’

‘Dany.’ Jon reached a hand across the table and squeezed hers. ‘I can’t promise you that everything is going to be alright, I wish that I could but we’ve both known too much lose to believe it. But don’t give this witch any more power over your thoughts, she’s gone and you’re still here.’

Tears welled up in her eyes, regardless of her words and she bit her lip in a nervous gesture, clearing trying to decide if she wanted to say something else.

‘What is it?’ He asked.

‘The witch, she said he was a monster. That he had scales and wings.’ She said the last part with a sob and raised a hand to cover her face as the tears came, though from grief or fear or shame he did not know. He left his chair and walked around the kneel in front of her, taking her hands in his.

‘You never saw him?’ He asked gently, he knew she had not. She shook her head. ‘Then you have only the word of a woman who hated you, our child will be fine.’ He assured her, trying to sound a confident as he could, he had his own worries, the persistent fear that she would not live through the birth, but he would not share them with her, she had enough to deal with.

He could not promise her that everything would work out in the end but he was certain their child would not be born part dragon.

Dany drew in a ragged breath, her eyes closed as she tried to steady herself. ‘You are not alone this time, I will be with you.’

‘You know men aren’t supposed to be in the birthing room.’ She told him, her voice wet with tears. Jon frowned. ‘Who’s going to stop me?’

The answer to who turned out to be the grumpiest midwife north of the neck, wizened with age she would have towered over Tyrion Lannister by a mere head. Tormund had delivered her to their house himself the following afternoon. She had sized up both Jon and Dany with a quick flick of her eyes, turned around and pointed Tormund to a chair. ‘Sit.’ She commanded in the same tone one would use with a dog. Then she marched off to the bedroom with Daenerys in tow. Jon stood awkwardly in the main room unsure of which way to go.

‘I wouldn’t follow her if I were you.’ Tormund warned. ‘Let the woman folk do their thing.’

‘She seems a bit…’

‘Nasty?’ The wilding offered.

Jon sighed. ‘Wasn’t the word I was going to use.’ He sat down opposite his friend and cast a look back toward the bedroom, he would have preferred to stay with her. They had been through so much
and for so long she had been his responsibility that leaving her in the care of anyone else seemed wrong and put him on edge. After what seemed like a long while he asked Tormund: ‘Are you sure about her?’

‘She’s the finest midwife we’ve got, she’s been deliverin’ babies longer than you’ve been alive.’ Tormund assured him. ‘Just don’t get too close. She bites.’ Jon scowled at him, unsure if he was joking or not. ‘Don’t listen to that one.’ Came the raspy old voice as the women re-emerged. ‘Biggest mistake of my life was dragging that one into the world.’ Jon turned back to raise an eyebrow at Tormund who was giving the old woman a look somewhere between amusement and loathing. ‘Now woman…’ He started but she waved a hand in dismissal. ‘Nearly tore his mother in two, ugliest babe I ever saw. And when she saw him, she told me to put him back.’ Jon stared dumbfounded for a moment before Tormund gave a bark of laughter and the old woman gave the briefest toothless smirk. ‘Your woman is fine.’ She said turning her attention to Jon, Dany stood behind her with a barely concealed smile. ‘Everything is as it should be, the babe won’t been much longer, a moons turn at most. But I expect less.’ She turned back to look at Dany, her posture and her voice softening. ‘You send for me when the time comes; when the pains come quicker or you lose your waters.’ Daenerys nodded in understanding and the midwife gave a curt nod back and turned to Tormund. ‘Come on you great oaf, walk an old woman home.’ Tormund cleared his throat and jumped up. ‘Yes ma’am.’

When they had gone Jon stood and made his way over to his wife. ‘Is everything alright? Truly?’ Daenerys nodded, walking over to take a sit on the bench by the fire, lowering herself down with difficulty. ‘She says the babe is in the right position and everything seems fine.’ Daenerys let out a shaky breath. ‘I expected her to tell me something was wrong.’ She admitted, staring at the fire. Jon sat down next to her and took her hand in his. ‘I know you did.’ ‘I keep thinking I don’t deserve this.’ She whispered softly. ‘I’ve done horrible things. I don’t deserve to have any happiness.’ Jon frowned and squeezed her hand, fingers curling protectively around hers, it was foolish to think he could protect her from the demons in her own mind but he wanted to try. ‘You had good intentions; you have a good heart.’ ‘Did I have good intentions when I ordered the destruction of Kings Landing?’ She questioned bitterly. ‘You were hurting, you were in pain. We’ve been through this.’ He watched the shadows from the fire and the light from the single window dance across her face. ‘And I can’t think of anyone who would be a better mother.’ Daenerys gave him a small hesitant smile before she slid over closer so he could put his arms around her. ‘Thank you.’ She whispered. ‘I love you Dany.’ ‘And I love you.’ She replied and he pulled her closer still, tucking her silver head under his chin and watching the fire dance in the hearth and for the briefest of moments Jon thought he saw a dragon unfurling it’s wings amid the flames.
So this chapter contains a little reference to Robb’s marriage like with Jon’s relationship to Ygritte (which also comes up here) I used the book version, I’ve never been a big fan of Talisa or that storyline, not a huge fan of Jeyne either but I think the storyline makes more sense. As far as the Jon/Ygritte discussion, I really wanted to dive into it when Drogo came up but it didn’t feel right nor did it feel like something he would do. It’s a tricky conversation to have, even by our own standards unfortunately, add medieval sensibilities and someone who isn’t the greatest communicator and yeah, lots of fun. I’ve always been fascinated by Jon’s very negative perception of sex which is of course something that gets completely left out of the show and I feel like I just sort of brushed the surface of that here, mostly because we’re too far into this relationship for it to just be rearing its head.

A loom appeared a few days after the midwife’s visit, she had gone for a brief walk with ghost at her heels and returned to find it near the fire, threads running up and down in lines and a basket of more sitting next to it. Her fingers reached out to touch the strands gently like a musician would a harp. ‘Did you do this?’ She asked as he emerged from the bedroom, having cleaned up from hunting that morning.

Jon nodded. ‘Well I didn’t make it, I just arranged to have it made.’ He admitted. ‘You seemed to enjoy it, I thought it would be good for you. There are a few women in the village who can help if you need it.’

Daenerys slowly withdrew her fingers and turned toward him. She felt a strange mixture of emotions, perhaps it was the pregnancy but she couldn’t stop the tears that welled up in her eyes. She had been given many gifts over the years, from those that had taken her and Viserys in as children, from allies and suitors. She had been gifted with dresses and jewels, ships, weapons and dragon eggs, a fortune by any measure, none had ever managed to make her cry. It was a simple gift by comparison but it meant so much more. ‘I’m sorry.’ She told him. ‘I don’t know why I’m crying. It’s wonderful.’ She whispered, tearfully.

Jon came forward and took her into his arms and she buried her face in his chest, he wasn’t wearing furs or leathers today, just a plain undershirt and breeches, the weather having warmed considerably in the last few weeks. She breathed in the smell of pine and fresh air and reached up to thread her fingers through his unbound curls as she lifted her face to find his lips. The kiss was a thank you, sweet and soft. She pulled back to look at him. ‘I like your hair down this way.’

Daenerys smiled. ‘Pregnancy.’ She told him. ‘Besides they’re happy tears. No one has ever given me a more meaningful gift.’

‘I find that hard to believe.’
She shook her head. ‘No one has ever given me something simply because they thought I would like it. Most were given because they wanted something in return.’ She tilted her head up again and captured his lips, the kiss going from sweet to heated in a matter of moments, she felt the familiar stirrings of longing within her, she had been ravenous for him since they had re-established their physical relationship, and he had met her in eagerness at every turn. She felt sorry now, that she had pushed him so hard in those early weeks after he had learned of his parentage, if she’d hadn’t been so lost herself perhaps she would have realized that he needed time. But the past was the past. If I look back I am lost. She wasn’t sure if she believed the wisdom of her old mantra anymore, she was beginning to realize that sometimes back is the only way to go forward, to truly heal she had to examine the wounds, it was an uncomfortable and humbling process but she felt better for having started it. She hoped that in the future, should they come upon hardships they would both be better partners to each other. ‘Perhaps’ She purred, running a hand up his chest, feeling his muscles through the thin material. ‘I could show you have thankful I am.’

Jon gave her a heated look, one that had her clinching her thighs together as she sought to control the sensation that pooled between them. She grinned and grabbed his hand leading him back toward the bedroom.

‘Did I ever tell you about Sheila?’
Daenerys sat next to Jon on one of the benches around the fire in Tormund’s house with a dozen other Free Folk all in various stages of drunkenness. The gregarious redhead was probably leading the charge in ale, sloshing more of it onto the floor than he managed to get in his mouth, his beard dripped with it.

At the question several members of the small get together groaned, Jon included. The ones in the know seemed to be Tormund’s people so she assumed this was a story he told frequently. At the moment he was looking at her intently.

‘No.’ She answered honestly, which only caused more groans.

‘She was a wild one, by the gods. Brown of hair, all over her body.’ He sloshed more drink. ‘Fangs were sharp ‘n she knew how to use ‘em. A wild night to be sure, lost half me cock to her…’

‘Tormund.’ Jon scolded with a roll of his eyes.

‘What?’

‘She don’t want to hear about you and that bloody bear!’ One of the wilding women spoke up, Etena if Daenerys remembered correctly, she was perhaps five and thirty with dark blonde hair and light grey eyes, like most of the free folk women she held herself more like a man, legs splayed and elbows on her knees. ‘No one wants to hear about you and that bloody bear!’

There was a murmur of agreement from most of them.

‘I want to hear it!’ Yelled one of the men, he was from one of the clans along the frozen shore Jon had told her, Rushing River ‘They name their children for the features of the land’.

‘Goo’ man’. Tormund slurred, raising his horn in salute.

‘So did you steal this Sheila? Or did she steal you?’ Dany asked. Tormund roared with laughter, his mirth contagious.

‘I like her.’ He told Jon. ‘Why the fuck is she wit’ you? Hum?’

‘I have no idea.’ Jon replied before taking another sip of his own ale, Daenerys gave him a glance in her periphery, she had a feeling, judging by his tone that he was serious in that statement. How could he not know?

‘Answer the question Tormund! Did you steal the bear? Or did she throw you over her back and drag you off to her cave?’ This from one of the men whose name she hadn’t caught, he wore bones in his long brown hair, but his face was clean shaven and a scar run from ear to nose on one side. ‘Perhaps I’ll drag him back to my cave, if he doesn’t pass out before then.’ Etena said with a wicked grin.

Tormund gave her an exaggerated once over and then poured the rest of his ale on the floor in front
of him.
‘Why would you want to if he’s only got half a cock?’ One of the other women asked with a smirk.
‘Even with half it missing it’s still twice as big as any man’s here.’ Tormund boasted.
‘You’ll have to let us know come the morn Etena!’ Another woman yelled.
Daenerys let herself join in the laughter, they were wholly different than any group of people she had met before, they were brash and wild like the Dothraki but there was an equality between the sexes in some respects that she had never witnessed. Marriage was a fluid concept, entered into and exited at will, children were considered a blessing regardless of the circumstances under which they were born. People were judged based on what they could provide to the community and not a name they inherited from their parents, women could be warriors or chieftains so long as they could prove themselves worthy of the title. And yet there was little order and few laws, violence between clans and feuding factions within clans was common, punishments largely depended on who was doling them out. They lived hard and they died harder.

She was still musing about the differences as she and Jon walked back to their little house later that evening. They had left earlier than everyone else, begging their leave as soon as Jon had noticed her yawning. ‘We could have stayed.’ She assured him, hands held between them.
Jon shook his head. ‘You’re tired and I can’t imagine the company was that entertaining for you?’
‘Why? Do you think I’m a spoiled little rich girl who can’t socialize with the common folk?’ She kept her voice light, though there was perhaps a bit of concern there. It wasn’t easy to relate to people after being held apart for so long.
‘I never said that. Though most nobles would find the free folk uncouth. Most would find the small folk the same. Aegon the fifth faced much opposition during his reign because the nobility thought he had spent too much time with the small folk, they believed it had corrupted him.’
‘In some ways they’re much the same as the Dothraki, in others they are completely different.’ She mused aloud. ‘Are all Free Folk women so forward?’
Jon snorted in amusement. ‘Most.’ He affirmed.
‘Was yours?’ She asked, she had been wondering about it of late. They had spoken of their past relationships of course but Jon hadn’t given much by way of detail.
Jon’s gaze roamed out over the rows of houses a winding little streets, in the distance snow capped mountains loomed though it was impossible to make out more than shadows at this time of night. ‘Ygritte was very forceful.’ He told her.
‘Do you like that?’ She wasn’t sure why she asked, they’re relationship was a give and take, balanced. It had unnerved her at first, when he had answered the summons to Dragonstone. She wasn’t used to dealing with anyone as an equal, as a girl she had been submissive to her brother and then to her husband, as Queen she had dominated all of her relationships; personal and otherwise. But Jon had been a king, one who had earned his title and the loyalty of his people just as she had. It had left her off kilter and she had tried repeatedly to remedy the situation to her liking. It was an odd dynamic between the two of them; even after he had bent the knee, even though he had a tendency to be submissive himself, privately they gravitated toward balance. Now, after everything they had been through together, she realized she preferred it that way. She liked having an equal but she had never considered what he might like, did he want her to be forceful like the wilding women? It wasn’t that she couldn’t be, certainly she had been before, though she was not one for vulgarity, but she found that she wasn’t terribly interested in the notion.
‘I like you.’ Jon answered, his voice oddly tight.
Daenerys smiled. ‘I know that. That’s not what I’m asking. How does one go from a spearwife of the Free Folk to a highborn Princess?’
Jon gave her a strange look then, as if he were weighing something in his mind. He gripped her hand tighter and turned them up the narrow street to their house. Once they were inside Jon bolted the door while Dany lite a candle and then turned toward the hearth.
‘Sit.’ Jon told her softly. ‘You’re tired. I’ll tend the fire.’
Bewildered Dany chose to sit down in the rocking chair one of the men had brought by the day before. She could tell that she had upset him with her question, but for the life of her she wasn’t sure
how, what was worse was that it seemed that he was simply going to pretend she hadn’t asked at all. Finally, when the fire was roaring and she could feel the heat of it creeping across her toes, he rose to his feet and then sat down on the bench opposite her. He sat there for a while, obviously wrestling with something, his hand clasped together over his knees, forearms braced on his thighs, head bowed. She felt that familiar tightness inside herself, the one that crept up on her when she remembered the unpleasantness of her past.

When he spoke his voice was low. ‘I had little interest in laying with Ygritte. I had said my vows and I had made peace with the idea that I would never lay with a woman, in fact that was one of the reasons I joined the Night’s Watch. As a bastard I had no hope of a marriage and I was determined never to bring another Snow into the world. After I joined the free folk Ygritte pursued me relentlessly, she was older, she knew what she wanted. I slept with Ghost by my side for weeks, to keep her at bay.’ Jon took a breath and looked up at her for a moment, his eyes were clouded with confusion as he turned from her gaze again to look at the flames.

‘Mance and Tormund were suspicious of my loyalty. Of course they were right to be, and I probably would have died right then and there but Ygritte vouched for me, she told them that we were lovers and so I had broken my vows. She saved me and when I thanked her for lying she told me it wasn’t a lie and that I should find somewhere else for Ghost to sleep.

‘Just once, I told myself. Just once, to give her what she wanted or she’d turn me over to Mance and he’d skin me. I hated myself for it, I hated myself for breaking my vows, I hated how easy it was, how a part of me liked it. I swore to myself afterward that I’d never do it again. But I was young and lonely and weak. So we did it again and again and I was disgusted with myself every time.

‘Some part of me learned to love her, perhaps just as you learned to love your husband. Part of me longed for the comfort of her because I was so alone and there had been so little affection in my life even before I’d left for the wall.’ Jon sighed, wringing his hands together as he finally turned back to look at her, in the firelight his grey eyes held a hint of indigo. ‘I don’t want you to be like that, what we have; It’s right, for us.

Dany sat and listened, she tried to clamp down the feeling of dread as he spoke, old memories coming to the surface. In many ways their lives had mirrored each other, different and yet the same. This was just another example. ‘Why didn’t you tell me? When I told you about Drogo?’ She asked when he fell silent.

Jon shook his head. ‘That was your story, You needed to come to terms with it, I didn’t want to interfere, besides my story isn’t nearly as bad. She didn’t hurt me.’

‘Not physically.’ Dany amended. Thinking about it made Dany feel like the world had turned upside down, in her world, in the one she was familiar with it was women who were threatened, coerced or outright forced into such situations, men were the lucky ones. Protected by virtue of gender.

‘I hope this doesn’t change the way you see me.’ He whispered. He looked vulnerable in that moment, that she understood too. ‘I’ve never spoken about it. It happened and I hold little ill toward Ygritte, It was more my own weakness that haunted me. Lady Stark used to recite the Seven’s views of Bastards on a regular basis, whenever she could work it into a conversation, Bastards are weak and wanton, lustful and untrustworthy. Afterward, I thought surely she was right, I shouldn’t have wanted it as I did.’

‘Jon. That’s not true, as you said you were young and alone. Your brother wasn’t raised a bastard and yet he deflowered a hightborn girl from the enemy side in the middle of a war. Ygritte should not have forced you into such an arrangement.’ Daenerys countered, she stood and sat down next to him, snuggling into his side and laying her head against his shoulder. ‘The world has been cruel to both of us. I hope that we can make sure our child knows something better.’ What it was to be loved, and wanted.

Jon swallowed thickly, eyes closed, he nodded. ‘Aye. Something better.’
chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Author’s Note: I apologize to anyone who understands how to use a loom if I got any of the terms wrong. In real life I’m a seamstress and I’m well versed in most textile arts but the loom is still on the ‘to-do list’ Also don’t skewer me for Dany’s thoughts on womanly power and birth, she’s hopped up on hormones.

What Remains
Chapter Sixteen

Her hands shook slightly as she ran the pick through the ends of the loom, in the weeks since Jon had gifted it to her she had spent every moment she could working on a blanket for the babe, the babe who stubbornly refused to come. The midwife had visited again five days past, this time in the company of a younger woman she said was her granddaughter. The old woman had pronounced that everything was fine and the babe would come when she was good and ready. Dany had nearly cried then, a childish reaction and she had been embarrassed for her lack of control. She had wanted it to be over, she had once thought that time stood still when one crossed the sea with nothing but blue waters in every direction for weeks on end, it was nothing compared to the last moon of pregnancy. But now, now the pains had started and she wasn’t so sure anymore. The blanket was nearly done, It was nothing exceptional, but she had made it with her own hands and she wanted, no, she needed it to be ready in time.

Shred
Pick
Batten
Shred
Pick
Batten

She bit down on her lip as the pain seized her again, a great pressure across her back, she had expected it to feel like it did during her moon blood only worse, that was how she remembered it starting with Rhaego but this was different. She hissed as it started to ease. The midwife had told her to count from the start of one to the start of the next but she was in no mood for that. She had to get the damn blanket finished first.
She took a deep breath and run the pick across one last time, now all she had to do was secure the ends and remove it, something one of the local women had shown her how to do only a few days ago. She stood to better reach when the pain gripped her again, sharper this time, like a band being pulled all the way around her back and belly. She groaned. In the corner Ghost stood up from his pile of sleeping furs and padded over to her, nudging her back with his nose. Jon had gone out early in the morning to help with repairs to one of the barns, the weather had continued to warm and it didn’t take a white raven from the citadel to realize that winter was over, short though it may have been. Those among the free folk who had experience tilling the land assured everyone that the growing season would be upon them soon and they had best be ready.
Daenerys put one hand on her back while the other carded through Ghosts lush white coat, it’s texture giving her comfort as dragon scales once did. When the pain had subsided she turned to the
direwolf. ‘Can you find Jon for me?’ She asked him, she should have felt silly, talking to a wolf but just as with her dragons she had no doubt he understood. He regarded her for a moment with those blood red eyes then he turned and headed to the door, she waddled over to let him out asking once more that he return with Jon, he took off through the street with a sense of purpose in his stride and she felt reasonably assured that he’d do as she asked.

She ambled back over to the loom, worrying her lip between her teeth again, it wasn’t that she was afraid of pain, she’d experienced her fair share of that, but with each new pain fear surged through her as the voice of Mirri Maz Duur rose up through the ashes of the past. She had thought herself barren for years, but perhaps it was just that she couldn’t bare of living child, a pregnancy did not necessarily amount to a living child. If she lost this baby she didn’t think she would survive, she would slip back into that place she escaped to after Drogon died and she was quite sure she would never return.

She rubbed a hand across her belly and silently told herself to breath, her fingers were numb as she removed the last of the blanket from the loom. She sat down in the rocking chair in front of the hearth and hugged the newly finished blanket to her chest, had her mother made her a blanket? Had she stitched a three headed dragon to a quilt for her crib? If she had Daenerys knew not of it, anything of the like lost when Willem Darry died just past her fourth Nameday. Just like the first time she carried a child, the further along she got the more her thoughts drifted to her own mother, Viserys had spoken of her with great affection, she had seemed a dream to Dany, that someone so good could exist. But Viserys always held her responsible for Rhaella’s death and so Dany had often felt as though her mother would not have loved her as she loved Viserys. As an adult she know differently but the doubts sometimes snuck up on her. She realized as well that she had been conceived under horrible circumstances, still she had never resented Rhaego for the actions of his father and she had to believe her own mother would have felt the same. She would have loved me, she thought as she stared into the low burning flames, I need you to stay with me. I don’t care what that old bat says, I need you to hold my hand because I’m so scared. I’m so afraid that I’m going to die like my mother and yours, or worse that I’ll live and she won’t.’ She felt tears gather in her eyes and slide down her cheeks, her lip trembled and her hand shook. Jon must have felt it for he raised his own to cover hers, there were tears in his eyes as well. She thought he would tell her that everything would be alright but he didn’t instead he just nodded and promised that he wouldn’t leave her side.

The midwife, who seemed to be referred to only as Nan, a nickname, Jon told her, for elderly women, brewed a bitter tea for her to drink while her granddaughter layered undyed woolen blankets
on the bed. Neither seemed the least bit apprehensive about the birthing, which did something to calm her nerves. Neither made any effort to remove Jon from the activity for which she was immensely grateful. He paced back and forth across the small living space with her, rubbing circles on her back as Nan instructed.

‘Isn’t it unusual for a man to be present?’ She asked between pains, Nan’s granddaughter, Asta was busy daftly braiding her hair to keep it out of her face, already the roots were damp with sweat. Nan shrugged her shoulders. ‘They put it in there, seems right to me they should watch it come back out.’ Out of the corner of her eye Daenerys watched Jon’s face turn red in embarrassment like a boy caught stealing sweets.

‘Oh, Nan’. Asta chided. ‘Mind your tongue, southerners don’t talk about such things.’ Nan scoffed, waving a frail boney hand in dismissal. ‘More’s the pity for them.’ Dany wondered idly as she passed the time between the pains which were now coming fast and regular, what it would be like to have a relationship with the women in her own family. There was a comradery between the two of them that was alien to her and yet wholly inspiring. One generation teaching a new one the family craft while the young one gently reminds her elder not to get too stuck in her ways, she wanted that, and for a moment as a new angry pain gripped her body she could see it stretching out in front of her, not just this child but others too, and this child’s child and so on, a legacy of dragons. She roared against the pain, hand squeezing Jon’s with all her might, fears and doubts forgotten for the moment. She existed in a sea of pain, one wave crashing into her after another with no escape and then suddenly as the new pain hit its zenith, she saw the solution as clear as day. Acting on an instinct as old as time she bore down, a wave of exhilaration rolling over her as the pain began to ease it’s hold over her mind. She could beat this she realized; she could make it end. In the delirium of birthing she almost felt like laughing.

Before her the old woman did let out a laugh, she waited until Dany’s body had relaxed before she interrupted. ‘Into the bedroom now.’ She directed. Jon hooked an arm under her shoulder to help her move. ‘You needn’t lay down if you don’t feel the need but everything we need is in there.’ Dany nodded absently, following direction now by rote rather than any comprehension on her part. ‘Now comes hard part.’ Nan informed them with a little too much glee.

In the bedroom Daenerys braced herself against the bed, Jon still standing at her side, he had reframed from rubbing her back after she’d abruptly decided that it made her want to kill him despite it having helped immensely up until that point. Now he simply stood, slightly unsure what to do, and looking years younger in his helplessness. The pain came again with the urge to PUSH, an inescapable, irresistible desire, the likes of which she had never felt before, even the desire to walk into that fire so many years ago paled in comparison to her body’s desire to push.

And so it went, She pushed and she screamed, she stood, sat, knelt, rocked and bounced on the heels of her feet until she fell onto the bed in utter exhaustion, face dripping with sweat, stripped down to her shift which she was also tempted to rid herself of, Her legs dropping to the sides uncaring of what anyone in her company may see.

‘Ah! I see it.’ Asta announced with a grin, Jon sat next to her, gripping her hand. She squeezed it as she registered those words. She felt Nan’s knuckles brush her inner thighs, the old woman surprisingly gentle now.

‘Push, girl.’ She told her. ‘It won’t be long now.’ So, she pushed, and she screamed, again and again as a burning sensation became her whole world before it gave way to a feeling of pressure so profound it almost undid her but by then this thing, set in motion so many months ago was already bound to its conclusion. The pressure disappeared in a moment of euphoria and Daenerys breathed a sigh of relief and joy, She looked up to see Jon’s face, not the bright look of joy she had anticipated but instead something much darker. Her heart stopped, fear seized her like nothing before, she turned her head slowly to gaze upon her child and the air left her lungs.

‘W-wh- what is that?’ The voice that asked was not her own, it was that of a little girl she’d left behind long ago somewhere across the narrow sea, the dragon queen had never sounded so timid, the dragon queen had never born a child. A monster, that’s all the dragon queen could be mother to.
It looked… it looked like an egg.
Nan looked up from the… thing in her hand, a strange grey mass without features, something shimmering under its surface and grinned at Asta, who returned her look before both faced the worried parents. Asta grabbed a small knife and handed it to her grandmother.
‘A good omen child.’ Nan replied before she carefully speared the strange blob and a rush of warm fluid gushed forth bathing Dany’s thighs. Suddenly something moved. Something pink and wet and wrinkled, she unfurled like a flower waking to greet the sun, legs stretching, tiny toes pointed, arms above her head, fists balled, she sucked in a breath and yelled into the still night air, a princess, a dragon.
A daughter.
Dany laughed and cried, her shoulders shook with relief and joy and a dozen other emotions she couldn’t rightly put names to. She was dimly aware of Jon doing much the same but she only had eyes for the tiny miracle in front of her. Nan pulled up Dany’s shift to expose the rest of her stomach and laid the babe against it, Dany wrapped her arms around her child and wept.
Asta came with a towel and roughly cleaned her off, to get the blood flowing she explained. Then she turned her over and Nan daftly tied off the cord and cut it free. Daenerys reached out and pulled her up into her arms, soft silken skin brushing against her. The babe turned toward her, mouth open as she searched for something, without conscience thought Dany’s hand went to open the laces of her shift to expose her breast but her fingers fumbled and Jon’s hands took over helping her undo the strings and push the material aside. Nan peered over her as the babe turned to root for a nipple, little lips puckered and eyes closed, she latched on and Dany felt the pull against her skin, a memory long forgotten raised up, hot scales against her breast under the heat of the desert sun. Nan nodded approvingly and settled back down between her legs as Asta handed her supplies to clean her up. Dany hardly noticed.
Next to her Jon sat mesmerized by the little creature in her arms, he reached out a hand to gently run his finger tips over her tiny limbs, perhaps counting fingers and toes, Dany didn’t bother, she was perfect, alive and whole and beautiful.
She brushed a hand over the patch of dark hair and lowered her head to breath in the scent of new life, new beginnings. The scent of hope.
Eventually, minutes or hours later Jon looked up at the old woman his voice breaking the spell at least for now. ‘What was that? The way she came out?’
‘A veiled birth.’ She said. ‘Tis the sac, usually it breaks early, sometimes, rarely, it emerges whole. It’s an omen. A prosperous beginning.’
Jon gave Dany a heartfelt smile, his dark grey eyes alight with love for her and their child. She didn’t know if he believed the midwife’s words or even if she did but in that moment it hardly mattered. Nothing outside of this moment mattered.
Nan seemed to be finished what she was doing, she had packed padded linens between her legs and covered her with a heavy blanket. She felt sore but she had felt much worse after Rhaego’s birth.
‘We’ll leave you three alone. There’s stew to be heated, we’ll see to it, you’ll need something to keep your strength up, then we’ll get you up while we change everything under you. After that we’ll leave you be. Asta will check on you tomorrow.’
Dany could do nothing but nod to that, food sounded wonderful but she wasn’t keen on the idea of moving. In her arms the child had stopped her hearty suckling and seemed to be dozing, her lips still pressed to her mothers nipple.
‘She’s beautiful.’ Jon whispered once they were alone. He leaned in closer and Dany turned her head, guiding him up with a hand under his bearded chin, she kissed him then, in a way she had never kissed anyone. So much emotion in such a small gesture.
‘I love you.’ She told him with tears in her eyes when she drew back.
‘And I love you.’ He replied. He seemed in awe, As though he couldn’t take everything in.
The babe in her arms gave a tiny jerk, one arm flailing as though she had woken from a dream, they both looked down at her, she had pulled herself free from Dany but she still appeared asleep. Jon sat up straighter and held out his hands. ‘May I?’ He asked her. She thought she would want to say no, she had thought no one would ever be permitted to held her save herself but instead she agreed
easily, she wanted him to feel what she felt, to experience the joy this little creature brought.

Awkwardly she shifted the tiny baby, careful of the neck as she’d been warned and placed her gently in her father’s arms.

Jon looked captivated. Utterly enthralled, he traced her features with his eyes and a gentle finger, drinking her in. He held her much more comfortably than Dany imagined she had, she wondered for a moment than remembered that he had held his siblings as babies, he knew more than she did though it still wasn’t much. ‘She looks like you.’ He remarked, the awe on his face evident in his voice as well.

Dany snorted. ‘Really, I think she looks like you.’

Jon shook his head. ‘Either way, she is perfect.’

‘She is.’ Daenerys agreed.

Shortly after the women returned with bowls of thick hearty stew and dense heels of bread. Jon was swayed to hand their child over to Asta to be cleaned and swaddled while the two of them ate. Dany was famished, finishing her bowl in no time and then finishing Jon’s as well as he assured her she needed it more than he did. Afterward they forced her up while they changed the bedding, laying down more thick blankets and then tucking her in like a child after another quick check below. As soon as she was comfortable Asta returned the babe, now clothed and bundled in the blanket she had made, the sight filled her with a delight few things ever had.

‘I’ll return the check on you in a few hours.’ Asta said softly, a hand on her shoulder in friendly support. This was a community of women Dany thought idly. Not simpering ladies trading gossip in gardens, but women seeing each other through the core of all womanly strength.

Once they had gone Jon returned to the bed, sitting close enough that he could draw her into his side, she laid her head against his shoulder and closed her eyes.

‘Are you tired?’ He asked.

‘Exhausted and yet oddly awake.’

Jon laughed softly. ‘I understand, but if you need to sleep you can, I can take her.’

‘Her. She needs a name.’ They hadn’t discussed it, not seriously. She had been reluctant to do so but now it seemed pressing.

‘The free folk don’t name their children until they reach their second nameday, it’s considered bad luck.’ He told her gently, his eyes never leaving his daughter’s face.

‘What do they call them then? How do they address them?’ She asked perplexed.

‘They give them milk names, funny things usually, terms of endearment more than names.’ Daenerys thought about that, she understood why, it wasn’t unusual for a child to die young, even her own mother had lost several children and they had been seen to by maesters. But the idea of not naming her didn’t feel right either, she was here and she was real and nothing would ever change that fact now. She felt a name would bind her to them. She told Jon as much, he nodded in agreement obviously fine with whatever traditions Dany intended to keep. ‘Do you want to name her Lyanna?’ She asked hesitantly. They should have talked about this at length.

‘Rhaenys.’ She said instead. ‘For your sister and for Rhaella, and Rhaegar and Rhaego.’

‘And Rhaegal.’ Jon added.

‘And Rhaegal.’ She agreed. For the family they had never known or known too briefly but whose deaths had shaped both of their lives.
I do apologize for the delay in updating, summers are crazy with the kids home.

He was a father. The thought echoed through his head as he swayed in front of the hearth in a rhythm as old as man, his daughter sleeping peacefully in his arms. Daenerys had finally fallen asleep sometime around sunrise and Jon had snuck out of the room with Rhaenys to let her be. Rhaenys Targaryen, the name, like his own sounded heavy in his mind, weighed down by centuries of history and conquest, he wondered if perhaps they should have named her something new, but it didn't seem right somehow. They couldn’t go forward without acknowledging the past. Besides, his name had been meant to honour a brother who had never had the chance to live, likewise Rhaenys would live where her aunt had fallen.

Arya would have been annoyed that they hadn’t picked Visenya. The thought made him smile, growing up she had memorized every detail about the wives of Aegon the conqueror and all the other warrior women of House Targaryen but Visenya had always been her favourite. Visenya who had wielded Dark Sister in battle, Jon had always thought her fascination apt for she had been his own dark sister. It was one of the reasons he had privately taken it so hard when Arya had sided with Sansa after he returned to Winterfell. She had always idolized strong women and he had befriended the mother of Dragons to defend their home, he had thought she would have at least approached her with idle curiosity, he hadn’t expected the quiet animosity. But then again he hadn’t expected the being that life had molded her into; cold, ruthless, hard. A part of him had envied her, her detachment. He had never managed to separate himself from the pain and suffering around him, he had never found a way to stop caring. Life would have been easier if he had. Easier perhaps but emptier.

In his arms his daughter gargled, a small coo of a noise, her lips quirking up at the corners. He could remember one of the wet nurses telling Robb that babes that age don’t smile, as he regarded a newly born Bran. ‘Gas’ she had assured him when he thought he was the world’s greatest brother. Gas or not, the sight warmed his heart, her tiny face was perfect, her lips a flawless pink bow, her eyes, the rare moment or two she had opened them since birth were the dark navy of most newborns, wether they would turn grey or violet he couldn’t tell though he secretly hoped for violet. It was already clear she had inherited his hair colour.

‘I am sorry.’ He found himself telling her gently. ‘I’m sorry for the mess of a world we’ve brought you into, your mother and I are going to do everything we can to make it better.’ He looked back at Dany’s sleeping form, still half visible through the open bedroom door. ‘One day we are going to go back and we are going to make things right but for now we are going to enjoy you.’

As if she understood she opened her eyes and regarded him, hands coming free of her swaddle to flail in the air again before her mouth found a fist, she sucked her tiny knuckles and gave a tiny cry when it didn’t get her anything.

‘Jon?’ Dany’s call was soft and gorgy, obviously the cry had pulled her from sleep. ‘Does she need to nurse?’ He looked up to see her watching him, clearly still exhausted but she smiled as he made
his way over, her arms stretched out for the babe.
‘I believe she does.’ He replied as he shifted their daughter into Daenerys’s waiting arms, the sudden loss of her warm weight caused his heart to seize just a little. How could he love something so much so quickly? Dany pulled her close and exposed a breast, the child turning instinctively toward the source of nourishment. His wife hissed when she started to suckle. ‘Does it hurt?’ He asked, he knew little of it, this secret world of women.
‘A little.’ She admitted. ‘It’s more powerful than you would expect from something so small.’ She gave him another tired smile. ‘I have never felt so content.’
‘Nor have I.’ He admitted. ‘I never imagined that I would have a family.’ He continued to watch them together, these two women who now made up his world, it was true he felt content, for perhaps the first time in his life. Despite having been raised along side the Stark children he had never felt like he completely belonged. There had always been a distance and while he knew what family looked like he had little experience with what it felt like. ‘Do you ever think about it?’ He asked her, he didn’t mean to break the peace of the moment but the words slipped passed his lips before he could stop them.
Daenerys looked up at him as their daughter continued to nurse, One of Dany’s hands idly stroking the baby’s fingers. ‘About what?’
‘What could have been. If Rhaegar had won on the trident.’ He clarified. Daenerys watched him quietly for a moment. ‘Yes.’ She answered. ‘All my life I imagined what it would have been like to grow up in Kings Landing, under a Targaryen rule. In the last few months I have imagined what our lives would have been like.’
‘It seems so strange to think on, that we would have known each other all our lives.’ He pushed a random curl out of his face. ‘Do you think we still would have ended up here?’
Dany gave him a small crooked smile. ‘Here? Up beyond the wall, surrounded by free folk? No, not a chance.’
Jon have her a little laugh at that, it wasn’t what he’d been asking but he assumed she knew that.
‘We would have been very different people, both of us, but yes, I think we would have loved each other anyway and Rhaegar would have given us his blessing and we would probably have had two or three children by now.’ She told him as she watched Rhaenys flex her little fingers against her chest.
‘Really? Two or three? Already?’
Dany laughed gently. ‘Yes, in this scenario we would be very much like Jaehaerys and Alysanne, I imagine we would have had at least a dozen before we were done.’ She told him and then snorted at his expression of disbelief, her movement causing Rhaenys to pull herself off her mothers nipple and give a faint cry of protest. A little awkwardly Dany turned her over and directed her to her other breast, she rooted for a moment, little head jerking back and forth over the nipple until she at least latched again and became still except for the furious workings of her tiny cheeks and jaw.
‘A dozen?’
‘Don’t worry Jon, I hardly expect that many. I think we should just concentrate on this one for the time being. We can worry about siblings later.’
‘Aye.’ He agreed.
‘You know, when I was younger and at the mercy of Viserys I used to imagine that had Rhaegar won I would have been betrothed to his son Aegon.’
Jon stilled as he listened to her.
‘Of course that wasn’t you but your brother, Still it catches me off guard sometimes. This heavy feeling of destiny, like all of this was meant to happen.’
‘To what end?’ He asked, though he knew she had no answer.
‘I don’t know, but it seems miraculous that two children who should have always known each other, separated before they were born by war and then by half a world, would end up meeting and falling in love without even knowing what they were to each other. That has to mean something doesn’t it?’ Jon grimaced. ‘I’m not sure I want it to mean anything. If it does than I can only imagine that there is more suffering to come.’
Dany sighed. It was clear she hadn’t meant to upset him. ‘I’m sorry.’ He told her. ‘I didn’t mean to dampen the mood.’
‘You do have a knack for that.’ She admonished gently.
‘So I have been told.’ He took her hand in his, the one that wasn’t cradling the babe and brushed his lips against her knuckles. ‘If we die, we die.’ He told her. ‘But first we live.’ Ygritte’s words from long ago.
‘We live.’ She agreed watching their daughter again. ‘And we heal, and grow strong, so that one day we can return to what we left behind.’
Jon watched her for a while, this new, gentle side of the Dragon Queen. In her joy she looked younger and more vulnerable, not as guarded as she usually was. She made cooing noises at the babe, who couldn’t’ be bothered to divert her attention from her dinner, and seemed completely enthralled in the child’s mere existence.
Only a few moons before he had worried that she would be unfit to take care of their child, her mind shattered and tormented. She had made great strides since then, though he knew her demons had not been vanquished entirely, perhaps they never would be. They were both scarred and traumatized by the lives they had lived and by the things they had been denied. They had both gone to extremes to find purpose in this world and he knew that Daenerys still heard the call of that throne and the power it promised. But for now they had found a simpler purpose in giving their kid the love they had not know. And for now that was enough for both of them.

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