UNDER THE SUMMER SUN

by Tativi

Summary

Tyrion and Sansa escape together from the Purple Wedding in an intensely emotional, romantic and sexual voyage, also full of discovery and a little adventure. I love this couple. This is my first fic and English is not my mother tongue, so I'm sorry for the mistakes. I'm publishing this same work in Spanish and it's called "BAJO EL SOL DEL VERANO". I wish you enjoy this fic! Kisses...

- A translation of BAJO EL SOL DEL VERANO by Tativi
Chapter 1

The *Fast Maiden* honoured her name and was sliding quickly over the waters of the Narrow Sea, propelled by the strong wind. Tyrion was taking care of Sansa in the small cabin he had managed to rent for them both. She suffered from seasickness and her husband was refreshing her forehead with a wet cloth and putting the bucket next to her every time she had an attack of retching. He did not leave her side even for a minute, so as for fear of any of those sailors trying to pay her an unwanted visit (he had seen the lustful looks they had shot his young wife), as for his worry about her condition. The maester aboard brought her soothing infusions and Podrick went to fetch food and he himself saw about emptying the bucket. Tyrion apologized to the loyal lad, assuring him that he himself would do that task if he was not afraid of parting from his wife's bedside. Pod affirmed that he had nothing to forgive him for and that he willingly made that task.

They had escaped at full speed from King's Landing. Soon after Joffrey's body collapsing to death on the floor, undoubtedly due to some kind of poison, Tyrion, taking advantage of the confusion, searched for Sansa and took her hand.

"We have to go just now. They'll charge us for this."

They started to run and Tyrion led her through corridors, followed by Podrick, always the shadow of his master, until reaching the outskirts of the castle without being seen, next to Blackwater Bay. Among the ships of the harbour was the *Fast Maiden*, which was about to set to Pentos. A purse of gold succeeded in encouraging the captain to urge the crew, which was accommodating the cargo, and a few minutes later the ship set sail with favourable wind towards Essos.

They left behind the mournful tolling of the bells. Tyrion sensed that he would not see the capital of the Seven Kingdoms again, unless almost all his family died and no one was left to accuse him for his nephew's death. Because he knew his dear sister must be shouting his name in those precise moments, sentencing him for a crime he had not committed.

*But it hasn't been as if I didn't want to*, he thought sarcastically.

Poor Pod was not going through his best moments either, but he guarded faithfully the cabin door. Tyrion had insisted on renting another one for him, though the boy had refused, but Pod only occupied it during his sleeping hours. The rest of the time he stayed positioned at his masters' door, and he only walked away a little to stretch his legs and breathe the air on the deck when his master, feeling pity for the loyal lad, commanded him to do it.

Tyrion pondered the options regarding the most suitable route from Pentos; the overriding thing to do was taking Sansa far from danger. Getting on to greedy magister Illyrio was not a secure option; he was absolutely capable of selling them to his dear sister Cersei. At the moment, they would have to go on traveling concealed, avoiding the paths. They could not venture falling into the clutches of some dothraki khalasar, outlaws, free companies or slave traders, who lacked scruples in regard to increasing their goods for free. The alternative was going on sailing to Myr and Volantis and, from there, surround the ruins of Valyria to enter the Gulf of Grief and Slaver's Bay. It would be very hard, but it was the only hope they could rely on.

After three days of discomfort and confinement, the *Fast Maiden* arrived at Pentos' harbour. Tyrion helped his wife to get up and she, unsteady, leaned on his strong shoulders while he held her by the waist. Pod followed them and kept an eye on the sailors while they went down the ship, but they were already busy unloading the cargo and did not pay them any attention.
They went away the harbour and Tyrion found a discreet and hardly visible place where Sansa could sit down to rest. He sent Pod to search for an inn which were at least a little presentable and sat down next to the girl, with his dagger ready under the cloak in case someone seemed too interested in them. The captain of the Fast Maiden had sold them traveling cloaks and now both of them covered under them to prevent the passers-by of Pentos from taking notice of their features. Sansa's flamboyant reddish hair, without mentioning her beauty, and his own short height, were enough to call attention to them, so the frayed cloaks were the best camouflage they possessed at the moment.

"Are you feeling better, my lady?," Tyrion asked softly.

"Yes, my lord," she answered. Indeed, she had better appearance since they had landed, but she looked scared and nervous.

He squeezed her hand in a consoling gesture. "I won't let anyone hurt you. I made a vow to protect you and I'm determined to keep it."

She, under the hood that covered almost all her face, threw him a shy smile. "I know it, Tyrion."

His name on her lips was a sweet sound.

The air carried spicy smells, mixed with others less pleasant, but in that area smelled better than any street of King's Landing. That made him remember that Sansa hardly had eaten at all in three days and that he had not either tasted anything decent since the fateful wedding. He wished Pod did not linger too much.

"Sansa... I want you to know that I didn't do it," he dropped suddenly. You care about the opinion she has about you, he told himself.

"I was sure it wasn't you. I had nothing to do with it, either, though it was not as if I didn't want to."

"Then we are two now," he said. She caught his irony and smiled again. "Who do you think that did it?," she asked.

"Joff had lots of enemies. It could have been anyone."

Sansa turned serious. "What are we going to do now, Tyrion?"

"We'll have to escape for a time and go so far as we can." He remained thoughtful. "It comes to my mind an alternative I believe is the only one which can save us."

"Which one is it?," she asked nervously, biting her lip.

He worshipped that unaware gesture she made whenever something worried her. "Looking for Daenerys Targaryen."
Chapter 2

Once accommodated in the inn, Tyrion sent Pod in order to get information about the first ship sailing to Myr, and to buy some plain clothes for Sansa and for him, if the boy managed to find something of his size. While they were fugitives, they would have to blend with common people.

He ordered the inkeeper to carry supper to the room he shared with his wife. It was not a spacious or very comfortable room, but at least the bed was clean, and there was a basin with clear water.

Sansa sat on the mattress with a sigh of relief.

"It's not very much, but I'm afraid this is the best Pod has been able to find," Tyrion apologized. "I'll turn so you have a little privacy. You'll surely want to refresh yourself."

"Thank you, Tyrion." She again gave a hint of the smile he was starting to treasure. He had seen her smile hardly a few times.

He positioned himself next to the closed door and stuck his ear to listen to the outside sounds. He tried to concentrate on the voices and the steps on the wooden floor, but he lost his concentration as soon as he heard the smooth brush of the fabric sliding over the skin and the splash of water.

She was washing herself up at his back. Tyrion immediately felt hot and a tingle on his crotch when he imagined her naked. He mentally reprimanded himself because of those thoughts. She's scarcely more than a girl!, he reprehended himself for the thousandth time. She has suffered hell! And besides, she doesn't love you, neither does she wish to bed you, lecherous dwarf! How is she supposed to wish it? Would you if you were in her place?

It was going to be a long night. It would be the first time they would sleep in the same bed.

He knew sleep would not come easily. He usually did not sleep very well, nor even in his best nights. And today you're going to have her beside you under the sheets. It was going to cost him a great effort not to move his hand to touch her furtively...

"I've finished already," she said, awakening him from his inappropriate daydream. He took a breath to calm himself down and turned around, grinning.

The girl was trying to disentangle her hair with her fingers. He felt tempted to offer her his help, but restrained himself.

"Now I'm going to wash myself. I know I can't improve my looks very much, but I'll do the best I can," he joked.

Sansa sat down, combing her hair and watching the opposite wall lost in her thought.

Tyrion washed himself up the best he could and a short time later supper was brought. They ate it on the small table which was all the furniture along with the bed and two chairs.

He made an attempt to keep a light conversation in order to distract her, and he almost succeeded. He made her laugh a couple of times and felt a knot in his stomach watching how her beautiful face lightened up whenever she laughed. He too told her what he knew about Pentos, the merchant prince and the distinguished magisters, among which Illyrio was one of the most important ones.

"By all means, never trust a merchant from Pentos. And least of all Illyrio Mopatis. He would sell you in a blink," he affirmed, with fake solemnity. And he winked at her, mischievously.
Light knocks sounded on the door, following the secret code he had agreed with Pod, so that Tyrion had no doubt it was the boy. Anyway Tyrion always had the dagger close at hand.

He opened with caution and the boy went in. He gave his master a bundle. Tyrion opened it and examined the contents. A couple of dresses for Sansa, a cloak, some changes of underwear (the boy turned red), and for his master he only had been able to find kids’ items of clothing, but they only distinguished themselves from the adult ones by their size.

"At first light in the morning a ship sets sail towards Myr. I've reserved the cabins."

"Very well, Pod. You're a good squire. I feel sorry about you having to escape with us, but you couldn't stay. They'd have charged you with collusion."

"I know, my lord. I don't mind, there wasn't anything left for me in Westeros."

Tyrion felt moved. "You could've become a knight. But all in all, it's better not to enlarge upon what could've been." He pointed to the boy the food which was still left on the table. "We have ordered supper for you."

"Thank you very much, my lord." The squire took his ration and the remainings of the jug of wine, and he set off to his room as quietly as he had arrived.

"A good boy, your squire," Sansa pointed out.

"The best," her husband affirmed. He cleared his throat. "We should sleep. Tomorrow we'll depart very early."

"Of course."

Tyrion gave her some space to undress and keep her slip. He put on a long shirt, trying not to watch much how the slip clung to the girls' curves. Even so, he watched how her nipples insinuated themselves under the fabric and how her hips stood out. He swallowed and removed his gaze from her, but not before she noticed what he was looking at; she blushed but did not comment anything. They climbed on the bed. The mattress was filled with straw and had bulges on some areas, but probably it was the most comfortable thing they could lie down on. He made sure that he positioned himself as far from her as possible. He heard her sigh.

"Sansa... I'll keep you safe."

"Thank you, Tyrion. Really, thanks for all."

"I don't deserve them. Good night, Sansa."

"Good night, Tyrion."

He kept the dagger under the mattress, always within reach. The door was barred and the window had iron bars. He paid attention to the nocturnal noises. After a while he heard the girl's deep and regular breath, and he was glad she at least could rest and evade herself.

At some point he fell into a restless sleep. He dreamed of himself stretching out his hand to caress his wife's cheek, but she got away and his fingers stayed hanged up in the air, without ever grazing her soft skin.
They departed at dawn. They walked along the streets towards the harbour, surrounded by the morning chill. The activity bustled already, while the crowd was busy with their work, what concealed them three from suspicious eyes.

Tyrion sensed Sansa's stress when the masts of the *Summer Moon* came into view. She was afraid that it was not going to be a pleasant journey, the same as the former one. He squeezed her hand to instill her with courage. "You'll get used to it. Your stomach will settle."

"I hope so."

"It will," he asserted, smiling. "Pod, go and talk with the captain."

The lad overtook them and went next to a strong and bald man with a wasted leather-looking skin. He wore a long beard with some grey strands, perhaps to make up for the lack of hair on the head. He had a beaming look, what pleased Tyrion.

The man recognized the boy with who he had traded the previous afternoon. Pod pointed to Tyrion and Sansa and the captain nodded. Tyrion watched the scene carefully, searching for any suspicious sign. He had the dagger by hand under his cloak. The crew was loading the packages into the hold and other passengers were wandering over the deck. No one looked in their direction. Pod made him a gesture and Tyrion moved forward, with Sansa holding his arm tightly.

"Calm down, my lady. I won't let any damage come upon you."

She was a little pale, but nodded bravely.

They walked up the gangway and the captain welcomed them with his rough voice. After them some other passengers joined the crowd, all of them with the appearance of modest merchants who went to trade and close contracts in other Free Cities, probably. Tyrion feared that at any moment the captors Cersei must have sent to chase them would appear, so he did not trust anyone.

A dwarf with a big scar on the face did not remain unnoticed. He covered his head as much as he could and was not the only dwarf in the world, but it was only a matter of time he would be recognized.

Just as the *Fast Maiden*, the *Summer Moon* had a shabby appearance, needed of a thick coat of paint.

"The journey to Myr is not long," he told Sansa in order to ease her uneasiness. He hoped the winds would go on being favourable, though now that winter had officially come, the weather would tend to be stormier. He did not like the perspective of sailing with the upcoming winter, but it was more preferable than traveling on land.

Not wishing to be the center of attention more than he was due to, and despite his hatred to be locked up, he guided Sansa towards the inside. A cabin boy of Sansa's age showed them their cabin. Pod passed Tyrion the bundle with their belongings and let them alone.

Sansa sat down on the bed.

"I suppose we'll have to find a way of entertaining our time, shut away here," Tyrion said, and immediately he regretted his choice of words. She could catch a double meaning he had not the
intention to give them.

The girl undoubtedly caught it, because her pale cheeks turned red, but she made the effort to ignore it.

"You could tell me about any of the stories you have read," she suggested, with imploring eyes.

His countenance lit up and she observed that he really wished to talk with her, to establish a real communication, not the usual exchange of courtesies. That expression of genuine joy enhanced him. And Sansa felt her heart accelerating a bit.

"What subject would you like?"

"Real stories. I don't want to listen to stupid girlish tales anymore."

He glanced at her surprised, understanding. After her hard learning, the girl had stopped believing in tales of knights and princesses. He felt sorry for her broken dreams.

"Do you like dragons?"

"They fascinate me," she answered with a sparkle in her eyes.

In Tyrion's eyes must shine the same sparkle, since he understood perfectly what she felt.

He too wanted to see the Red Keep burning.
Sansa barely got sick that time. At least she managed not to vomit.

The hours with Tyrion passed quickly and they were creating a progressive mutual understanding. He always had something to tell, either from a book, or something that had happened to him, or things that, as she suspected, he made up on the fly, and made her laugh, as he had an endless collection of funny anecdotes. Sometimes she told him about her childhood in Winterfell and then she felt wistful. She remembered a surprisingly high amount of moments and details she was sure to have forgotten. Whenever she spoke, he looked at her almost without blinking, eager of those hints of her personality which she had not let herself show him in King’s Landing, at least not so openly.

Tyrion did not regard her as stupid or unworthy of sharing any conversation with her, either trivial or more profound. He listened to her with his full attention and encouraged her to express her opinions. That meant a pleasant release to her, a sort of payback, after so many months covering up and pretending. He knew it and every time he had the opportunity, he asked her what she thought about this or that matter.

What was more, he did not mind at all speaking to her as his equal. He had a sharp tongue and restrained it out of respect for her, but he expressed in such a direct way that Sansa often felt her cheeks burning. However, she was getting used to his style and found it strangely liberating. As when her friend Jeyne Poole and she whispered and shared their childish confidences in the hidden corners of Winterfell, far from adults’ ears.

Sometimes, when the ship rocked more than usual, she turned white and Tyrion took her hand. He taught her to concentrate on her breathing to relax herself, and he realized that it worked.

He too told her about anything which popped into his head, to distract her.

At nightfall, sleeping in the same bed was not so awkward, as they no longer felt like two strangers, and the Lannister surname no longer bothered Sansa, as she had stopped linking her husband with his evil family. But there wafted a tension that both noticed and none mentioned. Tyrion wanted to touch her badly. The more he knew her, the more he yearned for feeling her; the need to caress that perfect skin increased, to kiss those lips, to tangle his hands in her shining hair. He did not know if that was love but, if it was not, it very much looked like it, as he never had enough, he did not get tired of looking at her, of hearing her voice, of breathing her fragrance so sweet, even staying in a cabin that smelled rank.

In any case, it was not the same he felt for Shae. He had loved her, but it was a practical love between a mundane man and a mundane woman. Shae was older, experienced and knew how to take care of herself.

Sansa was different from any woman he had been with. A northern lady with a fine education, so young and innocent that she awakened in him intense impulses of protecting her and taking care of her, of keeping her from the evil and the tragedy that insisted on devouring her.

But above all, he was amazed by how much he wished she eventually began to love him. It was the secret wish of all his life. To be loved. With every woman he had possessed, he dreamed of being loved, even though a bit, but he knew it was a useless dream. Only Shae made it come true, and he always would be grateful. But that relationship ended.
That was the first time he had in front of him a young maiden, so gorgeous that it was impossible not turning around to stare at her, a young lass stronger than she seemed, who had survived hell, and his heart pressed inside his chest more than ever, and that fact frightened him because he was afraid of longing for what probably would never be his.

And with his secret dream shouting in his insides, his instincts woke up strongly. So strongly that, as they were lying a few centimetres from one another on the narrow bed, he dreaded any brush, as he had no idea of how much more he would manage to hold on.

Sansa sensed that something worried him but she was not sure about the reason and did not dare to ask, so she remained silent while she noticed his stiffness. She imagined that he touched her in the darkness and that thought caused a tickle in the pit of her stomach. She immediately reprimanded herself for her bold imagination, which did not suit Septa Mordane's code of proper manners. But she could not prevent her mind from rambling and wondered how it would feel that he stroked her with his warm hands. That he gave her a genuine kiss, one of those kisses with the tongue Jeyne Poole said the lovers shared. She felt curiosity about the sensation of touching his blonde hair, about the scar that crossed his face and about the rest of his body.

*Oh, no. You're becoming one of those women in brothels.*

She wondered if her mother had felt that way when she thought about her father.

*They loved one another. They made that thing men and women make in the bed.*

She quickly pushed aside the image of her parents naked and embracing under the sheets. That was not a proper way to remember them. And their remembrance hurt too much still.

Now, more than ever, she needed Lady Catelyn's advice.

*What is a woman supposed to do when she wants her husband to do those... things to her?*

She then knew it. She wanted him to do those things to her. Far from the horrors of King's Landing, her almost fully womanly body was awakening beside that clever, gentle, brave and *passionate* man.

Tyrion Lannister.

But she did not move.
Chapter 5

Later, Tyrion shook her to wake her up from a nightmare that was tormenting her. She, confused in the fogs of the vanishing dream, clung to him and felt an immediate relief. Her husband, astonished, remained still, not wanting to scare her. She had coiled her arms around his back and her face was buried on his chest. He, cautiously, enclosed her and stroked her hair.

Then Sansa moved away her face and looked him in the eye. What he saw in hers made his insides start to boil and his crotch reacted. She must have sensed the reaction of his body as she opened her mouth and turned burning red. The next thing she realized was herself closing the space between their faces and a moment later she kissed him fully on the lips.

He, absolutely amazed, hardly reacted for a second, after which he reciprocated the kiss ardently. He grabbed her head with both hands to draw her nearer to him and touched her lips with his tongue. The moan the girl gave off was in the verge of driving him mad with lust. Instinctively, Sansa opened her mouth to allow him access, and Tyrion dove his tongue. She met him with hers and both tongues danced stuck together, with such surrender that they pulled up moans from their throats.

Sansa grasped his shirt and slid her palms over his chest, rubbing the soft blond hair which was visible upon the open collar of the garment. His skin shivered anywhere she touched it and he held his breath. She felt exhilarated to discover she could wield such power upon him and she got bolder. Without breaking the passionate kiss that lingered as a slow and delightful torment, Sansa slid her hands under the fabric and touched the muscles of his abdomen and chest.

Tyrion, who by then was half mad with desire, was kissing her on her earlobes and her neck, leaving a trace of saliva which made her shiver when she felt the contrast between the heat of his lips and tongue and the coolness of the air on her wet skin. His eager hands descended from her head to her neck, the shoulders and finally...

Oh, gods.

A palm closed on her breast, squeezing it almost strongly, but no so as to cause her pain, and that was so incredibly hot that she felt some sort of current that flowed down, towards her sex, which she felt soaked and, above all, she wanted him to touch her precisely there.

Never in her life she had desired anything with such vehemence.

He seemed to know perfectly what her body needed. At some moment he had undressed her completely. His fingers played with her hardened nipples and, a moment later, his tongue replaced his fingers. His hands moved down, going around her hips and grabbing her round buttocks, and after that they moved up again and...

Oh, for the Seven Kingdoms!

He was caressing her exactly there. For a moment she felt embarrassed of her own wetness, but he did not mind at all, on the contrary, when he felt her wetness his breathing caught in his throat for a second and he released it, shivering.

His fingers slid between her secret folds and she, automatically, opened her legs to allow him more access.

Never in her life she had experienced anything remotely resembling that sensation.
But when he moved down his head and deposited kisses on her belly, and went down until he reached the hair between her legs, she thought she was going to explode out of pleasure.

She had no idea that men did that to women. Kissing them exactly there.

His tongue sank into her folds and moved in expert circles, encircling a spot which was driving her crazy.

By then Sansa was so aroused that she had forgotten about shyness and modesty. She had transformed into one of those women in brothels and she did not mind.

Nothing could mind her less with his mouth between her legs, a hand groping her breast and the other...

*For all the gods!*

Tyrion introduced a finger inside of her. At first it hurt a little but soon her interior adapted and she felt both full and incomplete while he made a swinging movement and the finger went in and out.

She wanted more. She needed to feel complete.

As always, he knew what her body wanted. With his lips, tongue and fingers he drove her to a devastating climax that hit all her being. Sansa cried out, and she did not mind in the least that all the ship heard her. For once in her life, she could not care less about what others thought of her. By then, all that mattered was him upon her, inside of her.

Tyrion allowed her to recover. She started to regain control over her erratic breathing and sweat ran down her flesh. She smiled at him with such joy that he thought his heart would stop at any moment. They shared another long and wet kiss and she felt the fire of her womb starting to burn again.

"Let me see you," she requested.

Tyrion, suddenly unsure, took off his shirt and breeches and Sansa stared at his naked body. The blond hair descended from the muscled chest towards the flat belly and rounded his erect shaft. He hesitated, but the almost wild look in her eyes erased all his fears. The nod she aimed at him was enough. Tyrion positioned himself at her entrance and pushed. The pain was sharp the more he introduced his shaft and stretched her tight hole. He did it as slowly as he could, but the pain was unavoidable.

"It's going to hurt, darling. But I'll try to provide you with all the pleasure possible."

"I know, my love. Fuck me."

He looked at her, astonished. "Repeat what you have said."

"I've said: fuck me," she said in a low, suggestive voice, which accelerated his heartbeats.

"With all my pleasure, but I want you to repeat the first part," he requested, smiling mischievously, trying to cover up the intense emotion that was showing clearly through his green eyes.

"My love," she stated, with such a tender voice that some tears blinded him for an instant.

"I love you, Sansa." And he knew it was the truth.

"I love you too, Tyrion." That time the kiss was sweet, and he held her face with adoration.
"And now, what about proceeding with the second part?," she inquired with a slightly timid and wicked tone and her voice trembling in anticipation.

He introduced himself a little more and she tensed around him. Tyrion caressed with his fingers her spot of pleasure (it's called *clitoris*, he whispered by her ear) and instantly Sansa felt the fire reigniting. He gave a last push and broke her maidenhead. Sansa restrained a cry, but he quickly worked on her clit again and started to move upon and into her, going in and out, and then placed his hands resting on the bed, near both sides of her waist and without taking his eyes from hers for a single moment.

He changed his position so he knelt down and put her legs upon his shoulders. He went on pushing inside of her while stimulating her clit with his fingers. She felt the climax coming for the second time and arched her back completely, crying out and grasping the sheets. Some moments later, he tensed, gave a last push and released a hoarse moan. Sansa felt his hot seed spilling into her, and she found that sensation incredibly arousing.

Tyrion, with his drenched hair on his forehead, fell upon her, with a laboured breathing. The young girl hugged him and kissed him on the top of his head, feeling completely satisfied and happy. He wanted to move away from her in order not to bother her with his weight, but she retained him for some minutes. He rolled to his side of the bed, they embraced one another and fell into a deep sleep a few seconds later.
Some discreet knocks on the door removed them from their sleep.

"It's the hour," Pod announced. "We'll arrive at Myr in short."

"Thanks, Pod," muttered Tyrion, sleepy. "We won't be late."

The last thing he wanted to do was to get up from that bed and see how she, his hot wife, covered her glorious body. He wanted to fuck her raw all day long, to be sincere. Now he knew what he would miss, he did not fancy anything more than laying her down on any surface and making her cry out his name in ecstasy until her voice turned hoarse.

She must have read his intentions, because she quickly jumped from bed playfully and, naked and unchaste, provoking him, she headed for the bundle of clothes.

"Do you think the ship will wait?", he asked, with a husky voice and sparkling eyes.

"What for, my lord?"

*Damn, playing the game of the modest lady.* That aroused him even more. "For me making you scream my name once again."

It was lovely how easily he succeeded in making her turn red. But under the sheets he had discovered that she found inviting his erotic language.

"Then we'll have to hurry, my lord." He made her lie down on the bed. He took her legs, placed them on his shoulders and penetrated her without more considerateness, with ferocity. It was only her second time and it hurt, but that rudeness roused her too, her man's urgent need. He rubbed her clit exactly on the spot he knew would lead her quickly to her climax. Barely a minute later, she was convulsing, with his name in her lips, and he finished some seconds after her, and every time that with every spasm he ejected his seed into her depths, he whispered her name like a prayer.

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They set off to the deck and they were welcome by such a beautiful sunrise that it took their breath away. They looked at it holding hands. Pod kept himself at a discreet distance, and on his lips danced the hint of a smile. He had heard his masters' night and morning activities and he was glad they had decided to take that step. Perhaps, if they had not had to flee, they would not have taken the step, at least not so soon. But circumstances were special and being isolated and together all the time, free from the pressures of the Red Keep, had worked.

The rising sun made domes, towers and roofs shine brightly, suffusing Myr in a golden light. Tyrion almost could forget he was a chased runaway. But he did not. He touched the dagger, made sure Sansa and himself were properly hidden under the hoods and got away from the harbour. Pod stayed back asking for the next vessel to Volantis, and Tyrion and Sansa mixed with the crowd, awaiting. After a long amount of time the lad came back.

"No boat is leaving for Volantis until two days," he announced, a bit crestfallen.

"Two days? Well, let's get out of here. The less we are seen, the best, above all if we have to stay in this place for two days."

"They too have told me where we can find proper inns."
"Well, let's go. Pod, you don't know how glad I am that you always carried upon you my purses of gold. I believe you were the only boy in the Seven Kingdoms whom I could entrust my money to, without him stealing a single coin," Tyrion praised, grinning.

"I'd never steal anyone I respect, my lord."

"You'd never steal anyone, unless I commanded it to you."

"Only if you commanded it," answered the lad with another grin.

"Thanks to your foresight, we can afford a modest but financially stable journey, at least until we meet the Mother of Dragons."

Sansa took part in the conversation. "Do you think she will accept us?"

"I'm certain. I've heard she grants audiences to almost anyone who requests for them. I don't believe she will let pass the opportunity to meet a Lannister and a Stark who are outlaws."

She sighed, worried.

"I hope you're right and she is a reasonable queen."

"Reasonable kings or queens rarely exist, darling. But a few of them try to do things better. It seems Daenerys belongs to this kind. She probably is more sensible than the kings I've met until now. Considering one of those kings was Joffrey, and I doubt something worst than him can exist, I would say there are quite chances that the Targaryen queen has some wit. At least, enough to let me convince her of joining her service."

"You would be an excellent adviser," praised Sansa.

"I aspire to that," he smiled. "But for now I aspire to search for a place where lying down with you and making you forget about kings and queens, flees, ships, bastards and motherfuckers," he muttered to her.

She again blushed broadly to her hair roots.
Tyrion knew how much his wife missed her extinct family and her ruined home, now sullied by Roose Bolton's presence, the man who had assassinated Robb Stark. Sometimes she kept looking through the window, with her eyes lost in the distance, and some tears ran down her cheeks. He respected her grief and moved away to another corner of the room, allowing her to dispose of a little privacy to mourn her relatives.

There were moments when he looked at her and could not believe that girl was his and loved him. Him, the Demon Monkey presumably murderer of a king. He had suffered such great disappointments in his life that he feared the happiness he had just discovered along with Sansa would slip away from him, like any other thing which was good and beautiful. He made an effort to push aside those negative thoughts. Sansa was his and he would fight with all his will to keep her. She was all that was left for him. He had no privileges anymore, in the eyes of Westeros he had stained the Lannister name (as if it were not stained enough already), and he was an outlaw. For him King's Landing was buried, and Casterly Rock was a distant memory.

He wondered why he had not run away with Shae when she asked him to. When he had his face split in two and was rotting in the hovel where they had thrown him away. When he saw enemies in every corner, killers sent by Cersei to conclude the task Ser Mandon could not fulfill in the Battle of Blackwater.

They thanked him that way for fighting for the city.

Then why had not he sent everyone to hell and run to the Free Cities to eat, drink, fuck and live with Shae?

Because, like an asshole, he still believed he had lots to do in the game of thrones. Because he loved that game.

Yes, he loved it more than he loved Shae. But she stayed with him. And where was Shae by now? He had to speak to her with all the harshness he could gather in order to make her leave and be safe from Tywin's rage.

He hoped she were doing well and perhaps some day she would forgive him.

He decided to remain in that rats hole the Red Keep was and, in the end, it had been useless... The only thing he did not regret about his decision was Sansa. At the time he felt miserable because of his father (for the thousandth time), for forcing her to marry him. But currently he knew he would relive all that as long as she was there. He again would feel humiliated putting her on the Lannister cape upon her shoulders in the sept, he again would get stinky drunk in an embarrassing reception, he again would feel her frightened look in their wedding night and the sting of her rejection... He would pass again through all that so as to have her beside him as he had her now. She did not look at him scared anymore, she did not detest his name. In her eyes shone love and desire, something so incredible he was not able to believe it yet.

And if he played well his cards with the Mother of Dragons, he still could go back to the game of thrones.

The two days he stayed in Myr were the happiest Tyrion remembered. Despite being a runaway sought for regicide, not having a home and not knowing how he would manage to convince the
queen it was worthy to accept him in her entourage, every time he lost himself in his wife's body he did not regret anything.

In the small hours of the second day, he awoke in the most unexpected way. She was taking him in her mouth. He was so surprised he could not say a single word. He only dared to watch her and moan while her lips and tongue wrapped him. Without being able to prevent it, his hips moved on their own accord, propelling him toward her warm and wet throat. She did her best enthusiastically, and he held her head to set the pace he wanted.

*She is so young and ardent... At this rate we won't reach Meereen*, he thought, with a lewd grin.

Tyrion felt the tension prior to his climax.

"Sansa," he warned. "I'm going to..."

She went on and he let go. A hoarse and guttural moan arose from his throat while his seed spilled. Sansa received it a little surprised, but without flinching or looking at him in revulsion. He remembered that a few whores he had asked to perform him a fellatio looked at him with such displeasure (as if the fact of doing it to the *Imp* was an offense), that he in those cases gave up. But Sansa surprised him day after day.

"You don't have to do that if you really don't like it, darling."

"I've been glad of doing it to you because I know you wanted me to do were so aroused in your dreams that I couldn't help it." She smiled at him maliciously. "You did it to me and was... amazing."

"What have I done well to deserve a wife like you?"

"You want me to make a list?"

They shared a tender kiss and he tasted himself.

"I suppose I must seek revenge," Tyrion said, winking at her.

"A Lannister always pays his debts?" Uttered by her, the popular saying lacked every trace of threat and he laughed.

"This Lannister always pays them." He laid down between her legs and payed his debt more than generously.
Pod awoke them, as it was his routine.

"This kid needs a woman. Thus he would stop pounding on our damned door every morning," protested Tyrion, half asleep.

"Who would awake us then?"

"No one. I won't pay a very pleasant debt to anyone who takes us out of bed before noon."

"Only until noon?"

"Woman, if you go on provoking me this way you're going to really know what a debt is. And not only until noon."

Sansa roared with laughter while she was dressing herself. "I will have to test that," she said, giggling.

"You won't be so eager when I take your word."

"What do you bet?," she challenged.

"A full jug of Dornish red wine to bear a whole day of fucking. If you win, I'll drink it to your health. If you lose, you'll drink it, though I'll let you do it slowly."

"And if we end in a tie?"

"We'll share it." He winked.

They got dressed, ate a quick breakfast and Sansa remained thoughtful while they were walking to the ship.

"You're very quiet. What are you thinking?"

"Tyrion, don't take it bad, but... " She hesitated. "I think we should not have children yet." She glanced at him to register his reaction. He listened to her with his full attention and encouraged her to continue, without showing anything. "Of course I wish to have children of yours, Tyrion, children of yours and mine." She squeezed his hand. "But it's not the moment yet. In the Red Keep, once I heard a couple of kitchen wenches talking about a... a tea which prevents women from conception." She blushed and looked at the floor.

Tyrion held her chin with his fingers and made her look him in the eye.

"The moon tea. It's very sensible on your part, Sansa. You don't offend me proposing it, in fact I think it's a great idea." He smiled at her, to reinforce it. "Our position is very uncertain and indeed we don't need more added difficulties, and a pregnancy in the current circumstances it's not the most appropriate." He stroked her cheek tenderly. "I as well wish our own children, darling. But you're right, it's not the moment. I can get you moon tea. In Volantis I'll send Pod to find it."

"Thanks, love." She touched her belly with a sad expression, but she quickly recovered.

"Moreover, my dear, you're still very young. It's better for you not to go through birth until your body is completely grown. I don't want you to take more risks than necessary. And I would dare to
Sansa already had got used to sailing and she sometimes seemed restless in the seclusion of their cabin, longing for breathing fresh air and watching the views, but she did not complain. It was dangerous to show themselves and she once more resigned to the narrow walls of a small and foul-smelling cabin. She was always grateful for having Tyrion beside her. He was the most patient and the kindest partner anyone might dream of.

The intimacy provided by their forced isolation encouraged their relationship to become deeper and deeper, in a way that surely would not have been possible while she was a prisoner in King's Landing, surrounded by enemies and without allowing herself a single minute of relax, always pretending and playing the perfect lady. Joffrey's, Tywin's and Cersei's misdeeds, as well as the constant fear with which she lived, prevented her from appreciating the great ally with whom she counted on as he deserved to be appreciated. In those weeks of hesitant relationship, there were intervals of certain understanding with Tyrion, in which they went to the point of jesting and laughing together, until she heard the news of the brutal slaughter at The Twins. She shut herself, not wanting to see anyone and begging the cruel gods to let her join her dead family. But then, during Joffrey's horrible wedding, Sansa felt pity for her husband and pulled herself away from her self-pity in order to offer him some comfort, even if with some little gestures.

And now that they both were at mortal peril, fleeing to get as far as they could from Tywin's and Cersei's clutches, and they only had one another, she did not have the need to pretend anymore in front of anyone, and felt freer than she remembered in years. And her heart chose him, her brave husband, valiant, strong and good, exactly what her father had wished for her.

Sometimes they stayed embraced in a comfortable silence. Without talking about the past, without making future plans that did not go further from joining the Mother of Dragon's service. Without making love. They fell asleep and, when they awoke, it was usually Sansa who attacked her husband, and he let her do as she wished, to show her he was totally in her hands and she could do with him what suited her. She too liked taking control, and he understood her. He gave her wings to experience and search for what was more pleasurable for her. He encouraged her to make her fantasies come true, to express herself freely, to use a spontaneous language. At first she did not feel completely comfortable, but he did not hurry her and let her act as her inner impulses told her. And after verifying that her husband never laughed at her, nor reprimanded or restricted her, and that he was ready to follow her to any invention and mischief, Sansa was forgetting the restraints of her strict northern education, though only in the bedroom.

If it not were for the tension of the escaping and the troubles that oppressed them, Tyrion would be in a constant state of euphoria. But in spite of the fear that overwhelmed him, he desired Sansa all the time, even in his sleep. And, greater than his desire, was the need to keep her beside him, simply. He was happy only with her presence, knowing that she requited his feelings.

Given the high frequency of their lovemaking, she would not last long without getting pregnant, if she was not yet. They had to hurry in acquiring the moon tea. Tyrion pondered the possibility of being sterile. Despite all the women he had slept with (so many of them that he could not remember each one), not a single one of them had complained about any little bastard in her belly. Perhaps they took the healthy habit of drinking moon tea. Prostitutes had their methods to prevent pregnancy.

Neither Tyrion nor Sansa would have imagined that it could exist beauty inside a cabin, in a ship that was not for recreation, but a cabotage vessel, dirty and overcrowded, which moved forward...
through the unsteady winter climate.
Chapter 9

Volantis, the most ancient of the Free Cities, was famous for its numerous population of slaves with tattoos on their faces, depending on the job they were forced to do. Even there the fall of winter let itself be noticed, because the air was not suffocating as people said it was in summer.

They went along the Long Bridge, filled with crowds that were moving restlessly everywhere. Tyrion and Pod carried their weapons within reach and watched attentively their surroundings, just in case they observed any suspicious sign. Tyrion and Sansa sat down and waited for Pod to find lodging, almost hidden to the eyes under a wooden staircase, watching a red priestess of the Lord of Light who preached in High Valyrian for a large crowd. Tyrion knew that language, because he had studied it during his youth in Casterly Rock, and he translated for Sansa.

"Summing up, she says that hope lies in the Dragon Queen. Of course, the Lord of Light is a friend of dragons, due to their affinity for fire. For my taste, these people feel too much fondness for roast and not precisely made of the kind of meat I like eating," he pointed out, ironically.

"Everyone who listens to her is a slave," noted Sansa.

"Now that the Dragon Queen has interrupted all slave trade in Slaver's Bay and is freeing thousands of people, this poor crowd begins to cherish hope and will listen to anyone who speaks to them about the woman who is fighting for them." He looked at the people with bitter sympathy.
"When you have nothing, you have nothing to lose."

"I was a slave in King's Landing as well. I did not have a tattoo like these people, but one can be a slave in many ways, don't you think?"

Tyrion kissed her hand.

"Yes, darling. There are many more slaves than can be seen."

"Do you believe we'll be free some day?"

He kept silent for a few moments.

"I doubt it, my dear. But, if we have to live tied with chains, I would like you to share yours with me for the rest of our lives."

Tears filled Sansa's eyes. She covered his cheek with her palm.

"Always."

Pod, as efficient as he usually was, did not take a long time to go back and led them to the inn. That time, in addition to the usual scanning through the harbour in search for a transport for their next destination, Tyrion assigned him to obtain plenty of moon tea. It did not matter where he went, to brothels if necessary, but Tyrion urged him to get as much as it could be possible. Pod nodded and left, as quiet and discreet as his natural condition was.

Tyrion loved the boy as if he were his own son. He could never reward him enough for the loyalty and diligence he displayed day after day. If not for him, they would not even have went beyond the Red Keep, probably.
To all his worries, he added the fact that something could happen to the young squire. He was perfectly capable of defending himself, because despite his great shyness and his awkwardness in mundane behaviour, as a warrior he possessed an unusual ability, very remarkable in someone who, regarding matters of social protocol, almost stumbled with his own feet. Tyrion tried to calm down with those reasons. Pod was a smart and nimble boy and knew how to blend with shadows. He did not speak a single word of Valyrian, but in exchange of a few coins any kid who understood the common tongue offered himself to take the role of interpreter, and thus Pod got along with the locals.

Sansa stared at the Volantine scenery through the small window of their room, caring not to get very near the hollow. Tyrion had warned her about not letting the outsiders see her, and she never forgot his warnings. He wished he could take her to some pretty place in the open air, where strolling and having fun without being aware of anything or anyone. She deserved to have the whole world at her feet and the freedom to move as it was her will. He sighed, promising himself to give her that gift, one way or another.

He felt his heart so swollen for her that his chest hurt. One day I'll take you to the most beautiful place in the world to see you dance under the summer sun.

Sansa turned around, aware of him gazing at her with intensity.

"Why are you looking at me like that?," she asked, moved.

"Because I love you," he responded honestly, with his soul in his eyes.

As an answer, she gave him the sweetest kiss a man could receive.
Chapter 10

Sailing from Volantis to the Gulf of Grief was the most complicated part of the route. They had to go around the Valyrian islands. All sailors feared the Doom which had condemned the extinct Free Hold and the detour caused a considerable delay. But there was no other choice.

Their next destination was Tolos. Tyrion was impatient to set sail, before the war that the Targaryen queen was developing in Slaver's Bay blocked the maritime traffic. He foresaw that the cities in alliance with the nobility from Astapor, Yunkai and Meereen would not take long to send their fleet to pester the queen's forces, and the three of them had to pass through there before that area became a battlefield.

Unfortunately, they would not depart to Tolos up within a week, and the journey would not be short. If there were no incidents, the voyage lasted around twenty or twenty five days.

Thus it would take them a month, more or less. And still it would be left a stretch to Meereen.

However, he guarded himself from transmitting those worries to Sansa at the moment. For the first time since she left Winterfell, she was happy again and Tyrion wanted the young girl to enjoy life as much as she could. She laughed and joked in their privacy, and went on displaying the lady of the North outdoors, even though she was not the lady of any castle. Her husband did not tire of admiring the subtle change that was taking place inside of her.

She was not a little girl any more. In any sense of the word.

Pod brought a bag containing some herbs. With red cheeks, he told Tyrion that he had bought them to a brothel keeper and explained the way to prepare the infusion. Lady Sansa must drink it every night.

Tyrion tried to think about a way to make enjoyable the period of staying in Volantis. Sansa would accept without complaining the perspective of spending a week in an inn's room, but he ached seeing her resigned to a seclusion unnatural for a girl who had not reached fifteen days of the name yet.

What other thing could they do without calling attention to them? He never forgot Varys' little birds, and he did not trust the Counselor of Whispers. It was more than probable that Cersei had commanded him to find out about the wanderings of the fugitives, and the Spider could not deny a direct order from the regent queen. Varys was the best informed person in the world; it would not cost him much effort to fulfill that command. Tyrion knew that if the Spider had not sold them yet it was due, either to their ability to disguise properly (hardly probable), or to their good luck (less probable), or to the eunuch's mysterious motives to keep the secrecy. This seemed the most suitable option to Tyrion, in case Varys knew where they were and nevertheless he decided to shut up about what he had found out.

In the end, it was useless to try to conceal, but Tyrion was dealing with the most important mission of his life, keeping Sansa safe, and he would do everything that was in his power to achieve it. Because of that, they had to be the most cautious they could be.

He racked his brains trying to make up something which could entertain the girl without exposing her excessively. He understood he was the main problem, because his height made him easily recognisable, while Sansa could pretend being one more folk among people, whenever she wore her cloak over her hair. If she walked beside Pod and Tyrion followed them from a cautious
distance, both teenagers would look like ordinary passers-by and no one would relate them to the dwarf.

It would imply not having Sansa within quick reach, and that plan did not convince him completely, but not because he did not trust Pod's ability to protect his lady, but because she could not count on them both to protect her, and two always were better than one. But if there was no other choice left, they would have to do it that way.

The safest option was to stay among people. When oneself wanted to pass unnoticed, nothing like mixing with everyone. An idea occurred to him. He would take Sansa to the market, which would be like markets in all cities: noisy, flamboyant and lively. She would entertain herself looking at the stalls, watching the buyers haggling, touching fabrics, smelling perfumes, admiring the exposed items. What woman did not like going to the market? Pod would not leave her side and Tyrion would keep focused on them in the distance. He would take advantage of the visit to buy her a gift without her being aware, and he would surprise her when they joined at the inn.

A simple plan that might work without exposing her to much risk. Sansa and Pod should have their faces and hair hidden under their cloaks.

He would keep the secret until Sansa was in the market. As it was not a very brilliant plan, he at least would cover it with an aura of mystery.
Chapter 11

Three days later, Tyrion got up earlier and Sansa, startled that he did not lay down with her more time under the sheets, woke up suddenly.

"Don't you stay here with me?"

"I would like nothing more than that, my love, but today we have other plans. Get ready," he suggested, enigmatic.

"What plans?" She opened her eyes wide.

"You'll see," answered her husband, elusive.

"I like surprises, but... Won't it be dangerous?"

"Not more than the usual." He kissed her on the lips. "Keep calm. You'll see how everything is going to be all right and you'll enjoy yourself."

"Really?"

"I promise."

"I love you, Tyrion."

"I love you too, Sansa."

She combed her hair in the northern style, aware that it was useless to wear a hairstyle as she would cover it, but she liked to do it and it helped her to remember that she continued to be Sansa Stark of Winterfell.

They concealed under their cloaks and joined Pod.

"Sansa, you'll walk beside Pod. I'll go behind, to enough distance for people not to relate me to you. It will be more difficult to be recognised if the three of us don't go together. You must not look at me or give the slightest hint that you know me, all right?"

She nodded.

They got out to the clean air of the morning. Tyrion waited for Sansa and Pod to go ahead and he walked one block behind them, and got into the street. People, most of them slaves, moved around and were busy here and there. It could be seen the decline and neglect that devoured certain sections of the city, which did not recover from the fall of Valyria. It did not hold anymore its ancient and proud splendor.

The Long Bridge was bustling with activity, during the hours of the market. Tyrion could not distinguish the teenagers' faces, but when he saw Pod making a gesture pointing to the market, he was certain the boy had just told Sansa about the surprise. He did not register their reaction from that distance. She and the squire got into the crowd and Tyrion feared losing them of his sight, but he forced himself to walk naturally. He caught a glimpse of Sansa's hood and focused on her, thanks to her tall height, which surpassed most of the women who wandered among the stalls. Many other people wore cloaks or veils, so the girl's attire did not stand out especially among the rest.
He wanted to buy her a little present. The austere northern education was contrary to ostentation, so Sansa did not feel a special interest toward jewelry. She did not wear earrings, and the only necklace she had was a present from Lord Eddard, which she barely took off. Tyrion remembered that for a while she wore proudly a pendant Joffrey gave to her, equal to another of Cersei’s. But since he commanded to behead her father, she did not wear it again.

When Tyrion married her, he considered that, as her husband, and a very wealthy husband, he must provide her with possessions worthy of her new Lannister status. But he cast that aside, because he was certain that she would thank him very politely and coldly and would throw his gifts into the bottom of a chest to forget about them.

Nothing he gave her then would be welcome. The rift between them was very wide in the den of Lannister lions.

At that precise moment, a bright little object attracted his attention. It was a silver brooch with the shape of a snowflake. The beautiful symmetry of the hexagonal figure and its complicated labour of chisel engraving conferred it a superb finish. Tyrion smiled, glad; a snowflake was a perfect gift for a northern girl. A little remembrance of Winterfell and her family. He haggled with the seller and acquired it at cheap price. It was a simple brooch, lacking ornaments of gemstones. She would prefer it to a sumptuous jewel which, on the other hand, Tyrion could not afford. Some time ago he never cared about expenses and it was not easy to change those habits, but he had no other choice.

Content, he put the gift into his cloak pocket and went ahead, looking after Sansa, who was walking from stall to stall admiring the stuff. He had given Pod instructions to point out to Sansa that she could buy what she wanted, but she, moderated, restricted herself to only glancing.

More ahead, in the square where the red priestess they had seen the day of their arrival usually preaching, a group of traveling acrobats were entertaining the audience with juggling acts, vulgar songs, jokes and parodies of jousts, riding pigs. It consisted of a group of dwarves and Tyrion felt a sting of bitterness.

"Ey, you. Shouldn't you be among them?," a man shouted to him, looking him from head to toe. The crowd burst out laughing and many eyes glanced at him. Tyrion got tense; the last he wanted was to be the focus of attention.

"I'm old for that," he answered in Valyrian.

The spectators laughed and turned their attention to the show again. Tyrion sighed, relieved. He watched Sansa, who was a few yards to his right, concealed among the folks. He did not see her face, but imagined that she too must have got startled. She said something to Pod and them both went straight ahead to return along the same way they had followed previously.

They made the tour in reverse order through the Long Bridge, without stopping. Tyrion understood that for Sansa the entertainment had ended. He felt a great tenderness toward her, for worrying so much for him. But sorrow poured into him, too, because for her that little while of amusement through the streets of Volantis had finished so soon.

They went back to the inn and Tyrion touched the brooch. His mood improved immediately.
Chapter 12

Surreptitiously, while Sansa was with her back to him taking off her cloak, Tyrion deposited the gift on the bed. He took the girl's cloak and his own and hanged them on a hook of the wall.

"What do you think of the surprise?," he asked innocently.

"Oh, Tyrion. I loved your idea of visiting the market. Thank you very much. The truth is I needed to get out to breathe fresh air and have some fun looking at something different from the walls of this room."

"Yes, I imagine that even my handsome face must tire out having it opposite oneself the whole day long," he jested.

"Oh, don't say that. I adore your face," she affirmed, passionately. She leaned to kiss him. "Do you want me to show you how I adore it?," she insinuated by his ear.

Tyrion hardened instantly.

"Ummm, I wouldn't say no." He pushed her softly toward the bed.

Sansa opened her eyes wide.

"What's that?"

"What's what?" He faked innocence.

She stretched her hand and took the brooch.

"Oh! It's a brooch! Have you bought it for me?"

He turned to one side and another comically, as if searching for another person.

"I don't see anyone else in this room. And you?" He smiled from ear to ear, teasing.

"You silly man! Don't laugh at me," she exclaimed, wrapping her arms around his neck and kissing him soundly. "It's beautiful. I don't know how to thank you." Tears filled her eyes.

"It's enough for me to see you happy, my love," he said, taking her face in his hands. "I thought it was ideal for you."

"It is. You have brought my old home here." Her voice trembled. "But now you're my home."

He kissed her with devotion, and a tear of hers wetted his own cheek.

Later, nestled in the bed, Sansa rested on his chest.

"I'm sorry about the dwarves' show, Tyrion. It remembered me of Joffrey's wedding."

"That's what dwarves who aren't thrown to dogs at birth are good for, if they don't carry the Lannister surname. But it's not your fault, darling. Don't apologise for something of which you're not responsible." He caressed the silky skin of her back.

"It's only that I feel outraged about different people being belittled that way. No one is guilty for
"Say that to my father." Tyrion made a grimace of contempt. "But what matters for me is how you see me." He kissed her forehead.

"I see you as the most attractive man in the earth. Much more than any of those handsome knights. Almost all of them are mean cowards whose title is too good for them, or on the other hand they are incapable of loving a woman. You are my knight, my true knight, who fulfils his oaths." She rubbed his nose with hers. "One of these days I'll appoint you my personal knight."

"You'll need a sword." He grinned on her forehead.

"Pod's will suffice." They burst out laughing, he tickled her and Sansa hit him with the pillow to stop him, red with laughter. "Do you think this is a serious marriage, my lord?"

"Absolutely serious, my lady. I'm on the verge of showing you the seriousness of this marriage," he said with a muffled voice, as he snaked quickly under the sheet.

Her cackle transformed into a moan of pleasure.

Tyrion regretted that the week in Volantis came to an end. They were such wonderful days that he did not wish them to finish ever.

But they moved very fast, as every good thing.

They almost could forget about the threat that was hanging over their heads. Almost. Cersei took care that they did not. Even from so far away, his dear sister spread her claws.

A Lannister always paid his debts. Cersei was not the only Lannister. Tyrion was one as well. I'm not going to give you on a silver plate my head or Sansa's, sister. And I too know how to extend my claws.

They got ready to set forth on the penultimate period of their escape. Possibly the longest and hardest. If they succeeded in reaching Tolos and war had not blocked the waters of Slaver's Bay, they still would have options to achieve their goal.

The *Pearl of Ghis* was a merchant ship of about fifty yards length and a cargo consisting of Myrish laces, Westerosi wines, oil and spices. It was the biggest ship anchored in the harbour of Volantis and the crew was preparing it for the long journey it was about to face. As they went ahead toward the dock, Tyrion squeezed Sansa's hand, to help her keeping at bay the uneasiness that the girl felt faced with the perspective of sailing. That period worried her more than the previous ones, because they would get into very dangerous areas. On the one hand the Doom of Valyria weighed heavily, and all maritime routes avoided it. On the other hand, in the slaver territory where they were, the spirit of war was spread through the atmosphere, and even Sansa was not ignorant of the opposition of Volantis and Tolos to the Silver Queen. People talked around Sansa and a few of them used the common language; a week of stay in a city was enough to find out about some things, no matter how isolated oneself lived. The subject of most conversations was Daenerys Targaryen. The free residents despised her, and the slaves acclaimed her behind their masters' backs.

Among the passengers who would be their traveling partners was a red priest with a very dark complexion and a slave trader who was carrying in chains three blonde girls with a very pale skin, surely natives from Lys, with tears tattooed on their cheeks. Prostitutes. Sansa felt full of pity and rage for those poor girls, who must be of her same age more or less, except one who looked to be
no more than twelve years old. She exchanged an angry look with Tyrion, who given his expression was obvious that was thinking exactly the same as her.

He caught Pod watching the girls and in his eyes shone as well rage and sympathy. As his master, Pod respected prostitutes. In King's Landing, Shae told Sansa about a rumour according to which the lad visited Littlefinger's brothel and, when he went back to the Red Keep, his purse of gold was untouched. Or the women were so impressed with his amatory talents that they decided not to collect his money (Tyrion's money), or (and Sansa inclined more to this) he had treated them so gently that they changed their minds and made an exception with him. It was not very common that a man was kind with whores.

Pod did not take his gaze from them but, as opposite to the rest of men, either members of the crew or passengers, he did not look at them as if they were loafs of meat. The girls were waiting beside their master to get on the ship, very still and silent. The three of them had bruises and wounds, no doubt due to the mistreat they suffered.

Pod clenched his fists, and Sansa knew, not without a certain feeling of revenge, that that damned girls' batterer was in great risk of ending himself offering company to fish at the bottom of the sea, before arriving at Tolos.

The captain gave the signal to board and everyone walked along the footbridge. He demanded them mockingly to pray their gods and see if any of them payed attention and let the Pearl of Ghis succeed. He welcomed the red priest with a comical bow, and Sansa noticed a grimace of hatred in his wrinkled face when the slave trader walked pass him with the chained girls.

"Sewer rat," he spat under his breath, and he did not seem to mind that the man could hear him.

Sansa gave a hint of a smile. She liked the captain. He spoke the common language and started to shout commands in Valyrian and another language of rough sounds that, given the territory where they were going, must be the Ghiscari.

They set sail and she, with her mood unexplainably lighter, breathed the salty smell and, after months without praying, she pleaded with any god who bothered to listen to her to protect her husband, his squire Pod, the young girl slaves and the Pearl of Ghis. She did not believe in gods like before, but she told to herself that anyway praying did no harm to anyone.
Chapter 13

Tyrion loosened up the forced habit of confinement, because after all they were very far and, after some days, it was obvious that no one knew them or had heard about them. Each one minded his own business, the red priest preached on the deck, the crew worked hard and almost everyone got drunk every night. Once a brawl erupted among several members of the crew, but the captain threatened to throw overboard the following one who stirred up a scandal and his fame must precede him, as there were no more fights.

Tyrion did not tell Sansa, in order not to hurt her sensitivity, how the slave trader was planning to pay his fare. He would lend the girls to the sailors so they could use them during the nights they wanted to, and with that his debt would be payed. Tyrion spied him surreptitiously. The slaver called apart the first officer and they struck the bargain.

"The captain mustn't get to know this or he will throw us overboard," warned the officer.

"Then gag them and take them when your captain is sleeping. I hand over the girls. Anything else is your own business."

Tyrion wondered if someone would make a fuss if he stabbed his dagger in that son of a bitch's heart.

He did not know if Pod knew that agreement, but the boy did not miss a thing. Tyrion did not predict the trader a long life.

Maybe he had relaxed the rule of allowing themselves to be seen the least possible, but what Tyrion did not relax was watchfulness. He did not unstick from Sansa's side, and he was surprised regarding the long time he had kept sober. He barely drank, only a glass of beer with his meals, and he realized he did not need alcohol anymore. The fact of devoting himself to take care of his wife had shaken off that habit. He had to keep a cold head. Sobriety improved his senses and let him be aware of what was happening.

Later, on the deck, they saw the three girls sitting down on the floor. Their master was snoring next to them, sleeping it off soundly.

"Can I speak to them, Tyrion?" requested Sansa.

"Of course you can. But be careful. Don't go far from me." He grabbed the hilt of the dagger under his cloak, watching the asleep trader.

"Do you speak the common language?" asked Sansa.

They rose their heads and looked at her, stunned.

"I'm Alysa," she introduced herself. In Myr they had made up a story and fictitious names to preserve their identities. Sansa would be Alysa Rivers and Tyrion, Igor Rivers. Their families, which belonged to minor houses vassals of the Tullys, had arranged their wedding and thus they had resolved the trouble of being rid of two bastards. Igor was a wool merchant and was traveling to Lhazar to acquire high-quality merchandise, as the Lhazareen or "Lamb Men" (as they were known contemptuously for being pacific people) were shepherds and raised sheep with an excellent wool.

"Don't be afraid, we are not going to hurt you," said Sansa. "I only want to talk to you."
"We shouldn't. The master will beat us, my lady," the youngest one said.

"He's sleeping it off and won't awake in a long while, believe me," Sansa assured them. Tyrion did not know if taking that as a veiled reprimand due to his past time of being a drunkard, of which she was an eyewitness, or if she had said that simply as a reassuring remark. He smiled inwardly. "You can call me Alysa. What are your names?"

The one who was still a little girl (her breast had hardly grown) spoke again.

"I'm Kyra. These are Mylena and Leena, my lady." Mylena was the tallest, and Leena's hair was a darker blond than her partners'. Her hair was golden, whereas the others' was platinum. The three of them had eyes of several shades of blue.

Tyrion observed that Leena rose her face shyly and ventured a quick glance at Pod. The boy looked back at her with the hint of a friendly smile, and he quickly averted his eyes, as it was his habit. The girl smiled for a brief instant too. Tyrion felt touched by that scene. It remembered him too much of himself in other times, let alone he was not timid.

"Are you headed for Tolos?," asked Sansa.

"The master takes us to sell us to a brothel where they pay a high price for young Lysene slaves," explained Kyra without showing emotion or rising her face. "In Volantis he won a bet to our former master and we were given away as a payment for the debt."

"It had to be a great debt," Tyrion could not help but insert.

The girl remained silent for a few seconds. After that, she went on, as if she were reciting. "The former master beat us too. And if we didn't pleasure enough the clients he raped us. This master is the same."

"Shut up!," hissed Mylena suddenly. "You mustn't say bad things of the master."

"I'm planning to escape to join the Mother of Dragon's freedfolk. Stay yourself if you wish with your kind master!," snapped the girl.

"And how are you planning to reach that?," the oldest mocked.

"I don't know! But I'm sure the queen will come to free us. Very soon there will be no more slaves."

Tyrion and Sansa looked at each other, moved by the naivety of the girl, who had suffered enough misery in her short life.

If Tyrion possessed still the Lannister wealth, he could buy those girls and liberate them. But he did not have the biggest fortune of Westeros anymore.

However, he was not able to look at them, or Sansa's expression, and sit idly.

He had to act before nightfall and those brutes abused the poor girls.

Making sure he was unseen (one of the advantages of being a dwarf was that no one looked down), he approached the captain and bluntly explained to him the slaver's and first officer's plans. The captain got furious, exactly as Tyrion had anticipated.

"Thanks for telling me, mate. My father was a slave who won his freedom being a champion in the
fighting pits of Meereen. He defeated so many opponents that his master, at the request of the audience, took him off the slavery neckring and let him go." His eyes were two melted embers. "I won't allow anyone to rape girls in my ship. And I hate slavers."
Chapter 14

At nightfall, Tyrion awaited the events to come. There could be heard the usual noises of men drinking, speaking and roaring with laughter. Minute after minute silence fell and Tyrion, after checking that Sansa was sleeping, went out of the cabin and hid, listening.

The captain announced that he was going to bed and left the officers in charge of the nightwatch. Silence extended for a while, and Tyrion sharpened his ear to hear men's whispering. They must reckon that the captain had just fallen asleep, because there could be heard lots of rushed steps and muffled female screams. The captain stormed out of his cabin, outraged, and ran toward the faint turmoil which could be noticed. Immediately a thunderous voice reverberated throughout the ship and some frightened voices were heard, and a shriek of agony. The captain's booming voice thundered again and silence fell once more.

Several men dragged a bulge in the darkness and threw it into the sea with a loud splashing sound.

Then Tyrion knew that the slaver would not mistreat the girls ever more.

Sansa awoke with the noise and, when she touched the empty side of the bed where Tyrion should be, she got up quickly and searched for him. She got out cautiously and found him there.

"Tyrion! What's happened?"

"Those girls have just got rid of their master."

"How?," she asked, astonished.

Tyrion explained the events to her.

Sansa's eyes sparkled in the gloom. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders and kissed him with such vigour that it took his breath away.

"What will become of them now?," she worried.

"The captain will protect them. Won't let anyone hurt them," he asserted. "At least now they are free."

She grazed his lips with her fingers, moved.

"I'm so proud of you, Tyrion... I can't express what I feel for you at this moment."

"Let's go to bed, darling. There's a way through which you have learnt to express yourself very eloquently."

They laughed quietly and, soon after entering the cabin, Tyrion almost tore off Sansa's slip which she wore as a night garment.

It seemed that a sort of current had established itself between Pod and Leena. Tyrion noted that the boy was restless and distracted, and the lad tried to get near the girl every time he had a chance. Them both were of few words, but understood well one another with their eyes.

The captain had offered the girls his own cabin, and threatened any man who approached them
without their consent. He too sentenced the first officer to death, for conspiring with the slave trader, so his execution would serve as an example to everyone else. He declared that the same fate would be reserved to anyone who plotted any misdeed on board of the Pearl of Ghis. After that, he held his large sword and with a single slash he cut the officer's head. The corpse was thrown away into the sea without funeral rites or farewell words. That scumbag of a man had dishonoured himself at the eyes of the gods, spat the captain.

The red priest, nevertheless, muttered a prayer in a language Tyrion did not understand, but the captain limited to ignore the priest.

"Gods... Bah," he said, scornfully.

Tyrion started a certain friendship with the captain, who introduced himself as Letho, a native from Lorath, where his mother was from as well, who had married the Meereenese ex-fighter freedman. He was a clever man, and extremely perceptive. Tyrion feared that, as a sailor who went across so many harbours and heard all kinds of gossip, Letho would recognise him, but on the other hand that was not very probable, either. King's Landing was almost half a world far away and there were many dwarves. In any case, if the captain suspected the truth, he kept it for himself. Perhaps he was not interested in any dubious reward from an arrogant Westerosi noble of the other end of the world. If he had the intention to capture Tyrion, he could have done it at any moment. For caution, Tyrion was not confident, but that was not a new thing for him. He missed Bronn and his crudely pragmatic view of matters. The sellsword had become his best friend, but Tyrion had no time to notify him of the flight. Besides, since he was Ser Bronn of Blackwater, he aspired to more ambitious goals and among them would not belong becoming a runaway. As a knight he could marry a heiress from a minor house and he would not give up that tempting expectation.

Pod was loyal to the core, but not talkative, and Tyrion sometimes had the bug of a good chat from man to man. Letho offered him that side, and Tyrion accepted it eagerly, even though he would never reveal anything which gave himself away.

On her part, Sansa progressed with the Lysene girls. They came from an environment and culture very different from hers, but they were more or less her same age and, once freed from brothels and brutal masters, the natural tendencies of all teenagers awoke in them. As hurt as they were and so many beatings they had suffered, their spirits still had no time to break, and they blossomed visibly. They were generously pretty, with blonde hair, fair eyes and white skin. Their bruises and wounds were fading. Pod always accompanied his Lady Sansa, and she knew he did not do it simply because his master had commanded him to. The boy and Leena were developing an increasing mutual fondness, and Sansa felt touched, as if she had discovered a fine flower growing up in a mire. Moreover, she was glad that someone as nice as Pod had found a woman who loved him. He must feel lonely and, for a change, counting on a partner would mean a great difference.

Like Sansa with her husband.

Days slipped peacefully, until they began to go around the islands of Valyria, as far from its coastlines as their route let them. The atmosphere charged with electricity and restlessness floated in the air. People got grumpy and even captain Letho was quite hard to deal with, but the presence of the girls calmed him. Fights broke out and a passenger died in a brawl of drunkards. Tyrion kept the door of the cabin barred and only opened it for Pod. The squire had taken Leena to his cabin, as both of them agreed to be a couple and she went to live with him, just like that. She informed her friends and the captain, and left behind her former life. Kyra and Mylena cried their eyes out and hugged her, congratulating her for her good luck, and wished her all the happiness she was able to embrace.
One of the times that Pod knocked at his masters' door, asked with embarrassment if they could give him a handful of moon tea, if the lady still had at her disposal enough amount for the journey. The bag of tea contained plenty of supply, and to drink it only a pinch was necessary, as it was a herb of powerful effect. Sansa gave him a large handful, covering up her smile before the boy's blushing.

"Who was going to say it," commented Tyrion, amused. "Our Pod has fallen in love. And that is much to say, considering that he hardly seemed capable of looking higher from his feet."

"I'm very happy for them," affirmed Sansa. "It's difficult to find some love."

"It is. Many don't find it. It has taken me more than thirty years." He tangled his fingers in her red hair. "But you went through there and I caught you," he joked.

"I think it was not exactly that way, dear," she reproached, laughing. "But I'm grateful anyway." She grazed his forehead with her fingertips.

"Me too, Sansa," he sighed, closing his eyes. "Me too."
Pod informed his master that he was decided to ask captain Letho for a job until the end of the voyage. Now that he was paired off, he had to maintain Leena. Tyrion did not oppose and accompanied the lad to back him. Sansa stayed with Leena and the other girls in the cabin which the captain had took up formerly.

Letho watched Pod, amused.

"What can you do, boy?"

"I learn quickly, my lord."

"How did you say your name was?"

"Rudy, my lord." It was the name Tyrion had invented for him.

"All right. I'll give you a chance because now you have a mouth to feed. But you'll work hard and will obey all my orders."

"Yes, my lord."

"Very well. And now go searching for my second mate, because the first lost his head when I rescued your girl. He'll update you about your obligations. And now, go to work. But I'm your captain, not your lord."

"I'll go right now, my captain." And Pod, smiling, went to search for the second officer.

"Have a beer with me, Igor," invited Letho. "It's been some time since I don't talk with someone as interesting as you."

"In fact, I'm not so interesting. I only feign it."

They sat by one of the tables where the sailors ate and the captain served two jars of beer.

"They say that the Mother of Dragons is the most beautiful woman in the world. You believe it?," asked Letho.

"They say as well that Aegon the Conquerer cast fire by the ass and his wives copulated with their dragons. People talk the talk."

"But something has to be true about those rumours."

"She is a pure-blood Targaryen. Surely she looks like Kyra and Mylena, with silver hair and fair eyes. But from here I can't judge if she's beautiful or not."

"Now we're talking about beautiful women... How did you get yours?"

"An agreement between our families. Both of us are bastards, as you well know. She could not aspire to much more. And I did not dream of aspiring to so much."

"You're a lucky dwarf, Igor. How come you were not thrown into a river when you were born?"

The captain was the style Tyrion liked in a friend. Straightforward and brutally sincere.
"My mother threatened to throw herself into the river after me if anyone put its hands on me. Thanks to her I'm here." Tyrion drank a sip of strong dark beer.

"Mine too was a fierce woman. Her laughter was the most contagious of Lorath, and there was always a smile in her eyes. But she had a quick temper too and never stood still. Wherever she is now, she must have turned the divine abodes upside down," he laughed. "My wife reminds me of her a little. Lorathi women are really bold."

Tyrion picked up his jar. "To bold women," he toasted.

"To bold women," echoed Letho, clinking jars with his new friend.

An almost immature sailor, so young he was, asked for a talk with the captain and requested his permission to take Mylena as his partner. They both had got along during the course of days and Mylena looked content. Letho frowned.

"She'll go on living in my cabin under my supervision, and when we dock in Tolos you'll marry her. I'll make sure of that, you understand? Igor is responsible for Rudy, but I'm responsible for you, and I am like that girl's father. You won't touch her until you're married," he commanded sharply.

The teen boy nodded, intimidated, bowed his head in a sign of respect and went out.

"I'm going to adopt Kyra," Letho announced to Tyrion. "She's too young to pair off, and there has been too many men in her life. I'd like her to enjoy a little what she is, a girl. I'll take her to Lorath and my wife will take care of her. Lorathi people shelter fugitive slaves since the times of Valyria, when the poor wretched escaped from the Free Hold. They'll accept her and, over time, my wife will seek a good husband for her. Though I wouldn't mind if she ends marrying one of my sons. They're good boys."

"It's very generous on you part," praised Tyrion with sincerity.

"It's only a duty of every honest man. No one mistreats a girl in front of me," sentenced the captain. Tyrion did not doubt his word for a single moment.

"And your boy, Rudy, make sure that he treats Leena as she deserves," Letho warned him.

"He will. He has a special gift to women." Tyrion smiled, remembering the incident in Littlefinger's brothel.

"It'll be best you go back to your pretty wife, Igor. A fine piece like that must not be left alone for a long while." Letho winked at him. "And tell Rudy to keep his energies tonight, because tomorrow will not be his best day. His muscles are not used to the work on a ship and it will take its toll," he predicted, with a sardonic air.
Chapter 16

One day, in the early morning, when they were about to leave behind Valyria and its unhealthy atmosphere, a rough storm broke and made tremble and creak all the lumber, and shook the vessel as if it were simple leaf. Sansa huddled in a corner, upon Tyrion's lap, and they hugged tightly. She rested her head on his shoulder and he stroked her back. Every time they lurched, she grabbed him and shivered, but did not scream. Her husband admired her quiet bravery and he offered a mental prayer to the gods in which he did not believe.

_Save her. Take me if you fancy it, but let her live. Allow her to go on lighting up this shit world that is too mediocre for what she deserves._

The wind was howling and the waves were hitting against the framework of the ship without a rest. The captain roared instructions and the sailors repeated them to one another. They must be trying to save what they could.

Tyrion had put away the dangerous objects. He tested that the door was firmly barred so as to prevent it from flying open and unlatching from its hinges, and fastened Sansa and himself with a rope to an iron ring on the wall. Thus they would not burst forth. They could only just wait and pray.

"Sansa." She rose her face from his shoulder. "I love you more than I have loved anyone. I want you to know it."

"Shhhhh, hush. We're not going to die tonight. Don't say goodbye to me," she protested, putting her fingers upon his lips. He kissed them with reverence.

"We are going to live, Tyrion. We'll see our children grow up." She took off her undergarment from under her skirt and lowered his trousers. She sat upon him, encircling his waist with her legs, and straddled him. It was uncomfortable on the ground, tied and with the ship moving violently, and at the same time it was strangely arousing. Tyrion soon got lost in pleasure. He held her hips and helped her rock. She freed her breasts and he sank his face between them. Their moans were muffled by the noise of the wind and of the water against the wood. He held back, stimulating her with his fingers on her most sentient spot and waiting for her to finish in the first place. Finally Sansa shivered and moaned loudly, and then he abandoned himself and released inside of her.

Fear forgotten, they fell asleep almost immediately against the wall.

When they woke up, sore and numb, the storm had passed and calm was reigning.

They were alive.

The _Pearl of Ghis_ had been much less injured than it would have been expected. Her solid frame had resisted with little damage, nothing which could not be repaired. Several sailors were hurt, one of them seriously, and a passenger had fallen overboard and was swallowed by the furious waves. It was a drunkard but harmless old man, a modest merchant, who did not have a more brilliant idea in the middle of the storm that going up to the deck, and yelled to the gods to carry him next to his dead wife. Tyrion hoped with sad irony that they had listened to his request.

Pod and Leena were harmless, as well as the captain and the other girls. Letho's rings under his eyes were more pronounced than usual and the exhaustion of his sleepless night made him age.
several years, but, with his unhurt optimism, he did not lose his smile. They had just beaten one of
the nemesis of sailing, storms, and were still alive to tell the tale.

The captain retired to rest, and was stood in for by his second officer. The healer watched over the
injured. They had broken limbs, and the sailor with the most grievous state had his skull fractured
and remained unconscious. All them were covered in bandages and splints. One of them was
Mylene's fiancé and, even though he simply had a clean fracture of his fibula, she did not move
from his bedside and they chatted in whispers.

Valyria and its fearful Doom had been left behind and they were entering the Gulf of Grief. After
having noticed the havoc that the misty and stale air which surrounded the islands had caused in
the journey's people, an air perfectly visible from many leagues, Tyrion was not so convinced that
the Doom was simply a popular superstition; though it could be that the extremely irritable mood
that most of them had developed were due to their own self-suggestion for being so near the
gloomy place, and the storm could have broken by mere coincidence. It was not strange. The
question was that not even he had liked in the least going through there. But he had to admit to
himself that his restless and hungry spirit was quite sated at the moment.

They had spent a fortnight in the sea and captain Letho was sharing out the supplies, even wine and
beer. But the most valuable was fresh water. Letho was foresighted and after so many years leading
ships, he had a good eye to estimate the necessary. And precisely due to his sense of foresight, he
knew that in the sea the supplies were more precious than any treasure.

"How much time do you think Astapor, Yunkai, Tolos, Mantarys, Volantis, New Ghis and other
slaver cities will last to send their forces to the gates of the Dragon Queen?" Tyrion asked him.

"Not much, I think, my little friend. Maybe this will be my last trip to Tolos. When we dock, I'll go
by land to Selhorys and from there I'll go upriver the Rhoyne towards Volantis. And I'll sail back
home. Kyra will come with me. I don't want to risk getting in the middle of war. As much as I
admire and respect Daenerys, I can't get involved in her war. I have my own battles to fight."

"I wish you all the good luck in the world, my friend," said Tyrion.

"Me too, Igor. I hope you do good business in Lhazar. By the way, if you take a walk through
Meereen and see the queen, convey my respects to her. Tell her that Lorath kisses her feet."

"Of course, Letho. It will be easy peasy. I talk with kings and queens daily," jested Tyrion.

"You're not a simple merchant. I know you aren't who you say you are. But I don't mind that, most
of the people I meet in my voyages aren't who they say. Lots of them escape from something. But
you are what you are and you can't mask that. And you are more than the space you take up, my
friend."

A knot blocked Tyrion's throat. "Maybe we'll never meet again, but I'll remember captain Letho of
Lorath as the bravest from Pentos to Tolos," he declared.

Them both smiled and stared at the horizon, where the mist was blurring the coastline.
Chapter 17

The sailor with the broken skull died without having recovered the consciousness, and the rest of the wounded men progressed well, but they still needed several weeks for their bones to mend. The captain told Tyrion that when they disembarked, they would be admitted in the sailor's relatives' and friends' houses. Some of them had been sailing so many years as Letho himself and they had spread friendships throughout every harbour from Westeros to Asshai.

"We spend much more time on the sea than on mainland. She's our true wife. In fact, there's not much difference with our flesh and blood wives. She is capricious, wild, sometimes quiet, she gives us the life of her womb and pisses us off constantly." He laughed. "Our women on land are jealous, but they resign themselves. They can't rival the Big Whore. That is how us sea men call all this," he said, pointing to the silver and golden waters, iridescent by the rays of the sun.

"Sea men have always had a lot of imagination," said Tyrion with an ironic smile.

"You come to love her. She gets in your blood like a beautiful woman and tempts you toward her depths. When we die, if for a rare chance it's not her who kills us, we request as our last will to be buried in her core to rest inside of her for all eternity. Fish feed our remains and we extend the cycle of life," explained the captain, with a soft voice and his look lost in the distance.

Tyrion understood him perfectly. He too was very sure of how he wanted to die.

"But before that, I have things to do still. My Lorathi wife waits for me with our four younger sons and daughters. At least, I hope that some of them are my own," he joked, winking. "It's too much to ask for a woman like mine to await me during months or years keeping faithful. She's too much a woman. I don't mind what she does when I'm not there, if she's still there when I go back home. I neither remain pure as a septon," he confessed, with a lopsided grin. Everybody knew that most septons were not famous for fulfilling their vows of celibate. "Nights are long in an empty bed and there's nothing like a woman to fill it, don't you think, friend?", he asked, nudging Tyrion softly.

"I do. There's nothing like that." Sansa's red hair and her perfect skin filled all his waking hours and at least some of his sleeping hours, the ones that weren't plagued with his dear Lannister family or with the nightmares where Ser Mandon pierced his heart with his sword in the Battle of Blackwater.

"She loves you, Igor. I don't know how did you manage really to gain a woman like her, but when I see her next to you I feel a bit envious. Take good care of her, don't let this rotten world stain her with shit."

"I won't let it. That's why we're going far away."

"Then take her as far as you can. You're a clever and lucky dwarf. The Dragon Queen will have a good ally."

"I hope she sees it that way," Tyrion sighed, and went to the girls' cabin to fetch Sansa.

Tolos finally became a reality in the horizon. The navigators' mood swung between the excitement for having reached safe and sound their destination, and the sorrow for being detached from their friends. The captain made a list of recommendations to Tyrion about the inns he knew, the captains who he must agree to travel to Meereen with, and what things he should avoid doing or saying. Tolos was a queen's enemy.
"You only have to mention my name to the people I've pointed out to you, and the doors will be open for you. To them and no one else. Watch Leena carefully, freed people are not appreciated here."

Letho bent and hugged him so strongly he made Tyrion's bones creak. "Good luck, little friend. I wish you have strong and healthy children. And so good-looking as their mother."

"Thanks for all, captain. Protect the girls and arrive at Lorath in good health," Tyrion said as a farewell, touched.

Next to that Letho kissed Sansa's hand and said something by her ear that made her blush, gave another bear hug to Pod along with the purse of coins the boy had earned working aboard, and took Leena's hands, speaking to her as a daughter and gave her his blessing. After that the four girls, including Sansa, embraced and cried. Kyra held his new father's arm and smiled at the only friends she had known. Mylena would marry her fiancé as soon as she got out of the ship, and she would go to live with her new family.

The three men looked at each other, uncomfortable for the female tears.

"Until forever. Leave as quickly as you can and say to the Breaker of Chains that Letho of Lorath, son of Limor, former champion of Meereen, sends to her all his respects."

"We'll say that to her. Until forever."

When they descended the footbridge, it seemed that they had lived a whole life since they had set sail from Volantis.

And perhaps so it was.
Chapter 18

Tolos was not specially remarkable. It was an ordinary port city, allied in the war against the queen. Through its streets were spread rumours of her conquests, exaggerated by the popular fantasy, which differed depending on whether the narrators were supportive or enemies. Free people of any social status asserted knowingly that she had conquered Meereen using her dragons, that had roasted anyone they had knocked down, giving themselves a great banquet with the burnt flesh. She as well had time to put on orgies of sex and blood in the Great Pyramid, where she besides carried out all sorts of acts of witchcraft. What was more, she bedded everyone and never got satisfied, and she bathed in the blood of the murdered Meereenese noblemen.

Slaves murmured in a quiet voice, hidden in the corners, and believed she was the saviour of the world who had come to take them off the yoke.

What undoubtedly had touches of truth was that a teenager who was seventeen or eighteen years old was delivering a hard blow to the slaver system, which was the basis of the prosperity of most rich men and nobility of Essos. These ones were not going to sit idly seeing how their comfortable lifestyle was being snatched from their hands.

Tyrion knew that the Mad King's daughter was the chance on which Sansa, him and their friends counted to try to get on, but it was a chance surrounded by thorns. The queen's position was far from having become established, and her conquest of Meereen was dancing on a tightrope. Yunkai was restoring the old system and was a chaos, and in Astapor a man named Cleon was proclaiming himself as a king. He was called the Butcher King, a nickname which expressed itself.

She would need experienced counselors around her. Maybe he did not have other things, but he had plenty of experience in ruling, strategy and knowledge about Westeros and Essos. And besides, he liked the game of thrones.

In certain places it was an advantage to count on the friendship of the respected captain Letho. As soon as Tyrion mentioned him, the owners of the establishments he had recommended to him received them attentively. They offered them the best rooms, though these were not a big deal, either, and were ready to give them whatever they needed.

Now that she had a friend of her same age, Sansa had at her disposal another woman with whom venting things women told each other. Leena was not a cultured young woman, nor had she received a painstaking upbringing, as she had grown up in a lowly family from Lys and she had been sold to a pleasure house at eight years old, where later Mylena and Kyra arrived. When she was thirteen, the three of them were bought by a foreigner procurer who took them to his brothel in Volantis. The tears of prostitution were tattooed on their cheeks and they served to countless men and, sometimes, women, or both at a time. At last, the procurer had given them as a gift to the slave trader with whom he had contracted a high gambling debt. And that had been her life basically.

She remembered that when she was a little kid her mother yelled to her but other times sang to her as well, and her father struck her and made her men's things. She liked looking at the sea upon the cliffs. She played with her little brothers and several of them died.

Sansa's sufferings in King's Landing had been terrible, but she felt guilty whenever compared to Leena. At least her own childhood had been as happy as it could be. Winterfell was a loving and warm home, and she was surrounded by a family which loved her tenderly. No one could steal her that. Leena did not even live anything like that.
The girl did not chat very much but was keen and liked to learn. She listened with all her attention, as if she was drinking the words. For her, everything her Westerosi friend told her was like a dream. Sansa had the intention to educate her and teach her to read.

It was obvious that for Leena, Pod was almost a god. She looked at him with devotion and sometimes touched him as if fearing that he was not real. He treated her with all the tenderness a woman could be treated with, and step by step she got used to her new condition of free woman. She enjoyed every little detail, began to ask questions and, shyly, dared to express her opinions. That was what cost her the biggest effort, but Pod's, Sansa's and Tyrion's patience was paying off and the girl was transforming herself. Her figure went from near skinny to slim and healthy, her complexion gleamed and her sapphire eyes shone. If anyone noticed the tear tattooed on her cheek, would think she was a Pod's bed slave, but there was no way to remove the mark without causing a wreck on her beautiful skin, and Pod absolutely refused to the girl's suggestion of tearing off the tattoo with a dagger slash.

Pod informed his master that in the harbour reigned more stirring than the usual. He had asked for captain Gilean. When he heard Letho's name, his expression lost its first caution and he greeted Pod with an open smile. They chatted a bit about their shared friend and Gilean came to the point. He said to him that if they wanted to go to Meereen, they should do it the sooner the better, as within days the regular navigation to the city took by the Breaker of Chains would be cut off, in order to block trade and harass the queen with the lack of supplies. Tolos only would send war carracks. Gilean told him that his ship would set sail after two days, and almost certainly it would be one of the last ones to Meereen, and Letho's friends were welcome.

This news confirmed Tyrion's predictions. The harassment to Meereen was being brewed. He was concerned that the Tolosi closed the port ahead of schedule. Not being able to do anything else, he tried to relax and enjoy the delay. The intervals of delay in Pentos, Myr and Volantis had come to be the happiest days of his entire life. He did not think it had to be different that time.
The next day they went to the market of Tolos. Leena had never had anything which was hers. As a little child she played to make dolls with stones and sticks. At the pleasure house in Lys and at the brothel of Volantis she was not even the owner of her own body. So she marveled at the view of some colourful dresses on display, which was the fashion of all the free humble women in Tolos. Pod asked her if she liked them and she nodded heartily. The young man bought them and Leena burst into tears. Pod was perplexed but quickly understood her feelings and put his hands on her shoulders to make her look at him. He said to her that when a man loves a woman he gives her pretty things and that was something normal, making gifts to the loved ones. She cried even more upon the uneasy boy's shoulder.

Tyrion on his part insisted on updating Sansa's wardrobe and encouraged her to choose what she liked. She protested a bit and reminded her husband that they had to save their money, but he assured her that she did not have to worry about that, and a couple of dresses and other garments she needed would not cause a significant decrease in their finance. She chose a sky-blue dress matching her eyes, a new change of underclothes and a cloak made of thick wool. She declared she was satisfied and Tyrion paid.

Pod carried the packages with the girls' acquisitions and Leena finally had succeeded in calming down. She walked proudly holding her brand-new partner and she looked so happy that it seemed as if at any moment she would fly. Sansa grinned and thought it would be appropriate for the couple to marry, but that was their own decision.

She almost felt dizzy when she thought of the radical overturn of her life. Certainly her father and mother would not have imagined that their eldest daughter, trained to be a northern lady, would end up being the wife of a dwarf to whom her enemies had married her by force, but whom she had come to love, and she was a homeless outcast, and nevertheless she was happy. If she had ended as Joffrey's consort in King's Landing, she would have been an unhappy queen. She had dreamt of being Joffrey's queen and Joffrey revealed himself as a monster and her dreams were destroyed. Later she thought fate was making fun of her again when she deluded herself with Loras Tyrell and however had to marry the Imp. Her life, since the damned day she left Winterfell, was an endless series of blows, setbacks and guffaws of fate, and her wedding to Tyrion was the icing on the cake. But he was kind and she could not hate him. He was a Lannister, but not like the rest of Lannisters. He was despised and mocked, like her. And when Joffrey died suddenly in his wedding, Tyrion, instead of thinking only of his own neck, sought her to save her. It would have been much easier fleeing without her, but her faithful husband worried about traitor Ned Stark's daughter, for whom no one was concerned in the least. No one except for him. It was then when the girl's feelings started to change. When she saw for the first time the man next to her and her stomach tickled every time she stared at him, and desire awoke together with admiration and a deep respect. She fell in love. Septa Mordane said that there was beauty in every man, and as a child Sansa thought that such statement was ridiculous. How there could be beauty in an ugly, or fat, or skinny, or hairy, or crossed-eyed, or deformed... or a dwarf man? But now she understood.

Therefore she wished the same kind of happiness for Pod and Leena. Love was the true home. Not a house, or a castle, or a whole kingdom.

She missed Winterfell terribly, at least what it had been. But even though Daenerys offered it to her some day, or she recovered it by any means, she did not want it without Tyrion Lannister by her side.
Tyrion observed sideways a Westerosi knight who was wandering along the market of Tolos. He was tall and blonde, with sparse hair and he had overtaken his forties by far. The bear embroidered on his doublet gave Tyrion the clue.

Ser Jorah Mormont, of the Bear Island. Son of Jeor Mormont, the deceased Lord Commander of the Night's Watch. Exiled by Eddard Stark for having sold furtive hunters as slaves. He had served the Dragon Queen and she as well exiled him when she discovered that he had been spying on her to pass the information to Robert Baratheon the Usurper and winning that way the king’s pardon. The Exiled was a nickname which served him very well, thought Tyrion.

He studied him cautiously from some distance. He looked like a lost and aimless ghost. His appearance was very neglected and gaunt, and he staggered a little, as if he had been drinking. Tyrion pondered the options. Above all was Sansa's safety, and the others' too. Should he let the knight follow his lonely path, or recruit him as an ally? Varys had told him that Jorah was a good knight, an accomplished warrior and had ended up feeling a great devotion towards the queen, despite having betrayed her. He had given her good advice and, partly thanks to him, she was where she was, so he proved to be intelligent and a good tactitian. But the most serious problem was that Daenerys herself had expelled him. How was going Tyrion to turn up in Meereen with Jorah behind him?

But it was clear that man was like a mourning soul. And, being one of those rare knights who fed the secret wish to honour his oaths (Jorah had come to be a true knight beside the Dragon Queen), perhaps the fact of having a goal which injected new hopes into him would make his virtues come back. Yes, a little hope.

Tyrion would take advantage of it. It was worth to count on a knight. Meereen was still far away.

And he had to remind himself that he was a lucky dwarf, recalling with sarcasm captain Letho's sentence. Everything was possible from there to Meereen. And he was a man of many resources.
"Ser Jorah Mormont," greeted Tyrion. Just in case, he had the dagger ready, and Pod grabbed the hilt of his sword. The young women stayed behind their men. Sansa startled when she heard the name of her father's former vassal.

The aforesaid turned around quickly and met face to face with Tyrion Lannister.

"You're the Imp!," exclaimed him, stunned. "What are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same, but I happen to know the answer."

"What do you want?," blurted out Jorah with hostility.

"Considering your pitiful condition, I'll come to the point. I give you a choice between two alternatives. You can join our small group and accompany us to Meereen, where I have the intention to enter the service of your loved Daenerys and maybe you could gain her forgiveness, or on the other hand you can continue your way alone."

Jorah looked at him with astonishment and a glint of hope immediately extinguished by distrust.

"You're going to take the khaleesi's side? Why a Lannister of Casterly Rock would ally with the enemy?"

"Because supposedly I have assassinated my nephew Joffrey and have had to run away to save my life. And the khaleesi is not my enemy."

"Maybe she doesn't think the same."

"I wouldn't expect less from her. But you know her much better than me. Is she so fair as they say? Do you think she'll accept to listen to us?"

Jorah pondered the questions for some seconds.

"I served her since she was barely more than a child. I saw her transform from a scared girl to fully a queen. I saw her surrender to her feet a khal dothraki who led a khalasar of forty thousand men. I saw her go into a burning pyre and go out harmless and with three dragons upon her shoulders. I saw her conquer cities with little bloodshed. I was an eyewitness of her strength, her cunning, her sympathy, her right sense of justice, and as well her toughness against her enemies," listed him with his voice cracking with emotion. "I would give my life for her. I would give anything to see her again." His baggy-eyed face showed love and sadness. "I will go with you."

"We have come to an agreement, then. Welcome to our group. She is my wife, Lady Sansa, Lord Eddard Stark's daughter," introduced Tyrion. Jorah opened his eyes widely. Tyrion recognised that expression, which evidently meant: How come this filthy Lannister dwarf has married Eddard Stark's daughter?

Sansa offered a hesitant smile and a bow. "Ser Jorah," greeted her.

"Lady Sansa." The knight bent, covering up his surprise. "I respected your father and what I did was unforgivable. I hope I can make amends for my offense to the good Stark name," he apologized with humility.
"I'm sure that it will be so," conceded Sansa.

Tyrion went on with the introductions.

"He is Podrick, my squire," Pod and Jorah bent their heads. "And she is Leena, Pod's fiancé." The girl imitated Sansa's bow. Jorah glanced at her tattoo and gave her another nod.

"We travel modestly and with quite discretion. My father and my sister are seeking me for kingslayer, a nickname which already spreads in my family."

"That's not a problem for me. I'm an outlaw as well."

Jorah took accommodation in the inn and locked inside his room. Pod and Leena bade farewell until the following day and went into theirs. Tyrion and Sansa did the same. After a short while dinner arrived and they ate in a placid silcence. Later Sansa tidied herself up and Tyrion, as always, got aroused. In spite of the intimacy they shared, she needed her moments of privacy, and washing was one of those moments. He sat looking at other side of the room and closed his eyes, listening to the brush of the fabrics, imagining the droplets on her skin, and he hardened so much that it cost him a great effort not to release himself with his hand. When it was his turn and he walked pass her, he tried to cover up the protruding bulge between his legs, but she always noticed it and grinned with flush and mischievousness.

Normally, when they went to bed, she waited for him naked and that was the signal which showed him that Sansa wanted sex. Or she started to take off her slip, inviting him to end freeing her of the garment himself. But her moon cycle had just come to her and Tyrion knew that during those days women usually were less receptive. He did not mind making it to her any way, moon cycle or not, but he respected her shyness. They lay down comfortably and she leaned on his shoulder.

"The moon tea is effective," commented her.

"It seems so. And so much effectivenes makes me want to fuck you all day long."

"And if I didn't drink it you would want it less?," provoked her, grinning.

"I'd want it until the Wall melted away and the seven hells froze," assured him, his voice hoarse with desire and his pupils dilated. He placed himself upon her and grabbed her arms above the pillow. "I want it when you have your moon cycle."

She felt the current of heat flowing from her belly to the rest of her body.

"Would you make it to me with my moon cycle? I thought men didn't..." She did not end her phrase, feeling a little embarrassed. And aroused. Very much aroused.

"I'd make it to you just now. If you want." He looked at her ardently. "But it was me who thought that you wouldn't want."

"You still must learn some things regarding what I want or don't want, my lord."

"Then teach me," murmured Tyrion on her mouth, sinking in her as if the world were going to extinguish itself that very night.
Later, during the slackness after the climax, Sansa brought the subject of Jorah.

"How small the world is, isn't it?"

"No one would say that after having went across thousands of leagues," jested him, smiling over her hair. "But you're right. Life is full of coincidences. And of runaway Westerosi people."

"I never came to meet him in person before. Once I heard my father talking about him with my mother. I wondered what is it that drives a man of honour to commit a crime so serious. At that time I didn't understand to what extent a person can lose its good sense for love."

"Your crazy husband has made you understand it, hasn't he?" He rubbed her cheek lazily with his nose.

"Too well." She closed her eyes and moved her face so he could kiss her neck.

He moaned against her skin and the vibration of the sound reverberated over her bosom.

"But I'd never force you to break the law. I would never force you to dishonour yourself," stated Sansa, with a hard voice. "That woman didn't love Ser Jorah."

Tyrion placed himself upon her and proceeded to leave a trail of kisses over her breast. Her breath sped up again.

"Most marriages are not intended for love," whispered him, without stopping his caresses. Sansa noticed that the sound of his low voice increased the delightful sensation.

"But he did love her." She began to lose her train of thought.

"Yes. He did love her." His mouth was tasting her sweet belly.

Sansa suddenly got tense. He sensed it and looked her in the eye, inquiring.

"Tyrion... If I didn't have rights over Winterfell, if you were told that you'll never be the Warden of the North... Would you love me the same?," asked her, with her insecurity placing a cloud over the blue of her irides.

He felt deeply moved. He held her face with his hands. He knew that gesture calmed her down.

"To hell with Winterfell and the Warden of the North. That means nothing to me without you. It only matters to me to the same extent it matters to you and affects you. If any day you wanted to fight to get back your house, I would support you. If you don't, I don't mind. With or without Winterfell, I only love you. A castle cannot give me what you give to me," he said smiling, to lighten the intensity of their emotion. But it was important that she knew the truth once and for all.

"You're what I've always dreamt of, Sansa. Everything else was a mere replacement to make my life more bearable. Whores, drinking, intrigues, pissing off my father and sister... I resigned myself to the idea that those things would be all I could obtain from life," he said, with bitterness.

"And now?," asked her, stroking his hair.

"I keep wishing to piss off my father and sister," confessed him, looking at her with a fake guilt that made her laugh. "And I like the game of thrones. I have quite vanity and a very much restless
mind. I feel attracted to refute and beat others with my cunning." He kept quiet for some moments. "But above all and with great difference, I love you."

"Do I have to resign myself to share you, then?" needled her, amused.

"Only from time to time and out of this bed. Above this mattress I am entirely yours."

"Only above the mattress? And what if I want you to fuck me above other places?"

"You're getting very brazen, my lady. I should punish you." He returned back to rubbing himself against her belly, nibbling playfully.

"How are you going to do it?" teased her.

Tyrion penetrated her without preamble. "How do you think?"

She wrapped him with her legs and pressed him against herself, as if wishing to absorb him once and for all.

They got ready to depart and met the others in the corridor which connected their rooms. Jorah displayed a better aspect that morning. He had washed himself, was sober and a few hours of rest in a bed suited him. Pod and Leena were fresh and glowing, and they obviously had not dedicated simply to sleep, like Tyrion and Sansa. Both couples looked at each other with wide grins. Their night activities did not go unnoticed.

Jorah watched them with some envious disdain. Tyrion glanced at his expression, amused. *What this man needs desperately is to have Daenerys Targaryen in his arms.* He felt pity for him, precisely for having been himself an expert in unrequited love.

Tyrion said goodbye to his unforgettable nights in Tolos (that was why he remembered vividly the cities where they had been), and the five of them head for the port. Captain Gilean's merchant vessel was named *The morning star* (there was not a single ship that matched in aspect the ostentatious resonant beauty of her name), was smaller than the *Pearl of Ghis* and carried scarce passengers. There were already few people who ventured to go to Meereen.

Gilean invited them aboard and Tyrion exchanged some words with him. The captain's temper was more restrained and less stormy than that of his friend Letho, but he instilled respect all the same. His look was cautious and his smile did not usually ascend to his eyes. But whenever Letho was mentioned, he softened.

"He's a tough dude whose heart doesn't fit his chest." Tyrion thought it was strange that both qualities combined in the same person.

Everything got ready for the departure and they cut the wind in the direction of the millenary city taken by a young woman who was called, among other things, the Breaker of Chains.
Sansa was considering to make the most of the mornings in their journey through Slaver's Bay to educate and instruct Leena. She would teach her all she could about Westeros and Essos (Geography, History, customs and traditions, etc.), she would increase her vocabulary and improve her diction. She had no kit of embroidery, so that women's discipline would be postponed at the moment. To teach her to read and write she came up with the idea of asking the maester on board to lend her some quills, ink and sheets of paper. It would be a long and laborious process, but Sansa had at her disposal plenty of time and patience, and the truth was that she wished to be useful in something. All her training as a lady of a manor served her little being an outcast, so she was decided to use it other way. And she realized that it could be much gratifying to convey her knowledge to other person. Leena was eager to learn and improve.

Tyrion was glad of Sansa's excellent disposition to undertake her new project. He trusted absolutely her abilities and encouraged her to do things to spend her hours. He showed impressed when she told him about her plan to educate Leena and looked at her full of pride.

She only needed to take on self-confidence. With my dear sister and my lovely nephew humiliating her, insulting her and making her believe she was stupid, the poor girl came to really believe it.

"In Meereen I'll get some books and writing items for you, so you can go on with your lessons," offered him.

She kissed him, grateful, and they went to fetch Leena and start with the first lesson.

Tyrion soon discovered that Jorah was cultivated and well versed in many subjects. He suspected it, as a good counselor must have knowledge and experience and he undoubtedly had them. The initial sullenness of the knight was mitigated progressively and he proved himself as an acceptable fellow traveler, with intervals in which Tyrion and him chatted about books, stories from the past and, above all, about the khaleesi, which was the title with which Jorah almost always called her. They could recite from memory complete poems and recall millenary legends nearly swallowed by oblivion.

Jorah narrated with infinite admiration how he had seen her khaleesi grow. The first day he saw her, she seemed a fragile floweret that soon would be crushed under the hooves of the dothraki horses. Her slight figure was like that of a child white as snow and silver haired, by the side of the huge and menacing Drogo. The day of her wedding, she was terrified but concealed it admirably well. Jorah went next to her to gift her several books and since then he was certain he could not tear apart from her. And the scared child transformed into a woman with an unusual strength. For Jorah quickly it was very clear who was the true dragon of her family. Viserys was a cruel and stupid useless beggar who dug his own grave and his life ended brutally without having achieved anything. Only spreading contempt around him. And he still could consider himself lucky, because despite all his sister loved him and named one of her dragons with a version of his name. Viserion. Lots more than the imbecile dude deserved.

Jorah described to Tyrion how she lost Drogon and her unborn son because of a vengeful witch the dothraki had defiled, and how she reappeared from her husband's funeral pyre. And on her shoulders rested the first dragons that trod the earth and overflew the skyes after centuries of having being an extinguished species.

Later, the almost killing tour through the Red Waste, the hard heartedness of the Qartheen, the plot
to rob the dragons and how the khaleesi managed to escape from the House of the Undying and put to sea. But instead of setting out towards Westeros, she headed for Slaver's Bay, gained an army of over eight thousand Unsullied and the free company of the Second Sons and advanced conquering slaver city after slaver city.

Tyrion analyzed all the information Jorah equiped him with, in order to form a precise idea about Daenerys and try to devise a plan to approach her. Meereen had ramparts, Unsullied that guarded them and a Great Pyramid where the queen resided.

"I saw your father on the Wall," Tyrion pointed out. "A good man and a very accomplished Lord Commander. I was sorry about his death. The Night's Watch is alarmingly lacking men like him."

"I dishonoured him. He pinned his hopes on me and sacrificed himself so as I could be the lord of the Bear Island. I stained his name and undermined my family's honour. I'll never forgive myself for the shame I caused him. I either won't forget myself the disappointment in my khaleesi's eyes. It seems that my fate is to disappoint those who love me most," he lamented, downcast.

Tyrion knew too well the taste of self-pity.

"Do you want to talk to me of disappointments, Jorah? I grew up with the letdown in my father's eyes. There was not a single day in which he looked at me and I saw the smallest trace of affection or paternal pride. Do you know why he did not throw me into the sea when I was born and I killed my mother? Because I was a Lannister. He did not let me live out of love or kindness of heart. If Tywin Lannister ever had a heart, it was during the years when my mother was with him, and she took it with her. Believe me, my friend, you can wallow in your own shit, but I assure you that the only you'll get will be to smell foully. What's done it's done. We must try to look ahead before the past destroys us. I know it's not easy. I was drowning in my own shit, and would have went on that way if it weren't for Sansa. She gave me a purpose."

"Daenerys is my purpose. But she's too far away, out of my reach."

"Then fight for getting next to her. Fight for gaining her forgiveness. Maybe that will be all you can aspire to, but it'll be preferable to not even trying. She has loved you. Perhaps she still does. Not as you would like to be loved by her, but she has respected and valued you. A woman's heart never must be underestimated."

"Serving her is all I want in my miserable life. I know she doesn't love me, and anyway I could never marry her, never could be her king. But if she allows me to serve her again, I'd be the most devoted of her subjects."

"Then we already have a purpose. And that purpose only has a way: Daenerys."

The prudent captain Gilean had a veteran company of loyal guards which watched over The Morning Star. In those waters were not infrequent the attacks from slaver pirates who stormed the regular vessels to capture the cargo as well as the people aboard and selling these in the slaves' auctions. That was the threat which had worried Tyrion most since they got out from Pentos, but he kept his worry for himself. Sansa was not a fool and must be aware of that danger, but she kept that for her, too. If she did it as a means of not tempting fate, or for trying to appear to be braver, Tyrion was ignorant of it, but he agreed that pirates were an issue frightening enough in itself to utter it out loud.

He kept his dagger sharp and greased and besides the captain had lent him a shield made of solid
oak wood and a double-bladed axe with a sinister aspect just in case they had to go into battle. He had become fond of that sort of weapon since it was so effective in the skirmishes and battles he had fought. Every man of the vessel had at his disposal a supply, and they were their own or borrowed. The captain wanted that everyone could defend itself in case of an attack, so not only the guards had fearsome weapons. But he warned as well that if anyone used the armament to sort out feuds and infightings, he would not show compassion and who used the weaponry against its traveling companions, whether they were passengers, crew members or guards, would be executed.

Due to the fear of pirates, the journey was scarcely relaxed, nor was it a pleasant travel. The lookouts relieved one another day and night and kept a constant and meticulous watch, in order to detect with enough anticipation any suspicious ship which got into their field of vision.
The weather changed and the inclement wind lashed the deck. Greyish clouds covered the sky and threatened rain, and the last thing they needed was another storm after the scare in the *Pearl of Ghis*. The blustery weather did not contribute to lighten the heavy atmosphere which were breathed on board, but the presence of the guards avoided conflicts.

The young women were in Tyrion and Sansa's cabin, wrapped up in a lesson. It dealt with the main houses of Westeros and Sansa pointed in a map to the territories to which the houses belonged. The captain had lent her that map. It was a large old and worn-out parchment with the Seven Kingdoms and Essos painted with skillful detail and was very useful as a navigation map. Sansa found another usefulness for it.


"Its motto?"

"Ours is the fury."

"Point in the map its territories."

Leena scanned the parchment and bit her lip. "Ummm. These down here," she indicated, pointing at the correct areas.

"Very well, Leena. Do you remember the names of those territories?"

"These here are the Kinglands. And those over there, the Stormlands," recited the girl with a triumphant smile.

"You learn very quickly, Leena," praised Sansa. "And don't forget that House Baratheon is the one which rules Westeros at present, so the rest of the houses owe it loyalty."

Leena seemed to want to ask something.

"Do you have any doubt? Ask me what you want."

"How is living in a castle?," Leena inquired, without containing herself.

Sansa smiled. "It's very roomy and a lot of people live inside, because a castle needs a large number of staff to carry out all the tasks. But, in spite of being so big, Winterfell was not so cold as anyone could think, as it had a natural heating system in the walls. Outside it usually snowed and burst out blizzards which lasted weeks, but inside the temperature was pleasant."

"I'm sure it was nice to live there."

"It was." Sansa sighed. "Well, let's go on. House Targaryen. Sigil?"

"A three-headed dragon."

"Motto?"

"Fire and blood."
" Territories?"

Leena hesitated. Finally pointed at a spot in Essos. "Meereen."

"I'm impressed. You haven't forgotten anything," lauded the teacher. "In the past, House Targaryen, when moved from Valyria, took Dragonstone, this island over here, which now belongs to the Baratheons. And many Targaryen kings sat on the Iron Throne in the Red Keep, here, in King's Landing," related Sansa, pointing at the capital.

"It's true that that throne is so ugly as they say? It really has a thousand swords?"

Sansa smiled again. "Those are people's exaggerations. It doesn't have so many. But I agree with you that it's a very ugly seat," conceded Sansa.

"How can anyone want to sit on that hideous throne?" The girl's ingenuousness moved her instructor a little.

"You are right. I myself don't understand very well why. As a child I dreamed of being a queen, but a long time ago I cast aside that absurd idea. The Iron Throne has only brought misfortune to me," Sansa said harshly. "But you see, nearly all the powerful houses compete for it. Some really want to sit on it."

"The Dragon Queen as well," pointed Leena.

"Yes, she as well. But at least it won't come to her on a silver platter, she's not a queen girl spoilt and cruel who thinks that everyone belongs to her and that she can do as she likes. The queen knows what sacrifice is and accepts the responsibility because a king or a queen owes to its realm."

"Do you believe she'll conquer the Iron Throne?" Leena's curiosity was gratifying.

"I believe it. But not yet. She can't abandon what she has started here. She can't let the old masters restore the slaver system."

"No, she can't abandon us," whispered Leena, touching her tattoo.

Sansa looked at her in silence.

"What about dedicating ourselves to reading? Give me the sheet with the alphabet and let's continue." Sansa had written the whole alphabet with painstaking handwriting and big letters. Leena recognised at least the half of them already.

"Here you are," said the girl, putting the sheet on the centre of the table.

Pod walked over the deck with Tyrion and Jorah under the unpleasant wind while the young women studied in the cabin. The captain's strict security measures let the girls stay on their own with the only caution of the barred door. Gilean would never allow anyone to bother them. But Tyrion and Pod did not go far from them for a long while, only just enough to grant them their hours of study and women's chat.

"Knowledge is power," commented Tyrion. "Who said that women are the weaker sex never met any or lived in a desert island. Or preferred men," he added, with his sarcastic smile. "There are our women, instructing themselves. In short they will sit to rule side by side with Daenerys." He said it with admiration in his tone.
"The world would work better if they ruled more," affirmed Jorah. "So many who want the Iron Throne and the only suitable is the khaleesi."

Pod nodded and Tyrion raised his eyes to the sky, amused, with his resigned funny face of Jorah only sees through the khaleesi’s eyes.

A lookout’s yell cut the conversation short.

*Pirates!*
Chapter 24

For a second, the whole ship paralyzed. And immediately began a frantic activity. The guards prepared bows, arrows, swords and daggers and positioned themselves in the direction from which the rickety carrack was getting near them. It was still very far away. It was still difficult to see with clarity the details, but the sails looked patched and the hull showed some damages above the waterline. It was with no doubt a stolen boat, which must have suffered a violent boarding.

The captain and the sailors were getting ready for the attack too, and shouted orders unceasingly. They acted with the synchronization which their years of training gave them.

"Everyone to your posts!," roared Gilean. "To arms! Let's defend our ship! Those motherfuckers won't take a single pin!"

The helmsman tacked The Morning Star the most downwind it was possible, in order to increase the speed.

Tyrion got down to think quick as lightning. I won't let anyone get near the cabin. I have to search for a place from where defending it. The corridors of the cabins were very narrow and only had room for one person at a time. Tyrion would take advantage of that benefit. He would place himself with the axe and the shield exactly in the turn of one of the curves and, if any pirate ventured to pass along there, he would hack him in half, using the element of surprise. Pod should position in the other curve and dispatch anyone who came through that side.

He ran as much as his short legs let him, with Pod behind him. Tyrion knocked loudly at the door of the cabin. "Sansa! Open to me! I have to fetch the weapons!," he shouted.

He heard the noise of the metal bar moving along and the door opened.

"Tyrion!" She hugged him tightly, trembling. Leena stood by her side, deathly pale. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to defend the hallway. If any pirate enters this part of the ship, he will find my axe and Pod's sword," explained Tyrion with a steady voice. He took her face with both hands and gave her a vigorous kiss. "Bar the door firmly shut. Prepare the stones the captain gave you." Sansa nodded, with the terror reflected in her eyes. "I love you more than anything and I swore to protect you. For the seven hells that I'll do it." He tried to convey to her all the love and courage he could gather. Pod embraced Leena and she nodded to the things he was saying to her. Both men got out to the corridor and stationed in the strategic spots, waiting in tension. The girls blocked the door again.

Captain Gilean, when they had settled in the cabin after getting on the boat, had given a lot of stones to the girls so as they used them in case of attack. They were kept in the chest that was used as a seat as well. Gilean explained to them that, if they did not know how to use weapons, rocks could be as effective as a sword. It was not necessary to have a great aim, it sufficed to throw plenty to the attackers and thus a great damage could be inflicted in them, or even could kill them. Tyrion praised the man's wit and his concern about the people he carried.

The awaiting was becoming endless to him as he could not see what happened outside. A hair-raising silence reigned. The carrack would last at least half an hour or more to reach them, favoured by the wind. If it transported cargo, it would move more slowly and perhaps would delay more time, but Tyrion was sure the pirates would not leave the pursuit. A merchant schooner was a highly coveted prize.
His hope resided in the fact that the schooner was faster and finally the carrack could not reach it, but partly pirates' fame did not lie in giving up easily.

He wished he had Sansa next to him, taking her hand and saying love words to her. To endure the tension, he recalled the first time he saw her in Winterfell, still a child, innocent and dazzled by his conceited nephew. He had payed attention to her then, imagining the woman she would become and feeling pity for her naivety and her future. Joffrey was not precisely a romantic and would not make her a happy wife. Later he went to the Wall with Jon Snow and he set aside the girl, to the bottom of his memory, to remember her hardly again until he returned to the capital as Hand of the King and found her worn down and depressed, but making the effort to conceal her feelings and feign in the rats nest in order to survive. By then he admired that quiet inner strenght that only him saw. And, man of passions primarily, and fond of feminine beauty, he noticed how she had grown, how her shape turned more voluptuous. But he shut up those observations with a feeling of guilt.

He did not deny that when his father announced him that he would have to marry her, a small voice in his insides did not feel as appalled as it should. A tickling sensation went over him, but he suffocated it. The sarcasm with which he confronted life mocked him for the thousandth time. What do you expect from this marriage, Halfman? Love? Do you think she is going to throw herself in your arms? And in those moments all he wanted to do was to get stinky drunk and try to banish the taunts of the fucking fate.

Sansa was right when he went to see her shortly before the ceremony and she made him understand that he had no idea of how she felt. It was true, he had no bloody idea. He gained lots more than her.

The noises of the deck brought him back to the present and his heart beat like a drum and his pulse pounded in his ears.

The brawl was beginning.

Sansa.
Chapter 25

Screams and blows resounded, as well as the clash of metal. The steps and the rushing runs made the deck creak and the worst was not knowing what was happening above, but Tyrion would not leave his post unless they stepped over his dead body.

He imagined that the attackers had thrown chains with hooks as a fastening system to hold prisoner The Morning Star (the captain had told them that was their boarding style lately, because chains could not be cut easily), and would have leapt from ship to ship using ropes tied to the masts of the carrack, but not without being welcome by a gang of fierce defenders. Some of the pirates would have fallen in the jump, but they surely wore robbed armours, leather protections and shields, and almost all would have managed to succeed. Tyrion pleaded mentally that the guards’ arrows and others’ who knew how to shoot a bow had managed to take down some. Their number must reach several dozens of attackers, Tyrion calculated for the loud noise above him. Many pirates of the Bay connived so as the attacks where more effective and thus, in a long-term period, they obtained more earnings than when acting separately.

If no one got access to the levels below, it would be a good sign, as it would imply that the pirates were not able to break through the defensive force. Tyrion awaited with his muscles tense, ready for action. He sharpened his ear. He thought of Jorah, who would be fighting restlessly, and he trusted that the knight were not taken down. The three of them had come to an agreement with an exchange of looks and a nod. Jorah would stay on the deck, and his two traveling companions would watch over their women.

Time passed and the skirmish lost vigour. No one had descended to the corridors, but Tyrion kept tense and expectant. A short while later the fuss stopped completely and tyrion held his breath.

"Tyrion!," a voice called him from above.

Jorah. He was still alive. He went down the stairs, jerking.

"We have won!," announced him, covered in blood from head to toe. "Almost all this blood is not mine," clarified him, with a harsh smile.

Tyrion let go the air he was holding back. He ran to inform Sansa. "Sansa, it's over! We have won!"

She slid back the metal bar and opened.

They hugged so tightly that Tyrion did not know where he ended or she started.

"It's all over now, my love. Those pirates won't attack or sell anyone ever more."

Sansa got to her feet and looked at Jorah, grateful. She took one of his hands, stained with blood.

"Thank you, Ser Jorah. You have saved us. You are a true knight. The debt you owed to my father has been repayed," she said, with a steady voice. "Today you have saved many people from slavery or death."

Jorah cast his eyes down, too moved to speak.

Leena was in Pod's arms, but she did not cry. She was touching his face and examining it, to make
sure that he was all right. "Don't worry, woman," Pod said to her, smiling. "I haven't had to do anything."

Jorah narrated what had happened.

"Several of our men are dead and others are injured, but most pirates have fallen down. The captain will execute those who have been caught as prisoners. Only nine of the thirty-two pirates have survived."

"They were more or less as many as I reckoned. It seems that these traffickers are getting bolder," said Tyrion.

"They act this way since the time the khaleesi started the war. Desperate times call for desperate measures. The queen is making sure that this is not the best time for slavers."

"Let's go help to restore order," suggested Tyrion. "We'll have to clear up the deck and say a proper farewell to our dead fellows."

"Yes, let's go," accepted Jorah.

Tyrion turned towards Sansa. "Stay here, girls. Don't go upstairs for now, as there the view is not very pleasant at this moment."

"All right," Sansa nodded.

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The deck was a slaughter. There were bodies and pools of blood everywhere. With the help of all the survivors they dropped overboard the pirates' corpses and lined up the defenders' ones to officiate a funeral for them. Some sailors cleaned up and other people carried the wounded who could not walk, following the maester's instructions. Tyrion, Pod and Jorah joined the latter group and helped to move several men to their cabins and hammocks.

The surviving pirates were tied and stayed on their knees, spitting insults and curses in different languages. The captain walked in front of them, ignoring the insults and giving them the option to choose how they preferred to die, whether by beheading or drowning. "If you don't choose, I'll do it for you and you'll go directly to the bottom of the sea, and thus I won't stain my sword with your filthy blood," he warned. "Any of you want to say some coherent words before dying?" He awaited, but they did not stop their string of curses and spat at his feet. "Well, then. Let's proceed."

Eight chose the sword. Only one preferred drowning. Most prefer the quickest death, of course. In the hour of death usually there aren't brave people.

The captain carried out the unpleasant task as fast as he could. His large sword for executions was big and heavy and the material of which it was made drew Tyrion's attention.

Valyrian steel. My father would get off on a sword like that. He already stole the Stark's one.

Later, the beheaded corpses were discarded into the sea along with the pirate who wanted to be drowned.

"Look over the carrack, seize what is useful and bring all in here," commanded the captain. "If there are slaves, treat them with respect and say to them that they're free. Captain Gilean doesn't transport slaves in his ship. And when the carrack is ransacked, burn it."
The crew and some volunteer passengers, including Tyrion, Pod and Jorah, moved to the carrack and disappeared from view under the deck. A while later, they got out carrying boxes and bulges. They too had released a small group of fishermen who were chained in a hovel and had been caught by surprise by the pirates while the men were fishing in their launches. "They were going to sell us in Yunkai," explained the oldest.

"We'll take you to Meereen and from there you can go back to your homeland," conceded the captain. The fishermen nodded. After that Gilean spoke again out loud. "All of us have contributed to save our vessel, so we'll share out fairly the profits among guards, crew and passengers, without distinction. We as well will give the fishermen their part, for the harm they have suffered. If not for your courage, we would be dead or have been made slaves and The Morning Star would belong to the pirates. Today you have behaved bravely. Tonight we'll officiate the funeral for our valiant dead men and we'll toast for victory."

Everyone cheered enthusiastically and got back to routine. The fishermen went to their new lodgings.
Chapter 26

The carrack was burnt and all the occupants of The Morning Star watched the show of flames while they went away from the burning wreck. After that they went to tidy themselves up for the celebrations of the upcoming night, a funeral and a feast. Almost all of them were dirty with blood and filth and they wanted to be presentable.

The defensors’ bodies had been washed and dressed and lied down on the deck in several stages of damage, though the maester had done everything in his hands to conceal the ravages from battle. Darkness contributed to mask the terrible sword slashes and arrow holes.

Sansa and Leena wanted to be present with the rest of them, despite the warning of their men that it would not be a pretty show.

"I saw my father die, Tyrion. I was nearly ravished in the riot where people rebelled against Joffrey," listed Sansa, determined. "You think that a few dead men are going to impress me?"

Tyrion smiled at her with admiration. "You have changed a lot, Sansa."

"I've had to," said her harshly. "I don't have the intention of being a victim any more."

He squeezed her hand. "I don't know which you are most, if a wolf or a lioness," jested him.

"Maybe both," blurted out her, defiant.

"I like it when you turn into a beast," Tyrion insinuated to her, with a lecherous grin.

"Then from now on you're going to like me much more."

He raised an eyebrow, amused.

They went outside and congregated around the corpses. There were no priests that officiated the ceremony, so the captain uttered a discourse and everyone listened in a respectful silence. Gilean commended them to their gods, whatever they were. One by one, all the dwellers of the ship dedicated them a last farewell and the bodies were lain to rest under the waters.

Dinner was served on the sailors' tables and the beer barrels were brought. The captain had given his permission and anyone could drink as much as he liked, as long as did not cause any disturbance.

The rejoicing and the laughter filled the narrow space, until dinner ended and they got out to go on celebrating under the stars. The night was beautiful and clear, with a waxing moon. They wrapped up into their capes and cloaks as the wind was shearing.

Someone began to play a song and soon was supported and accompanied by flat choirs. The deck crowded with dancers more or less skilled. Sansa remained sat next to her husband, understanding his feelings. He did not like dancing.

"Go if you wish, Sansa. Any of them will be glad to dance with you," encouraged him. "Ask Jorah or who you want."

"But, Tyrion...," objected her.

"Don't worry. I don't mind, really. I know you love dancing and I don't want you to deprive
yourself of it because of me."

She kissed him and raised to her feet.

"Thanks, my love. The truth is that I need to stretch my legs and move." She got away and commented something to Jorah. He nodded, surprised, and looked in Tyrion's direction, who made an affirmative gesture.

Them both joined the dancers. Pod and Leena danced too and guffawed.

The group exuded happiness and friendship. And real freedom.

Tyrion wondered if they would be so free when they walked on solid ground.

In the early hours of the morning, tired but glad, they got back to their cabins. The ones who were too drunk were carried by others, because with such cold they could not be left sleeping outdoors at the risk of catching a pneumonia or any other fever.

Tyrion and Sansa got ready for bed and bundled up under the blankets.

"The Starks always are right in the end," commented Tyrion. "You use to be party poopers," he joked, needling her. "Though it has no merit to be right about the obvious. Winter always comes."

"Winter must not be forgotten. Not even in the hottest of summer," lectured her.

"Such as I said. Party pooper."

Sansa tugged his hair.

"You should be roaring all the time, according to your motto, don't you? At this point I already would be deaf."

"Who says I don't do it? But I'm clever and don't go announcing myself from afar. My bellow is subtler."

"I see. Very subtle." She touched his hardened male member. "Just now a part of you is roaring, my husband."

His throat got dry and he felt the flow of desire run through his blood. "Smart girl. You want to hear my genuine roar?," he asked with his voice hoarse and grabbing her hand so she would massage him. She pulled out his cock.

"I want to hear you bellowing my name," said her, descending upon him.

Tyrion suddenly forgot about all the events of the day and even his own name.

"It has been a strange day, isn't it?," commented Sansa, resting on her husband's shoulder.

"Strange but beautiful too. Many things have happened. And we're still alive."

She caressed his chest, distracted.

"Do you know what I thought when I was locked inside the cabin with Leena, ignoring what happened outdoors, and being frightened to the core for you? That if it weren't you who came
through that door, I wouldn't fight for my life," admitted her, with wet eyes.

He hugged her tightly.

"Sansa, don't. Don't say that. Don't ever think of it. You have to live. You have to fight for your life, whether I'm here or not. You must promise me that you'll do whatever you can to keep on going, always." In his voice there was such restrained emotion that her tears spilled over her eyes.

"I'll do it, if you promise me the same."

He hesitated, but finally nodded. "I promise you. And now do it yourself as well."

"I promise you, Tyrion," said her, sinking her face onto his chest.

"But we're together and will move forward together. That's all that matters now, all right?," said him, firmly.

"All right."

Tyrion kissed her forehead and hair and they slid into the fogs of sleep.
Leena read slowly the words Sansa had written for her. She had trouble with some syllables, but after the initial faltering she finally uttered them correctly and went on.

Her progress in reading was fast and she already could read most syllabic combinations. A few more lessons and she would be able to read all by herself. Sansa felt proud of her student.

Leena loved seeking names in the map. Without books, they used other ways. And Sansa had made for her a thorough reading guide in the sheets that the maester had given to her.

The perspective of being capable of reading what she wanted filled the girl with excitement. Books were expensive and difficult to get, but Tyrion, who was greatly fond of them, could not do without them, so when they settled with the queen he surely would gain some, and he would lend them to Leena.

"I was convinced that really good men didn't exist," said the girl. "There were very few who didn't beat me or abuse me. Most of them didn't care that I hated what they did to me or that I didn't want them to," explained her, resentful. "Every time they forced me, I tried to remember the cliffs of Lys and my brothers' and sisters' faces. That was all the beauty I knew and whenever I felt filthy, I grasped those memories in order not to turn insane. In several occasions I thought of killing myself. I wasn't worth anything, my parents didn't love me and had sold me, the clients of the brothels used me to their liking without asking me what I wanted. So when I met you... I believed I had died and I was in some gods' abodes," she said, with a sad smile. "You freed the three of us and treated us with respect. You didn't care the tattoo on our cheeks. No one had respected me ever." She kept quiet for some moments. "Tyrion and Pod are good men. You were very lucky, Sansa. Though you were forced to marry him, they married you to the proper man. And Pod..." she grinned. "I can't believe he loves me. He didn't care what I was. He said to me that the past was not important, that the important thing is now."

"Pod is not an ordinary lad. He knows how to appreciate a good woman. Tyrion and he are quite related in their hearts, though my husband has the gift of the gab and Pod is so shy," commented Sansa, smiling. Just then she decided to ask her the question that stirred her curiosity. "Are you going to wed? Or you'd rather remaining as you are? Excuse me, I don't have the intention to get into what doesn't concern me, that is a choice of Pod's and yours... It's only that I want to see you very happy."

Leena pondered the question. "Pod has asked me. I've answered him yes, but I want to wait until we arrive at Meereen and stop running away. I'd like it to be a pretty ceremony."

"It's very understandable, Leena. My own wedding was horrible," recalled Sansa. "In the first place, I didn't want to marry Tyrion. Moreover, Joffrey turned our ceremony into a grotesque mockery. And later, Tyrion got drunk in the reception, Joffrey told me he would rape me and my husband threatened him with a knife to prevent the bedding ritual to be carried out. Joffrey would have ordered his beheading if not for the intervention of my father-in-law, Tywin Lannister. You see, it was lovely," said her, with sarcasm. "But Tyrion didn't force me to have intercourse with him. He gave me his guarantee that he would wait until I wanted. And that was what he did." Her voice had softened. "At first I was sure I'd never want to have anything to do with him... Until I changed my mind."

"You'd be very blind if you hadn't seen him as he is. But you aren't," asserted Leena.
"Fortunately, I'm not," admitted Sansa.

They kept in a comfortable silence for some minutes.

"They say that the queen lost her great love," commented Leena. "You think she'll find another man who loves her so?"

Sansa was sincere. "Let's hope, but I don't think so. It's very difficult that a lightning strikes twice in the same place. Even that it strikes only once."

The three men were strolling over the deck as usual. Humidity coated the air, glued the hair to the forehead and left a sticky sensation on the skin.

"Soon we'll arrive at Meereen," pointed Tyrion. "The trickiest part is coming."

"Let's see what we can think," reflected Jorah.

"Gilean said to me that he is well known through these coasts and slavers sell and buy merchandise to him because he is useful for them and he's a reputable merchant, who doesn't try to swindle them. But the same who make deals with him don't esteem him more than Gilean does with them. He knows for sure that even the queen has heard of him. He has to transport the goods to the city and offer his respect to Daenerys. We could take the chance to enter with him," weighed up Tyrion.

"You think it'll be that simple?"

"No, I don't think it'll be that simple," conceded Tyrion, patiently. "But it's very probable that Gilean doesn't know who we really are. The only thing he knows for sure is that we are a group on our way to Meereen. Why would he deny us to accompany him?"

"The Unsullied will recognize me. And Gilean's not going to cherish the fact that you use him as a bait," objected Jorah.

"Leave that to me. Let me speak. I've come out of worse situations talking," he recalled, amused. "If I was able to convince the mountain clans from the Vale of Arryn to not killing me, and I can confirm to you that they are quite brute tribes and little inclined to dialog, it's feasible that at least I awake Daenerys's curiosity. We'll go into Meereen disarmed, to send her the message that we'll be at her mercy. She won't venture to do us anything before having seen us and having formed her own judgment. And when we're in front of her I can be very persuasive," expounded Tyrion with conviction. That scheme had to work, if he had judged correctly the Mother of Dragons. Tyrion would not even consider to carry out it if he harboured great doubts about Sansa's and his friends' safety. It was the great chance they had. "I don't know how she'll take your presence there, Jorah, but I'm going to intercede for you and let's plead for her to listen to me. I can't claim what she will decide since then, but she isn't a fool and there's one true thing."

"What's it?," inquired Jorah.

"Daenerys needs brave and experienced man around her, good counselors who help her to achieve her purpose. Exiles like her, landless people running after a shared goal: to see her on the Iron Throne."
Chapter 28

Meereen: Day 1

Tyrion told Sansa about his plans. She tried not to show too much anxiety. She trusted him absolutely. She knew well her husband’s ability to get out of any tricky situation. But that precise situation was extremely tricky. Nevertheless, she decided to keep her faith. He rarely was wrong in his estimations and opinions. He knew well what he did.

So she tried to instill herself with conviction so he saw it reflected in her expression and kept confidence in the fact that matters would succeed. Everybody knew that bad luck mustn't be called aloud.

Tyrion searched for Gilean and asked him for some minutes to speak.

"We'll go to Meereen with you when you go to present your respects to the queen," informed him. "You know that our intention is pleading for asylum and it'll be better that we all enter together. The fishermen from Bhorash will come too, they need a shelter and help to return to their home."

Gilean watched him, thoughtful.

"And the Unsullied? They're very distrustful towards the newcomers. They have to verify that they aren't spies or infiltrators of the enemies."

"I'll talk to them and they'll convey my message to the queen. We'll only be a handful of people who will get into the city disarmed and who will be at the Mother of Dragons' mercy. I don't believe that she'll refuse to concede an audience to people who come willingly to join her cause or to implore her aid."

"I hope there is no trouble."

"I do all this for my wife above all, and for my friends as well, among whom you've gained a place, and at last I do it for my own neck too, which I happen to appreciate highly. I don't take this lightly, Gilean."

"All right. Until now you've proved yourself a capable man. Don't fail now."

"I won't," affirmed Tyrion with all the confidence he could gather. He wasn't going to falter. He couldn't afford that. "I won't put you at any risk. If there's any trouble, it will be me who will act as a shield."

The captain nodded and gave orders. *The Morning Star* went ahead to the mouth of the port.

The biggest of the cities in Slaver's Bay outlined itself behind the mist. The Great Pyramid towered many yards above the ground and the queen had replaced the statue of the Harpy with her banner of house Targaryen.

Finally appeared before them the city of their concerns, where they pinned their hopes on. Surrounded by ramparts, it had a dignified and calm appearance, and it seemed almost impassable. Tyrion knew that was a mere pretend. The Great Masters loathed the foreign queen and she did not feel much more respect for them; inside the pyramids conspiracies were plotted; and Tyrion had never known a place which was inaccesible. There was always a way to get inside.
There had to be a way to soak through Daenerys's walls, and he did not refer simply to the ones made of bricks. He clung to this idea in order not to get very nervous. The critical moment was close and they would bet everything on that trick. For all the gods that he would succeed in putting Sansa in safety, and the rest of them too. His resolve was fierce. Never had been so much at stake in his life and he was going to fight with all the weapons of his natural talent: his intelligence.

Sansa squeezed his hand and he returned her gesture.

All that was for her.

With that thought he stopped being scared.

In the harbour of Meereen the traffic was scarce and most ships remained moored. One of them was the one which Daenerys had brought from Qarth. Further away, several men fished on the shores and in fishing boats. It was obvious that trade had suffered a hard blow. Meereen was not a city with plenty of natural resources; it lacked woods and the lands surrounding it were waste, roasted by the sun. The queen was trying to improve the depleted economy through brotherhoods of freedfolk which worked in varied jobs, and thus at least the city self-provided partly. The rest of the production was sold to Astapor and Lhazar. There were left very few cities that had taken sides for the Breaker of Chains, and the majority were too far away so the trade traffic with them could not provide the city with enough profit.

It was the first time Tyrion found himself in such a quiet port. It was unnatural.

The whole group brought together to wait for the mooring. Gilean organized the unloading of the merchandise and he soon would join them to walk together towards the city gates.

Sansa kept grasping Tyrion's hand and he stroked hers with his thumb to soothe her. Pod and Leena were tense too and quieter than usual. The fishermen, unaware of their companions' worries, awaited in calm.

The sailors put the packages in some carts and took them down to the dock through the gangway. The captain made a sign to Tyrion so they followed the sailors. At last they headed for the ramparts. Tyrion breathed deeply and began to walk with Sansa by his side.
Chapter 29

Meereen: Day 1

The captain and some sailors carried the carts with the merchandise and behind them the group walked. They stopped before the gates when the Unsullied, hieratical like statues, crossed their spears in front of them. Gilean asked if someone knew the common language, and one of the sentinels answered with an affirmative gesture. Gilean spoke ceremoniously.

"I am the captain Gilean of Tolos. For many years I have traded on these coasts and I am in favour of the queen. I bring spices, olive oil, cotton and silk fabrics, leather, almonds and hazelnuts, Arbor Gold, Dornish Red, some varieties of cheeses and honey, and I'm interested in the goods the queen produces. You can check all the load and, if you command it, I'll taste a sample of each product so you can verify that nothing is poisoned. We'll hand our weapons over to you and we plead with you to escort us before the queen, because we wish to ask her for an audience, if Her Grace considers convenient to receive us. My crew and I want to request her hospitality for some days, while we do business with her." Right after he pointed to the rest of the retinue. "They're passengers I've transported in my schooner. Those four are Bhorashi fishermen, whom we rescued from a gang of pirates and they as well need temporary shelter, until they can go back to their land. The rest of them come from Westeros and Lys and wish for the Mother of Dragons to concede them the mercy of allowing them to serve her." The Unsullied who understood the common language listened in silence. He pointed to one of the members of the group.

"I know that man. He's Jorah the Andal. The Mother exiled him for treachery."

Gilean looked at the knight, perplexed. He was about to imprecate him, when Tyrion went ahead and cut him short.

"Gilean, we are sorry. For safety we didn't reveal to you the truth about our identities and it's understandable you feel offended. Later we'll discuss that and tell you everything, I promise," he offered, in order to calm the captain. He quickly turned to the sentinel. "I am Tyrion Lannister and seek the Mother to join her cause. In Westeros I'm charged for assassinating king Joffrey, a crime I have not committed, even though the sadistic bastard deserved it by far. I have been Hand of the King and managed well." Almost without breathing, he pointed to the rest. "She is Lady Sansa, my wife, of the slaughtered house Stark. And the other two are my loyal squire Podrick Payne and his fiancé, Leena of Lys, a former slave whom we set free during the journey from Volantis to Tolos." Tyrion now understood the Unsullied's fame. The sentinel remained in perfect stillness, with his spear ready. "Jorah the Andal requests a second chance to the Mother, and I can assure he is no more the man he was. He is totally devoted to her and does not live for other cause than her. I would not have to stand up for him or risk my head for him, but he is a good friend and a great ally. The Mother will judge if he deserves her mercy." He bent his head in front of the sentinel. "We ask for an audience to express our respect and our adherence to her aspirations. Like captain Gilean, we will enter disarmed and will be under your custody until Her Grace considers it is suitable to receive us." After uttering his discourse, he breathed deeply and awaited.

The sentinel nodded. "You'll stay next to the gates while we convey your message to the Mother. Your load will be inspected and you'll hand over your weapons temporarily."

Tyrion contained himself to not jumping of pure relief. At the moment everything went as planned and he knew intuitively that the queen would receive them. A young woman, despite being so sensible, rarely would resist to her curiosity. Tyrion at least would plant in her a generous amount
of surprise.

They went through the searching and their daggers and swords were confiscated. After that the soldiers raised the canvas of the carts and inspected the goods conscientiously. Gilean tasted everything they commanded, until the soldiers were satisfied.

"So, Tyrion Lannister, eh?," said Gilean, with a tone of sharp reproach, but he did not look really angry, only annoyed. "You are who they call Imp?"

"And don't forget Halfman and Demon Monkey. At least, those are the nicknames I know. If you hear of another one, then you'll know more than me."

"Now I understand all. You didn't fit as a wool trader." Gilean gave the hint of a smile.

"All I know of wool is reduced to the cloaks I wear in winter," jested Tyrion.

Gilean then turned his attention to Jorah, looking at him with suspicion. "And if it isn't much indiscretion... What did you do so the queen exiled you?"

Jorah sighed, crestfallen.

"A long time ago I committed a crime and was forced to leave Westeros. I wished to go back and king Robert Baratheon promised me a royal pardon in exchange of information about the young Targaryen princess. I hadn't met her yet and agreed to the deal. And when I met her... little by little I left Westeros behind. But the damage was already done. And she found out."

The captain watched him.

"We do a lot of foolishness because of many reasons. Youth, stupidity, love, desperation... I can assure you, I've had my share. Not always I've been the old hand I'm now. Some of that foolishness is unrepairable," commented him, with regret.

"I know. I'll accept the fate the queen chooses for me," said Jorah.

Gilean kept silent, but Tyrion read the compassion in his look.
Chapter 30

Meereen: Day 1

Tyrion squeezed Sansa's hand. "Don't be afraid, darling. She'll receive us."

"And what if she takes us as prisoners?," she could not help to ask.

"I can't foresee what's going to happen to Jorah, but the rest of us haven't caused any harm to the queen. She won't sentence us without a reason. She's not her father."

"But she hates our surnames."

"We aren't our surnames. She's clearheaded enough to discern the difference," said him to try to calm her. "We weren't there when her family fell. You weren't even born."

She controlled her breath such as he had taught her.

"You're right. She wouldn't have gained so many devotees if she were cruel with innocents," reasoned her.

"Indeed, my dear. She's unrelenting with her enemies, not with those who show her fealty. It's probable that Jorah has some chances to redeem himself at her eyes. But not without a punishment."

"You mean dungeons or something like that?"

"If the queen decides to forgive him, she wouldn't send him to the dungeons. He wouldn't be useful to her locked in a cell, and Daenerys isn't a woman who wastes useful men."

Sansa was about to make another remark but through the gates came out the Unsullied who had conveyed the message to the queen. Everybody turned to them, tense and in complete silence.

"The Mother consents to grant all of you an audience in short," informed the soldier who spoke the common language. "You can go into Meereen. We'll lead you to the Great Pyramid."

The collective sigh could be clearly heard.

"We thank you," Said Tyrion with a bow.

They penetrated through the gates and everyone looked around, some of them watching what they expected to be their new home, nearly half a world away from all they had known.

Tyrion was aware that hostile eyes stared at them. The Great Masters ruminated their resentment in the pyramids. The apparent quietness that could be breathed on the streets was fake; Tyrion sensed the rage which floated in the air. Meereen never had been an oasis of peace, but now the hatred was focused on the foreign queen who had come to steal thousands of years of tradition.

Certainly the khaleesi had guts.

The Great Pyramid was imposing. Tyrion's legs hurt when he reckoned the high amount of levels to go up and down. He thought with a touch of malice that who built such a mass for himself and a handful of relatives, must imagine he was making up for some sort of lack. Casterly Rock was as
well a monstrous horror, with huge doors shaped as lions jaws and halls and rooms so sumptuous that they almost fell down with their own weight. A castle that, all in all, did not deprive itself in the least from blazing the power and wealth of house Lannister. Tyrion missed the scarce happy moments he had lived there during his childhood, but for him it had not been a true home, except for the intervals when he played with Jaime or got lost in the library for hours, secluded in his reading, which was the only thing that helped to him get away from Tywin's coldness and Cersei's cruelty.

The Unsullied who had escorted them from the ramparts led them indoors. The carts were moved to some warehouse Tyrion could not see from the lobby. They were commanded to wait there while the queen got ready to receive them in audience.

There were only a couple of narrow windows in the only wall oriented to the outside, what enveloped the space in semi-darkness. The thick walls shielded the interior from the burning sun and the heat.

"If the queen accepts us, we'll live here?," inquired Sansa, guessing what her husband was thinking.

"It's likely. This pyramid can be home to hundreds of people. It was designed for a noble family, owner of loads of slaves, so Daenerys must be making the most of it in other ways and using the rooms to put up her closest followers and staff. I don't think she has trouble to accommodate a few more. Anyways, she has taken possession of some smaller pyramids and houses which belonged to any family which must have fled to Yunkai, and she probably has seized others," explained Tyrion. "But it mustn't be easy to find shelter for an increasing number of freedfolk, apart from eight thousand Unsullied, two thousand Second Sons and the rest of her forces. Did you pay attention to the camps over there, beside the Skahazadhan estuary?" Sansa nodded. "There is where live the majority of the soldiers and sellswords, the dothraki who have followed Daenerys from the Great Grass Sea (they don't like closed places) and many newcomers who are incorporating to the camps. I'm afraid that the issues of logistics and organization which all that carries are difficult to solve."

"I don't feel any envy towards her," confessed Sansa. "She has a great load upon her shoulders. More than anyone can bear."

"That's the genuine price of being a king or a queen. That's the reason why the Iron Throne is so ugly and uncomfortable. To remind who places its royal ass on it that ruling is not a path of roses, or fit for the weak," said Tyrion. "But most forget it. Most ensconce themselves, ignoring the pricks in the ass and the cutting edges of the melted swords."

"The Mother waits for you," proclaimed an Unsullied. He took up his place beside the door to the audience room and returned to his hieratical position.

The so-called room was very large and had windows, because it encompassed almost totally one of the outside walls, so the profusion of light blinded them momentarily. When he got used to the change in illumination, Tyrion at last could see Daenerys Stormborn for the first time. She was sitting on a plain bench on the top of a flight of stairs, flanked by Ser Barristan Selmy and a pretty, young brunette woman with very curly hair.

Daenerys wore her platinum hair combed in a braided style and a spotless white dress, plain and without more ornaments than some laces in the neckline. She was greatly beautiful; the rumours did not do justice to her. The face was lovely, with large light-green eyes, full lips and delicate features. Her figure was slender and slim. Her skin, very fair and satiny, looked out of place in the rough climate and the strong sun of Meereen. Her expression was reserved and did not reveal anything while she watched carefully the newcomers. Tyrion caught a flash of feeling when she laid her eyes on Jorah for an instant. He looked at her without blinking, as if he wanted to absorb
her. The poor man radiated such an intense emotion that the ones next to him could sense it.

Ser Barristan stared at them with open mistrust and seemed ready to make use of his sword at the slightest provocation. Tyrion respected the old knight. He had been the best warrior in Westeros and an outstanding kingsguard, wasted in kings little capable or not capable at all. He wished him an honourable old age at Daenerys's service, probably the only one in those times whom was worth swearing the sword to.

The brunette young woman stepped forward and declaimed with the voice of a herald, resounding and steady:

"All kneel before Daenerys Stormborn, The Unburnt, Queen of Meereen, the Andals, the Rhoynar and the First Men, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Chains and Mother of Dragons!"

The group kneeled. Daenerys raised a hand. "Stand up," commanded. Everybody obeyed and silence covered the room, while the queen measured her guests one by one.
Chapter 31

Meereen: Day 1

"Captain Gilean of Tolos." The aforesaid stepped forward. "Your fame as a merchant captain has spread. Even to my ears have come the stories of your honesty. You have never consented to traffic with human beings and that is a rare virtue in a free man who is from Slaver's Bay. You as well have rescued and set free people from the claws of pirates," praised Daenerys. "I would be glad to make you a proposal you can refuse if you are not interested in it." She did a pause. "I offer you a post as my merchant captain and you'll have at your disposal my ships apart from your own to carry through the transactions and commercial deliveries. You will transport the products manufactured by my craftsmen and you will sell them in all the coastal cities where you are able to get buyers. You, who know so well the routes and the world of maritime trade, will establish under your own judgment what cities will be the destinations of your travels and who will be the people with whom you will strike bargains. Moreover, you will be authorized to buy the basic necessity products Meereen needs for its subsistence, trying to keep a reasonable profit margin. The quarter of the profits you get will be for you and your crew, and from the rest, the clean gainings will be destined to the coffers of Meereen." She did another pause, to let the man process the information. "I must say to you that it is probable that in short the maritime trade on these coasts is going to be hindered by the war my enemies are brewing against me," admitted her in plain language. "You will gather brave and loyal men to be the guards of the ships in case of attack. You can meditate on all this while you rest, if you need time to give me an answer."

Gilean gripped his tatty cap, perplexed. "You are very generous, Your Grace. I would be delighted to accept, but my wife, sons and daughters wait for me in Tolos."

"Bring them. You will have your own house," assured Daenerys. "Go back to Tolos and bring your family. Shall you accept?"

"Yes, Your Grace." Gilean looked like he was about to float. "Thank you very much for the trust you place in me. I will not disappoint you."

"From this moment you work for me. In your first mission, I commend you to halt in Bhorash to return these fishermen to their homeland. And you can go on towards Tolos to fetch your family. You can retire for the rest of the day and will be led to your lodgings so you can rest from the journey."

Gilean bent in a clumsy bow and went backwards. The fishermen made bows too and uttered phrases of gratitude.

"Tyrion Lannister," named the queen. This time her tone did not keep any trace of warmth.

Tyrion imitated Gilean and stepped forward. He looked at her straight in the eye, without a single faltering. They measured one another with their gazes for some seconds.

"Give me a reason why I should take you into my service," blurted out her, straightforward.

"I am still considering if you are worth my services," objected him. Beside him, Sansa churned in alarm and Tyrion grabbed her hand on the sly, to convey her that he knew what he was doing. Daenerys seemed an ice cube. Tyrion went on. "I have heard many stories about you, but at last I have you before me and will be able to decide if you are the queen for whom I have went across half the world with my wife and friends."
"And now you see me firsthand, where does your opinion incline towards?" asked her, ironic.

"It is soon still. It would be fair to count on enough mutual knowledge, knowledge not only based on rumours, gossip and thirdhand reports."

"And if I decide to have you executed?"

Sansa got so tense that he stroked her hand.

"Well, in that case I plead with you to spare my wife's life and not to punish her, as well as my squire and his fiancé; they are only guilty of being faithful to me. At least it will have been worth the voyage towards here and all my days since I departed from King's Landing have been extraordinary," said him, tranquil. "And it has been interesting to be in front of you."

She blinked, and Tyrion nearly smiled when he saw the hint of surprise in the khaleesi's pretty face. Daenerys reflected and she finally said:

"Let's admit you are right and we should not take hasty decisions without being in possession of more mutual knowledge. We can start that process just this moment. If you were my counselor, what would you advise I should do with Ser Jorah?"

Jorah jerked. Tyrion glanced at him briefly. Ser Barristan too seemed uncomfortable above, and it was obvious that he made an effort to bite his tongue. In King's Landing the relationship between he and Tyrion was cold, though Tyrion had nothing against the knight. But the honourable kingsguard must not think the same of him.

"I have not known anyone more devoted to a person than him to you. Well, except for me to my wife, or Pod to Leena," he clarified, looking at Sansa tenderly. "He is in love with you, I believe. What he was before meeting you, began to change since the day he attended your wedding with Khal Drogo. You yourself have been a witness of his excellent qualities. He is a great and clever knight, he has been completely loyal to you for a long time now. He has revealed himself as an invaluable traveling companion; he fought against the pirates who attacked us in the sea. He made a serious mistake in the past, that is true, and that offense must not be overlooked. I know that, if you commute his sentence to exile and readmit him, you will not regret your decision. But he deserves a punishment. Reduce him in rank; he cannot hold the post of honour he held before, of course. Assign him other tasks, far from you. He is an accomplished warrior. He will have the chance to go on showing his loyalty and devotion and in due course you can decide if he deserves to be worthy of your full trust," proposed Tyrion with the eloquence he knew was one of his best talents. "Kings and queens must fulfill their promises, but they must know when to give second chances as well to those who really are worth."

The look that Daenerys was giving him was not cold any more; in it slid a bit of astonishment and respect. For an instant, when she looked at Jorah, her reservation banished and her pupils reflected her feelings toward her old friend, whom she undoubtedly had missed.

"All right. Ser Jorah, come near," commanded her, with a less steady voice. "The sentence of exile is pardoned to you and from now on you will serve under the command of Ser Barristan, Daario Naharis and Grey Worm. You will settle in the camp of the Second Sons," she declared, with a slight shiver.

"I am infinitely grateful to you, khaleesi." She almost grinned after hearing her old title, with which no one save the dothraki addressed to her since Ser Jorah's departure. "I will merit your forgiveness. I will live and die for you, I swear it. My sword is yours until my last day." The knight knelt and bent his head in a sign of submission.
The air was charged with emotions. Sansa's eyes shone as much as Daenerys's. Leena watched the scene fascinated and stunned, as if she could not assimilate that those things were happening in front of her.

"Head for the camp and settle, Ser Jorah," pointed the queen. "Serve me well."

"I will, khaleesi." Jorah bent once more and got out.

"Lady Sansa," said Daenerys. Sansa got near the stairs and came to a halt. She had realized that the queen liked to look directly in the eye to measure who she had before. Sansa raised her eyes, shy, and forced herself to stare at those piercing eyes. "Do you love your husband?," asked the queen. Sansa expected other kind of question and perplexity must be reflected clearly in her face.

"With all my heart, Your Grace," she answered. Sincerity radiated from her.

Daenerys looked from her to Tyrion and her expression softened. "Tomorrow I will talk at long length with you both, separately. For today, rest from your travel. My spokesperson Missandei will show you your rooms. Check with her the matters about your accommodation." The brunette girl walked down the stairs and greeted them with a bending.

"Welcome to Meereen," said her, with a sweet smile. "Follow me."

They went out of the audience hall, precisely when the queen called Pod and Leena to her presence. Tyrion and Sansa looked at each other with a radiant grin.
Meereen: Day 1

Missandei and an Unsullied guided both guests. The girl displayed exquisite manners; she could match up Sansa. Nevertheless, her life had to be hard in the past, having been a slave. It was obvious that her former masters had educated her with painstaking; she surely was useful as a girl for formal functions. She was clever and much brighter than her natural modesty let her show. Tyrion had not much difficulty to guess it.

Quickly a current of friendliness settled among the three of them as they walked through the pyramid and went up over some ramps. They stopped in front of a door which was only in the second floor, at the bottom of a long corridor. Tyrion sighed with relief. At least they would not have to end huff and puff every time they had to go up and down of their rooms.

"Here are your chambers. We hope you like them. Meals will be brought to you and thus you will enjoy your privacy while you rest. If you need anything, tell the boy who will assist you."

"Convey to the queen our gratitude for her kindness," said Tyrion. "I think I've never been such a lavished guest," he added, smiling.

"I will convey it to her. Recover from the long journey. Have a good day," said Missandei as a goodbye, and left them alone.

The chambers were spacious and cozy. They consisted of the bedroom and an adjacent hall. The furniture was sumptuous, in the exotic Ghiscari style, but it was noticeable that some objects from the original decoration were missing, surely ornaments made of precious metals to which the queen probably must have given a better use, instead of getting dusty uselessly.

There were windows, a detail the couple found much more proper than any decoration. Sansa strolled through the chambers, touching fabrics and surfaces, content. Tyrion on his part laid down onto the bed, with his head resting on his crossed hands. After having slept for weeks in pallets of cabins and inns, that thick and uniform mattress was a blessing. He felt he could not be happier.

Sansa sat down by his side and the mattress sank a little. She touched his cheek. "Your beard has grown a lot," she observed.

"You don't like my masculine beard?," asked him with closed eyes.

"I do," decided her. "It gives you an... interesting air."

"Great. I'll let it grow then. But I believed that without the beard I had an interesting air as well."

"If you let it grow enough, it will conceal that cakehole you have," needled her. "It would be a relief," said her, tugging softly some hairs of his beard.

"Ah, that's so? Well, this cakehole makes you cry out my name and bails us from time to time. And I remember that it has made you laugh some time or another. And it says pretty things to you. You still want to hide it under a moustache with the same length as those from seals?"

"Ummm, I have to try it a little more to decide."

"Try as much as you wish. It's fully at your disposal."
She silenced him with a hungry, ferocious kiss.

They did not last to get naked and use for the first time that tempting bed, which offered a paradise after the narrowness of the voyage.

Tyrion thought he was wrong before, when he had believed he could not be happier.

They got dressed again and short after that, sounded some discreet knocks on the door.

"I'm your helper," announced a child's voice.

Tyrion opened and was face to face with a boy of about ten, dark haired and very thin, with big brown eyes. Tyrion smiled at him.

"Get in, boy. What's your name?" he asked to him.

The boy entered shyly and he remained standing. "My name is Mhyraz, master."

"Sit down, Mhyraz." Tyrion pointed to the chair next to his. "I don't like looking up while I'm sitting and talking with someone. If you sit we'll be at the same level. And moreover I don't like that likeable people feel uncomfortable around me," he said, smiling to the boy friendly.

Tyrion was aware that the boy must be wondering about the reason of his small height. It was typical of children's curiosity.

"The gods made me this way, Mhyraz. I couldn't become a warrior, but I was gifted with other talents. You'll find out about yours when you grow up. Or you already have any?"

The boy yet should be getting used to be treated as a free person, as it was obvious that it cost to him an effort to express himself with spontaneity, despite being a kid.

"I'm fast. And I can hunt using a slingshot. I have good aim."

"That's a good thing, Mhyraz. Surely those talents are useful for you."

"When we were slaves and the master kept us starving, I hunted secretly," told the boy.

Sansa uttered a spontaneous "oh" which she covered up with a cough.

"My family died in the riot of Yunkai and the Mother took me in. She has told me that Ser Barristan will teach me to be a knight," he said, with enthusiasm. "He's training me and other boys."

"And I see that you're an excellent helper, too," praised Tyrion. He sensed upon himself Sansa's sweet look, who in those moments radiated love for him. "The Mother is educating you well, Mhyraz. She's a good queen, isn't she?"

"The best in the world. She set me free," said the kid, with adoration.

"Could you be responsible for bringing us some clean clothes? And we need to wash ourselves," requested Tyrion with kindness.

"Immediately, master."

"We're going to be good friends. Come whenever you wish, not only to help us, all right?" Tyrion
proposed.

"All right," answered the boy and went out, closing the door.

"You'll be a great father," pointed Sansa. Tyrion made her sit on his lap.

"I'm sure of it. But for now I'm very good in the process of making children."

"Really? And what makes you reach that modest conclusion?"

"I don't know, let me think... I'm certain it's due to a red haired girl who doesn't stop begging me to have sex with her."

"Does she? And she's begging you now?"

"Out loud. I can't disappoint her. If you'll excuse me..."

Tyrion stood up and lifted her by the waist with his strong arms. She uttered an exclamation and laughed, while he carried her in his arms towards the bed.

"I still can't believe we're here, Tyrion," said Sansa resting on his chest, relaxed.

"You must have more confidence in your husband, my love." He encircled her with an arm.

"I have confidence in you. What I don't trust so is the world."

"As it must be. But your husband is capable of many things. I'm a lucky dwarf," joked him.

"Sometimes I think you're like a miracle, Tyrion."

"You're the miracle, Sansa. You're the reason for which we've come so far." Sansa realized that he didn't refer simply to the geographical distance they had went through.

"With a little help on your part," added her.

They remained in one of their intimate silences for some minutes.

"Don't worry about the conversations Daenerys'll have with us tomorrow, Sansa. Be sincere and don't hide anything she asks for. It's the only way to bore into her shell, not fake and empty words. She wants the truth, not what she'd like to hear."

"She's very young to be so sensible."

"She grew up without parents, without a home and with a stupid brother. Someone had to take the reins of the family."

"Well, let's get up. Again," said Sansa, with naughtiness. "Mhyraz will return soon with our orders and I wouldn't like him to catch us in this fashion."

His lewd eyes roam her. "I don't see anything wrong in our fashion," objected him, mocking.

She grabbed the pillow and threw it to his face, missing for very few centimetres.
Chapter 33

Meereen: Day 1

Mhyraz, with the help of other boys and girls, brought a big bathtub and several buckets with hot water, which they emptied in the tub. Sansa bathed in the privacy of the bedroom while the children left in the adjacent hall some bowls of honeyed dates, prunes and nuts, and a jug of one of those tasteless Ghiscari wines. They too carried clothes for them both, towels and an ivory comb for Sansa.

"Thanks very much, kids. ¿All of you have been taken in by the Mother?," inquired Tyrion.

"Yes, master," Mhyraz responded. "We all lost our families in Yunkai, except for Dara, who is from Meereen." The boy pointed to a girl with black, straight and shiny hair.

"You're good kids and I'm glad you help so much my wife and me. I'll think of a way to reward you for your efforts," affirmed him, and all the children smiled.

"Thanks, master. It's not necessary. The Mother rewards us," opposed Mhyraz, polite.

"I don't think she'll protest if I do it as well." He blinked an eye. The children looked one another, smiling. I must be a very likeable dwarf, he thought, amused.

"Later I'll bring dinner, master," said Mhyraz.

"Great. For the moment I don't need anything else. You can devote yourself to the responsibilities you have with the Mother or you can spend your time as you like. I'll tell the Mother how good and efficient you're." He similed to them and they went away, very content.

It came to his mind that, as Sansa liked teaching so much, perhaps she could give lessons to those children. Probably they did not know how to read. He'd consult that matter with Sansa and the queen and, if they agreed, she could use the adjacent hall for the lessons.

He knew that would make Sansa excited. Teaching was one of the things she was good at, and he wanted her to feel that she contributed to improve others' lives and not limit herself to an idle routine without occupations that would not satisfy her. She loved embroidering and reading sometimes, but that was not enough for her, he knew. In the Red Keep she spent many hours being depressed but he ignored how to try to fill her time, because she did not allow him to get near her soul.

"Sansa," called him. "They've brought towels, clothes and a comb."

"Take the things and come here," requested her. He grabbed everything and went to the bedroom.

Sansa was standing in the bathtub, freshly bathed, with her hair soaked and the droplets sliding over her curves in a very erotic way. She was shivering slightly with cold. Tyrion quickly brought her the towel and Sansa bent down to let him wrap her. He encircled her with his arms to give some warmth to her and she remained in that position for some seconds. He let her go and she got out of the bathtub, drying herself. Then Tyrion undressed and entered with a sigh of delight in the soapy tub. It smelled like her, with a touch of lemon. He closed his eyes and inhaled, while washing his hair, which had grown very much.

Sansa was drying her hair.
"You think I should cut this mop of hair?," asked him. "Or you like it long, like the beard?," needled him, grinning.

"You're very appealing with that look a little dishevelled," opined her. "I like grabbing your hair tightly."

"When we fuck or when you scold me?," provoked him.

"Maybe the second thing," cut her off, defiant.

"Are you going to say to me that you don't like grasping my hair tightly when we're fucking? Then you cover it up too well."

"Would you like to prove it?," challenged Sansa, provocative. She stood before him, naked. He already was hard as stone.

"I know your game, darling. You want to kill me slowly because you are aware of my weakness to resist your glorious body. How long you think this old man will be able to bear your rhythm?," complained him, joking.

"You remember the bet we raised in Myr?" He nodded, with his eyes invaded by desire. "So much want you to lose it?," asked her.

"Come here, wife. Let's begin training, because one of these days we'll carry out the bet. We'll see who loses."

"Yes, you better begin training, oldie," provoked Sansa. She stepped into the tub, where the water was getting cooler. She kneeled onto his lap and placed his hot and hard manhood at her entrance. She dropped and, when he felt himself wrapped by her wet warmth, moaned and shivered. She surrounded his shoulders with her arms and started to move up and down. The water splashed and spilled over the rim. They laughed, almost breathless, and he rubbed her clit below the water. The sensation of making it that way, slippery, was new, incredibly new, and he got so aroused that he finished before her helplessly. "I'm sorry," he panted. "You've cheated, darling. This has been too good."

She smiled with a triumphant expression. "I think that counts as a point for me. Let's see who loses in the real bet," said her, jesting. "No one said that cheating wasn't allowed. And by the way, you have a debt with me."

"Then let's pay it. I have a reputation to maintain." He make her stand up and sank his face between her legs. She gripped his shoulders in order not to fall down, as her kneels turned jelly as soon as she felt his tongue in her intimate folds.

"Come out of here," urged him, aware that they were at risk of falling down. He made her sit on a chair, onto the towel, then he kneeled, placed her feet onto his shoulders and continued with the task he had began on the tub. He licked her and introduced two fingers, and went on and on until she convulsed on his mouth and around his fingers. Sansa grasped his long strands of hair with an oblivious and furious strength.

Now it was him who smiled in triumph. "What did you say about your dislike in regard of grabbing my hair when we're fucking? I'm sure you've pulled up half my mane, darling."

"Then when I scold you it'll be worse," said her, laughing, trying to catch her breath.
Already dressed and with their hair almost dry and combed, they sat to eat the supper Mhyraz had brought.

"We won't raise the bet with this Ghiscari wine," affirmed Tyrion, looking with displeasure at the yellowish liquid. "This looks and tastes like cat pee."

"The crops of grapes are not of high quality over here. The ground is too poor. Too roasted by the sun," recited Sansa, as if she was teaching one of her lessons.

She was wearing one of the dresses Daenerys had sent her. It was made of thin cotton coloured in light green, and the bodice was much lower than any other garment Sansa had worn in her life. Nearly all her back was visible and her breasts insinuated themselves generously. She was a little flushed, as she was not used to show so much skin.

Tyrion could not tear his eyes from her. "It's the Ghiscari fashion. You'll have to get used to it," announced him, smiling. "Missandei dresses in that fashion too."

"Ah, then you've noticed," rebuked her, half joking, with a sting of jealousy. "You were taking a bit long to bring the subject. You have a reputation to maintain," she added, sharp.

"It's a fact that beautiful women simply are that way, independently from who looks at them. Is that my fault?", needled him, knowing exactly what she was thinking. "But you're the one who torments me in my sleeping and waking hours, and that's so because for me you're the most beautiful woman and I've chosen you. If not, it'd be another who would be tormenting me at this moment."

"Ah, what a relief. I'm a privileged woman," said her, sarcastic. "The queen is very very beautiful as well."

Tyrion felt that he was sliding down over dangerous ground. It would be best not falling into the trap if he did not want to sleep alone on the couch that night.

"I prefer sweet redheads who show their claws when you least expect it. I prefer a redhead who stole my heart and drives me raving crazy with love and lust, even when she tells me off without any reason," he whispered, caressing her hand. "Are you going to tug my hair now too?"

"Maybe," murmured her softly, taking his hand. She smiled at him and he sighed with hidden relief. For now he could sleep in the bed.

"Sansa... Would you like to teach those children, as you teach Leena?"

She opened her eyes wide. "Of course I would, Tyrion. I' be glad to do it," affirmed her vividly.

"Then tomorrow I'll talk about it to Daenerys and you'll see how soon you'll have your little school here."

"Tyrion..." She squeezed his hand, deeply moved. "I love you."

"And I love you too, gorgeous." Yes, definitely that night he would sleep in the bed.
Meereen: Day 1

At dusk, Mhyraz came with dinner and Tyrion asked him for a glass of hot water. Sansa had to drink the moon tea, as every night. They never forgot.

"They say that the queen can't have children," commented Sansa, while she ate the spiced meat which was swimming in a thick sauce. That time the wine was Westerosi, a detail that pleased Tyrion.

"When she lost khal Drogo's son, she became sterile. That was what predicted that Lhazareen witch," confirmed him.

"It must be painful for her. To be aware that she won't produce new life. And that she's the last Targaryen," pitied her.

"Yes, her lineage will die with her. The lineage of the dragon kings and queens."

"But now that dragons have been reborn... Will they extinguish again, when she dies?," Sansa asked, interested.

"There is a powerful bond between Targaryen's blood and the dragons'. But these could survive. They already existed before Valyria. The only creatures that can cause their extinction are men themselves. They caused it once with their negligence or because the kings were progressively losing the ability to control the dragons. They were distancing from their magic little by little and were more worried about political intrigues and their own greed. Or they fell into madness, like the Mad King. It was logical that they didn't know how to keep alive the species."

"Do you think Daenerys'll learn to control her dragons? It is said that they are very ferocious and one of them is let loose, going and coming at will." Sansa did not felt very delighted imagining that huge beast flying out of control.

"Let's hope so, but she'll have to find out step by step. It's a very old magic that only the Targaryens with true Valyrian blood can inherit. Daenerys possesses that blood and she carries inside her that magic. She'll have to discover it in due course, remembering the words of control she has stored in her memory long before being born. It's not easy. It will be a long and difficult process," assured Tyrion. "A dragon is missing because no one could chain it, and the other two stay confined because Daenerys, rightly, is afraid of the damages they can bring about. Yes, she has ahead a long way to walk, and not only with her dragons. And she, unlike the Targaryens who came before her centuries ago, doesn't have other relatives with magical blood who advise and help her with the issue of those beasts."

"But at least she has competent counselors," remarked Sansa. "She has totally loyal followers and the best army in the world."

"It's not enough. Most Ghiscari noblemen hate her, and if a queen doesn't gain nobility's esteem as much as the folk's, she'll have advanced only a few steps and peace won't be feasible," predicted him.

"You can help her, Tyrion. Finally you have the opportunity to do something bigger than you and me and anyone. You can improve things." Sansa intertwined her fingers with his. "She's the queen
you deserve. The queen all of us deserve."

He felt touched for her deep confidence in him.

"I'll try to build up a better world for you, Sansa," declared him in all simplicity. "That's why we're here."

Some tears spilled from her eyes and she kissed him above the table. "Do it for my father, for my mother, for my brothers and sister. For your mother. For all the good people who are gone and for those who will come," pleaded her, weeping. "For our sons and daughters."

They hugged tightly and he let her mourn all her losses upon his shoulder.

Sansa fell asleep early, worn out and a bit melancholy. Tyrion remained awake in the semi-darkness and sat on the windowsill to stare at the almost full moon, which illuminated the waters of the bay. *The same moon as in Westeros. It shines equally for everyone, without distinction.* It would be lighting up Blackwater Bay and the Red Keep as well. He wondered which plot Tywin and Cersei would be hatching, and how Jaime was enduring his handicap. *Almost all of us end up becoming physical or emotional cripples. This life doesn't leave anyone unhurt.* The news flew, even that far, and Tommen was crowned king with his brother's corpse still warm. Tyrion imagined Tywin, who was not very given to sentimentality, manipulating his youngest grandson in front of his other grandson's grave, of whom his grandfather would have not been very sorry to get rid from one day to the next. Tyrion winced, feeling the bile in his throat. It was the effect his dear father caused him.

There too spread the rumour, which he had caught in some of the cities, that the search of the Imp had been fruitless. As he well knew, his father and sister had not hesitated for a single second to load him with guilt for Joffrey's poisoning. Had he fled or not, he was condemned, so he chose the option with which he had more chances to survive and save Sansa. If he had stayed, at that point his head and his young wife's would decorate two pikes on the ramparts of the Red Keep. And even though he did not like much his own head, he did not fancy losing it yet. And Sansa's was precious for him and he would protect her above all.

Tommen was a good boy and the Iron Throne was too big for him. It would eat him alive. He would be another wimp king in Tywin's hands, the ideal for the Lannister patriarch, because Tommen was an obedient and submissive lad. Margaery would be tying the knot with him. The ambitious Tyrell girl would not stop until she succeeded in being the legitimate queen of Westeros and, if she could achieve it through a weak boy, she'd prefer it instead of enduring a sadistic husband. Tyrion reflected about who must have plotted the assassination. Though Tywin was not fond of his eldest grandson, he would not make an attempt on his own blood's life. *Unless it were his despicable dwarf son, of course.* Which other declared enemies, apart from his dwarf uncle, Joffrey had? No, that was not the question; how many had not hated Joff? The question was: Who benefited from eliminating him? Who was interested in replacing him with his easily influenced brother?

Margaery. She had powerful motives and was perfectly able. Her lovely face did not deceive Tyrion. Her apparent sweetness was a mask. But she could not have made it alone. Her grandmother? The old Olenna would not allow that her granddaughter lived together with an insane man. She was many things and her tongue was sharper than the edge of a sword, but the old woman cared for her grandchildren.

Varys. If it could be trusted what the Spider himself had affirmed before him in some conversation, his only aspiration was the realm. To achieve a long-term peace. With Joffrey was
impossible any form of peace, despite Tywin's grafts to make amends.

Littlefinger. Tyrion felt shivers whenever he thought about that man. He was the most greedy of all and Tyrion knew that he was not content with a post in the Council, a ghost manor in Harrenhal or being the regent lord of the Vale. He suspected that his love for Catelyn Tully was an illusion of what he would never have. Tyrion doubted that Littlefinger possessed a true heart to love anyone.

Oberyn Martell. The Dornish people were expert in poisons and the Red Viper had plenty of reasons to take revenge on the Lannisters, what he did not deny himself of blazing since his stormy arrival at the capital to assist Joffrey's wedding.

He discarded Oberyn. Too obvious. Moreover, if he knew in the least the Red Viper's reputation, he would seek his vengeance openly, body to body, a direct provocation. He did not see him acting in the shadows. It was not his style.

The four previously mentioned (Margaery, Olenna, Varys and Littlefinger) focused all his suspicions. The play had went round for them, because the guilt had fallen upon Tyrion, removing them from the spotlight. Whoever it was, took advantage of Cersei's and Tywin's hatred toward him. That person did it knowingly. Made sure that Tyrion was next to Joffrey and... Made the most of the convenient circumstance that Joff forced him to serve the wine. Made the evidence point at him.

The gears of his brain fit together.

Littlefinger... Was not present. Apparently he was in the Vale fucking his demented wife Lysa, but he was an expert in acting from behind. He would have concocted that other hand dropped the strangler in Joff's cup... Beside whom placed his nephew the cup just before drinking the last sips? Tyrion remembered... Olenna. The cup was very near Olenna.

Littlefinger and Olenna, and maybe Margaery? It was the most suitable choice.

Anyone must be very very careful of Petyr Baelish. Tywin was the most powerful, but Baelish was the most fearsome of the Seven Kingdoms.

If that was possible existing someone like Tywin Lannister.
Chapter 35

Meereen: Day 1 - 2

He was not worried about the conversation he would have with Daenerys several hours later. He already had tipped the scales in his favour and, though she subjected him to an intensive dialectical duel, he knew he would get what he wanted. He had revealed himself as an ally who promised to be very valuable and she was not a fool. Besides, her expression had softened when she looked at Sansa and that gesture played for them both.

It was not that what kept him awake. It was resentment. It was the rage that sometimes ate him up when Sansa did not fill entirely his thoughts. It was not good to feed those fires. Sansa soothed him, but his wounds never healed completely. He did not expect her to be the balm of his pains. Only he could heal himself. He ignored if that would happen any time. Although the Red Keep were burnt with his enemies inside it, that would not erase the harm they had inflicted him since his childhood.

He neither had the intention to be Sansa's balm. She sometimes remained staring into space for hours through a window and her mind was thousands of miles away. Perhaps in Winterfell, recalling happy times.

That was a hole he could not fill.

The important matter was to have a place to return. Though their hurt hearts in some occasions overflowed of pain or fury, afterwards they came back to the other's arms.

The important thing in every odyssey of the soul was not to have a place to go.

It was to have a place to come back.

Dawn greeted them with an intense light, in spite of winter, in Slaver's Bay. But in their room it was not much noticed, because Tyrion had shut the curtains before going to bed. He finally got to his elusive sleep for some hours.

Sansa was the first to wake up, fresh and rested, already vanished her melancholy of the previous night. Tyrion was sleeping soundly, so she got up carefully in order not to disturb his rest. He would need all the rest he could get to keep his mind as nimble and lucid as it was so like him.

Tyrion was the most intelligent man she had ever met. Perhaps he had inherited that feature from his father, to Tywin's chagrin. Tywin's mind was not negligible at all. She felt an inner shrinkage and a stab of hatred every time she remembered her father-in-law, but she could not deny the evidence: Tywin was more cunning than an old dog. Fortunately, that privileged brain seemed to be the only trait his son had inherited from him. It cost a great effort to her to imagine him as an affectionate person, though the stories about him told that he had married his cousin Joanna Lannister out of love. That was something that did not fit at all with his inflexible personality. And anyways that ended with her death.

Every morning, Sansa's first thought was for her husband; she was much more in love than any princess from songs and tales, as hers was a real love, solid and tangible, and had as its subject the gentlest man in the Seven Kingdoms; at least, for her. She felt surprised of having laid her eyes, an entire life ago, upon Joffrey or the Knight of Flowers. Some moment during their journey, Tyrion
had confessed to her that Ser Loras did not feel attracted to women. What meant that he fell in love with men. In King's Landing, among the gossip, she learnt that there were men and women who felt inclined to people of their own sex or both sexes. The first time she discovered that fact, catching bits of gossip among the servants or other subjects who walked through the corridors or the gardens, she felt stunned. But afterwards she reasoned that the matter of personal tastes was very strange and complex and it encompassed everything.

What she refused to believe at first was that Ser Loras was included in that category. He was so gallant, fought so well, wore his clothes and armour with such handsomeness, he complimented her with such delicacy... Even gifted her with the flower of the Tourney of the Hand celebrated in honour of her father... Sansa now understood he did it to pretend. Tyrion explained to her that the fact that a man liked other men, or the same with women, was a taboo subject in Westeros. Just like incest (although the Targaryens had committed it for centuries).

"If you had married him, probably you would remain as a maiden still, but for the opposite reason to what happened in our wedding night," he had told her, with a pitiful expression. "You'd have yearned for his touch, but he'd ran away terrified because he did not desire you. It's normal. Think about how you felt regarding me and put yourself in his position. In our case, you were who ran away terrified because you did not want me. It's totally logical and understandable. You had just been forced to marry a dwarf Lannister. You didn't need any more encouragement to not feeling a great attachment to open your legs for me."

"Then, if I had wed Loras, as the Tyrells expected, my marriage would have been a failure. He'd have treated me well because he's not cruel, but he wouldn't love me. What a stupid girl I was. I didn't see that the Tyrells wanted the same that your father, catch me to secure the North," said her, with a bitter tone.

"You were innocent. You were raised in a honorable house where your family protected you, darling. You didn't grow up among intrigues and treachery," consoled him.

"Perhaps it would have been better that way. To grow up among intrigues and treachery," declared her, looking at the floor, sad.

He made the gesture that always moved her: to take her face in his hands.

"No, Sansa. I love you this way, exactly as you are. And you aren't stupid." And he had kissed her so tenderly that she quickly forgot the bitterness she had felt.

(Part of a longer chapter from the original. To be continued)
Meereen: Day 2

To tell the truth, currently Sansa most of the time did not even remember that her husband was a dwarf, and when she remembered it, that was not something which bothered her, but something that was like him, inseparable from his being, and she loved him.

The romantic songs of her childhood paled and were ridiculous. Nothing to do with what she felt for her husband. For her it was yet difficult to believe that they had reached such degree of intimacy in every sense, and that she desired to fuck with him practically all day long. Yes, she used that rude word he was so fond of. As soon as she recalled it in her mind, she got wet.

And, apart from the delights of sex, talking with him was one of the most joyful activities that existed. She constantly learnt things from him.

She reflected upon all that while she was putting on a low-cut, light blue dress, matching her eyes. She would wear one of the capes of fine wool the queen had given to her, both for the cool air and for protecting her modesty. She smiled thinking of how Tyrion would look at her when he awoke. She loved to please him and turning him crazy with desire. Her smile twisted when she got aware that with Loras Tyrell the situation would have been drastically different.

She realized that she would need help to comb her hair. Now she was in a court again, she could not wear her hair loose or tied carelessly. She would ask the orphan girls if any of them would dedicate to that task every morning from then on. At the moment, she made some simple braids which tied together behind her head, and let the rest of her hair fall free over her shoulders. It had quite grown, like Tyrion's, and overtook her waist.

She inspected more thoroughly the chambers but she did not find anything in the drawers or wardrobes, apart from the objects them both had placed and put away.

She would not mind living there, but ignored if the queen would relocate them. Anyway, it would be sufficient with those two comfortable rooms, at least while they did not have children.

There were no fireplaces, which denoted that winters must not be very extreme. They probably heated themselves up with braziers.

The bay offered a glowing aspect. The harbour remained calm and The Morning Star was anchored a few yards from the shore. Some sailors and guards had stood in the ship to watch over it and the mates who where inside Meereen must be taking turns to carry the daily supplies to their colleagues on board.

She was eager to know about what the queen would have said to Pod and Leena, and where would she have put them up.

She heard Tyrion stretching out and headed for the bed, smiling.

"Good morning, sleepyhead," greeted her, cheerful.

He blinked his eyes, getting used to the light, and fixed them in her.

"You're a vision this morning, darling," said him, with his hoarse voice of just awaken. "Are you planning to seduce the Mother? Let me remind you that I'm jealous as well," he joked.
"The only one I have the intention to seduce is in this bed."

"You have me utterly and hopelessly seduced already. Even though you were dressed in a burlar sack, your hair were a mess and you were dirty with filth, I would want you," admitted him, categorical. "But it praises me a lot that you take such care of your gorgeous aspect."

"You think I do this only for you?," provoked her.

"For whom else, otherwise?," threatened him with his tone of fake anger.

"I do that for anyone who looks at me, I suppose."

"Cut off the anyone. Anyone is me and exclusively me," he said, sitting up and slapping slightly her bottom. "Yeah right. The truth is that I feel very proud of showing off the beautiful wife I have." He gave her a kiss.

"That's very much like you," said her. "To exhibit me as if I am a peacock." She laughed.
"Breakfast will be brought soon. What do you think of my hairstyle? Today I had to put more care, but I don't know how to style my hair very well. I'll ask the girls to see to that in the mornings."

"I know that my masculine opinion regarding aesthetics isn't worth very much, but I'd say you are awesome."

"Yes, in truth your opinion in that matter doesn't give me much reinforcement."

They laughed and then some knocks sounded on the door.

"Breakfast," announced Mhyraz.
Meereen: Day 2

They ate fruit and cheese for breakfast. Sansa asked Mhyraz if he could call any of the orphan girls, Dara for example, because she wanted to ask her for a favour. The boy nodded and went out.

Sansa wore proudly the snowflake brooch Tyrion had gifted her. He noticed, pleased. During the journey she hid it, but in their current circumstances she did not have to conceal it.

"You are very beautiful."

"It must be because yesterday I had a good day." Flush reddened her cheeks. How many times had they made it? Three, four? Tyrion was losing count and he decided that he loved the fact of losing count.

"Who do you think the queen will request first?," inquired her.

"Surely you. Ladies come first," said him with his gallant tone. "Remember you don't have nothing to fear. She'll like you."

"Are you sure? I'm not as clever as you or her."

"How many times do I have to plead with you not to underestimate yourself?," begged him patiently. "She'll see your virtues."

He kissed her hands.

Mhyraz returned to tidy up the breakfast service and Dara came with him.

"Mistress," said the girl, bending.

"Hello, Dara," greeted Sansa. "I would like to offer you a deal, and you'll tell me what you think." The girl made an affirmative gesture, nervous. "Would you like to comb my hair in the mornings? Can you get hair styled?"

"I did my mother's and little sister's hair," told the girl. "I know how to do it. I like it very much."

"Then, what do you answer to my request?"

"Yes, mistress. I'll come to do your hair every morning." The girl almost jumped with joy.

"Then we have come to an agreement. You can go, tootsie." The girl made a quick bow and left, grinning.

"How easy it is to make a child happy," murmured Sansa, staring at the door. Tyrion new that remark was not only aimed at Dara.

The door was knocked again. It was Missandei.

"The queen requires you in private. Lady Sansa, you are the first."

Sansa and Tyrion held hands briefly, he gazed at her eyes to inject confidence into her, and Sansa departed with Missandei.
The queen was sitting at a table, in a hall of much more limited dimensions than the audience hall. She again was dressed in pure white and her braided style left loose two wavy strands from her temples to her shoulders. She stood up to welcome Sansa and offered her a seat.

Sansa thanked her.

"Lady Sansa Stark," began Daenerys, solemnly. "I have not called you here to tell what you already know. We both know what our fathers did." She did a pause. "But perhaps there is something you ignore. It has come to my knowledge that your father, when he was Hand of the King, tried to make Robert the Usurper change his mind and stop plotting my death."

Sansa stared at her with surprise. "I indeed ignored it, Your Grace."

"Of course. You were just a girl in love with the wrong groom." Daenerys smiled, understanding. "You were lucky. A family who loved you and a father who protected you," she said, with a tone of longing for what she never had. "Naturally, you were not aware of what was cooking up in the court. But I have found out that Lord Eddard Stark had a kind gesture with me, an exiled teenager who was hundreds of miles away and who he never had seen. And the Mad King's daughter. I have discovered that he had a row with Robert, his best friend, and he threw the badge of the Hand to his friend's face, all to defend my life," she said, as if she was not able to believe it.

Sansa cleared her throat timidly. "My father always did what he thought it was his duty. Maybe he was not always right, but he never acted against his principles," declared her, standing up for him. Daenerys wanted the truth, and that was what she would obtain. At least the truth Sansa knew.

"I know. I am aware as well of the fact that he confessed himself a traitor in the Sept of Baelor to save you, before the Bastard King executed him. He was supportive of Stannis Baratheon as Robert's heir."

"Yes. He defended his stance against all odds, he even was ready to die for it. And I believed that I convinced him when I went to talk to him in the dungeons." Sansa smiled sadly. "He said that he would confess a traitor and he would declare that he supported Joffrey so they allowed him to dress the black. What a poor naïve I was. He did it to save my neck." Her voice trembled. She was about to cry.

Daenerys placed a hand upon hers. Sansa looked at her behind the veil of tears.

"That tells me very much about how your father was. I was blinded with rage, but now I have realized that I was wrong. Don't cry, sweet lady. Feel proud," encouraged the queen.

Sansa smiled through tears. "I feel proud. I regret so much that I was furious against him during those days... He had to slaughter my direwolf because of Joffrey and Cersei, and I got so angry with him that I barely spoke to him for weeks. He had gifted me a doll when we arrived at King's Landing to ask me for forgiveness. And I said to him that I did not play with dolls since I was eight." She sobbed. "If I had known that I had so little time left to be with him..."

Daenerys squeezed her hand. Tyrion used to do the same gesture. "You suffered a lot. It had to be awful to live among your enemies. To be betrothed to the monster."

"It was. The worst was pretending in front of everyone and repeating constantly that all my family were traitors. More than once I felt tempted to jump from a tower to avoid my wedding to Joffrey."

"You survived that hell. And later they wed you to Lord Tyrion so house Lannister could rule the North."
(Part of a longer chapter)
"I thought I was going to wed Ser Loras, you know, the Knight of Flowers. Once more I was kidding myself. The Tyrells were manipulating me, but Tywin Lannister figured it out and came earlier than the Tyrell's ploy. And Tyron came to my chambers to give me the news before anyone else did it. I was deluding myself with a nice wedding to a handsome knight in Highgarden, and suddenly I had to marry Tyrion Lannister. I felt more stupid and unhappy than ever before." She kept quiet for some moments. She drank a sip from the cup of wine she had been served. "The day of the wedding came and I felt miserable. Tyrion tried to comfort me before the ceremony and made me smile," she remembered sweetly. "But the ceremony was a bad jape; Joffrey took away the stool where Tyron was going to step up to put the Lannister cape on my shoulders, and almost everyone was laughing at us. I wanted to die of shame. He pleaded with me to kneel and I thought that it would not make any difference, and that there could not happen anything more humiliating than that." Daenerys listened very attentive. After all, she was scarcely a few years older than her, and... What girl did not like gossip? She was about to smile. "But I was wrong. The reception was even worse. Tyron got drunk, Tywin reprehended him, Joffrey threatened to rape me and, when he announced that it was time for the bedding ritual, Tyron stabbed his dagger on the table and blurted out that there would not be carried on any bedding and that if Joffrey dared to put his hands on me to force me into the ritual, Tyron would chop his manhood." Daenerys almost laughed. She restrained herself, but Sansa noted that she was making an effort to remain serious. "Tywin succeeded in calming down Joffrey, and Tyron performed a great role pretending to be more drunk than he was to make everyone believe that he did not control what he was saying. He took me away in a rush and, once in our chambers, he assured that he would not share my bed until I wanted him to. And he fulfilled it." She drank another sip of wine. "He treated me kindly. He worried about my well-being. He never got angry or lost his patience even though I refused nearly all his attempts to get closer. The worst was when I heard about my mother's and my brother Robb's murders." Sansa drank one more sip to swallow the knot in her throat. "I did not want to see anyone, or talk to anyone. Soon after that, the day of Joffrey's wedding came, and it was another embarrassing and humiliating day. Joffrey treated Tyron worse than rubbish. We had to bear an awful day. I felt pity for my husband; I realized that he was a prisoner there like me, in a different way, but his family despised him for no reason and no one seemed to see his qualities. I admit that I hardly had appreciated him either. He saved the city from Stannis's attack until Tywin arrived with the Tyrell's army." She drank again. "And at last, when Joffrey fell dead on the ground after eating pidgeon pie and drinking the wine he forced Tyron to serve him, my husband searched for me among the people and we went away at full speed. And we headed for you."

"It was then when you fell in love with him? When he sought you to save your life?"

"Yes. In that precise moment I saw him as he really was," admitted Sansa. "And I reproached myself for not having payed attention to it before. I think he felt something for me since some time ago, but he kept it for himself. It was not until I showed him my own feelings that he opened too and gave himself fully. I believe that if I had not taken that step, he would have went on protecting and taking care of me all the same, respecting my distances with him, until we arrived at Meereen. He is a man who fulfills his oaths and responsibilities to the end. He would have kept me equally safe. But we would have been much more unhappy. One night I awoke from a nightmare and he was beside me in the bed, in the cabin of the ship that carried us to Myr. We had started to sleep together because he never left my side in order to watch over me. And then... I felt that... I wanted him to touch me. To kiss me."
"And he did it?" asked Daenerys. In that moment she looked like a curious girl instead of a queen, and that amused Sansa.

"No. I did it. I pounced on him and kissed him."

"And just then you both began to be a real married couple."

"Yes. Just then we began."

"You are a lucky woman. Once I was so in love as you," confessed the queen. "And my marriage started in a similar way than yours in some aspects. I was forced to the wedding, I was terrified and did not want anything to do with my husband. But things improved between us. We fell in love and Drogo, the fiercest khal among khals, loved me tenderly, and I loved him. He changed and I changed too. We were sure that the world would be ours. But all ended and I lost him. I lost my son. I lost all the children I could not have." Like Sansa some minutes before, the queen looked in the verge of tears. "Fight for what you have. Don't let it go. The gods already are too cruel without our help." She drank a sip from her cup too. "I am glad that you have come to me. I know we will be good friends. Settle in comfortably and on the fly we will solve any issue. For anything you need, don't doubt to consult me. Think carefully about the tasks with which you could be useful to me and I will arrange it."

Sansa had it very clear, but she would let Tyrion expose it. Her modesty prevented her from bringing out her own qualities in front of other people, especially those who she had just met for the first time, and Tyrion would be delighted to talk about them to the queen.

"See you soon then, Lady Sansa. Missandei will escort you and will notify your husband to come here."

"See you soon, Your Grace." Sansa made a bow and left with Missandei. She felt very content regarding her conversation with the queen. And Daenerys had not seemed to her as intimidating as the first day. Perhaps she was that way only with whom really deserved it.
Chapter 39

Meereen: Day 2

Tyrion was awaiting sitting on the same windowsill where he had sat the previous night gazing at the bay. When the door opened, he jumped to the floor and went to meet Sansa. He watched her, expecting. She grinned.

"It has gone well," she said.

He took her hands. "I'm very glad for it, darling. Well, you'll tell me later. I'm going."

She bent down to kiss him. "Good luck, my love."

"You're my luck. See you in short," said him as a goodbye. He blinked an eye and was gone.

Daenerys greeted him and Tyrion, after a bow, took a seat on the same chair Sansa had used. The queen studied him carefully, but she had not any more the cold attitude of their first meeting.

"Lady Sansa has told me very interesting things about her time in King's Landing. It was a nightmare for her."

"My nephew, my sister and my father saw to that. They made her life hell. I would like to say that I did not contribute to her miseries, but I would lie. The fact of having to marry me against her will did not help to improve her fondness of me," admitted Tyrion.

"But you treated her well. You took seriously your wedding vows and cared for her, although she rejected your kindness."

"She was innocent and wretched. The only thing I could do for her was to try to comfort her, make her see that she had a friend even though she did not want anything to do with me. It was my duty."

"Are you saying that, when your father commanded you to marry her, you took it as an unpleasant obligation? As a hateful responsibility?" asked Daenerys, with a skeptical smile.

"She is a beautiful young woman, polite and sweet, of the ancient lineage of the Starks of the North, with a claim on Winterfell. She was too good for me, much more than I was able to dream of a wife. Unpleasant? Of course not. Does the pig complain when it finds an exquisite piece of food in the mud? But I did not want her to feel forced to be with me. I did not fancy it being that way. I did not have the least wish to be scorned by her more than she already did for my Lannister surname. I did not feel thrilled by the perspective of facing day after day her indifference and the wall of her distance. Sansa lost much more than me," declared him. "How could I be glad for her unhappiness? How could I feel well with myself, knowing that she was suffering and I could not do anything?"

Daenerys looked at him lengthily.

"Any other man would have taken her without a guilty conscience, he wouldn't have given a damn about what she felt and would have compelled her to consummate the marriage in their wedding night," said her, harshly, though she did not look at him, but at some distasteful memory. "You are a strange man, Tyrion Lannister."
"I am not my father or my sister, nor my dead nephew. I am very far from being the best of men and I don't use to put honour ahead of my own life, except when other lives that depend on me are at risk, and I don't like to have on my conscience the deaths of innocents. Ned Stark was very honourable and I respected him, but his honour served him to end losing his head. I am not like him. I like the game of thrones and I play it well. I was fond of being Hand of the King." He picked up the cup and emptied half of its contents in a gulp. "But I don't enjoy torturing; that was Joff's favourite hobby. I don't enjoy plotting misdeeds; that is my sister's favourite hobby. And I neither enjoy my father's favourite pastime, ruling with an iron hand and without scruples. I would be pleased if there wasn't so much death and horror because they are sights which don't cause me enjoyment. It is true that I have always felt amused screwing over my father, as I would never gain his affection. Every day he has spat at me that he hates me for being responsible for my mother's death. He despises my sense of humour and I have infuriated him as much as I have been able to since my childhood. He denied me of my claim on Casterly Rock and that hurt me deeply. I was a drunkard whoremonger because I knew Tywin loathed that his dwarf son dishonoured even more the already dishonoured Lannister name... I went from brothel to brothel and drank, because...

Which woman was going to love me, me, the Imp? All my life I have searched for love and finally found it in Sansa. She is so... unbelievable amazing that I wonder what god must have pitied me. I know I don't deserve her. But I strive to. I would die for her and I will devote the rest of my life loving her at least a fraction of what she deserves to be loved. And to achieve what I want for her, I have come to help the only woman who can change the world. I am a man of action, I possess a political and tactical mind, I like big challenges in which I bring into play all my mental ability. That is what I offer you, Your Grace. What I am inside of this small body is what I have to offer."

He stared at her without wavering, or without a single trace of fear.

"You have spoken with the heart, Lord Tyrion. You are brave." He sensed that Daenerys was deeply touched but she kept her iron composure. "I start to make out that we are going to understand one another very well and we can be great allies. My task is very hard; I am not one of those queens who live lazily. I owe myself to my people. They call me Mother. I can't abandon them."

"I know, Your Grace. I wouldn't have come here with my wife, traveling through thousands of leagues for less than you have to give."

She smiled for the first time.

"Do I must conclude them that I am worthy of your services?," she asked, amused, recalling their first audience.

"You are, Your Grace. Fight restlessly to go on being that way. The throne is not made to loll about on it."

"Like the Iron Throne," pointed her.

"Like the Iron Throne," affirmed him. "I must consult you about a subject."

"On with it," encouraged Daenerys.

"The orphan children who tend to us are lovely. We are becoming fond of them and my wife finds pleasant to teach and educate. During the journey she has been instructing our friend Leena and wishes to continue with that occupation. It has occurred to us that she could set up a school in our adjacent hall for the orphans you have in the pyramid."

The queen's eyes shone with interest.
"It's a great idea. Tell Lady Sansa that she will have available all she needs for her lessons." She remained thoughtful for some moments. "I think that all the freedchildren could receive an education. I have your first mission as my assistant and counselor, Lord Tyrion. Sound out how many among my followers possess instruction as transcribers and educators and if they will be willing to be the teachers of all the children from five years old. We will prepare rooms here, in the Great Pyramid, so they will have spaces for their lessons. Could you start as soon as possible?"

"Of course. Today."

"You can retire. Tell your wife that this project is due to her and that I am very grateful for her initiative. By the way," she added. "I will try to find you a permanent lodging. For now settle in as comfortably as you can in your chambers and we will see."

"Thank you very much, Your Grace." He dedicated her a bow and retired, with his soul lighter than he had felt it in his whole life.
Tyrion got into his rooms and found Sansa waiting for him, anxious. He almost flew to her and took her hands.

"We did it, darling. We have something like a home," he said, with his throat tight out of emotion.

"It wouldn't have been worth such a long journey if she weren't able to see how you're, Tyrion. Daenerys would've disappointed me if she didn't think highly of you. But you chose well the path. You bet for her. And you've saved us. At least for now we're safe." She knelt in front of him and that time it was her who took his face in her hands.

"The queen's position is unforseeable, Sansa. We don't know what's going to happen," warned him.

"We'll get ahead. We have experience in that." They smiled.

"I told her about the lessons, Sansa. She has loved your idea so much that she intends to open a school for all the freedchildren, employing volunteers who have some instruction to be the teachers. She said that she owes you the project and she's very glad for your initiative," explained him, with pride.

"Oh, Tyrion. It's wonderful. I have no words." She kissed him.

"This very day I'll inquire to find out who can be the candidates for teachers, and it'll be necessary to calculate how many children will attend school. I must ask Missandei and some of the Unsullied if they can help me. The freedfolk don't know me still."

"Great. The sooner everything is organized, the better." Suddenly she remembered what Daenerys had revealed to her. "Tyrion... Do you know what the queen has said to me? She has surprised me a lot."

"Tell me," urged him, curious.

"You weren't in King's Landing then. It all started when my father was appointed Hand of the King and we traveled to the capital. Some weeks later, something happened because my father gave orders to pack our belongings and load them in the carts. He wanted us all to go back to Winterfell, and Arya and I opposed strongly. Afterwards he was wounded by one of your brother's soldiers and..." She swallowed, trying to push aside the painful memories of those days. "Well, it seemed that my father had an argument with king Robert and the quarrel was so heated that my father shouted to the king that he didn't want to be the Hand any more, and threw the badge to Robert's face."

"Yes, I've heard the story superficially. Go on, darling."

"All the argument was due to my father's refusal to get involved in Daenerys's murder. Robert insisted on killing her, and my father stood up for her, saying that he didn't take part in girls' murders. Robert got angry, they yelled to each other and we were on the verge of leaving King's Landing. I wish we had done it."

"You can't change the past, Sansa."
"I know it too well. I didn't want to go. I still believed that Joffrey... All in all, my father defended Daenerys's life. And she knows."

Tyrion processed that information. He did not know very well that part of the events in the Red Keep, as he was very far away living plenty of turbulent adventures which comprised, among many other things, Sansa's mother taking him prisoner and causing Tywin's dreadful fury, as well as Jaime's. But those were delicate matters of which he hadn't spoken to Sansa yet, because they implied in a high degree the hatred between the Starks and the Lannisters and he wasn't sure of how she would face all that. Her wounds were too recent.

"Your father was a good man. A lot better than mine."

"He confessed himself a traitor to save me, Tyrion. He retracted his support to Stannis for me."

Some tears ran down her cheeks. He dried them with his fingers.

"That was what any true father would've done, darling. He venerated you."

She held back a sob and cleaned her eyes. That day she would not cry any more.

"He'd be proud of you if he had known you, Tyrion. If he had seen how happy you make me."

He nodded as convincingly as he managed. He did not envision himself as the ideal son-in-law for Ned Stark but, if she believed that, he would not be contrary.

If he were Ned, he'd neither dream of his treasured daughter ending married to the Imp.

Anyway, Ned was not there to pierce him with his icy disapproval.

They both proceeded to plan their activities for the day, glad to have something important to carry out. Mhyraz showed up with lunch and Sansa took the chance to question him.

"What do you think of learning to read and write? And many other things."

The boy looked at her, agape. "But I thought that poor children didn't..." He hushed, ashamed.

"Since now they will, Mhyraz. Do you know that the Mother intends to open a school for freedchildren? I'll teach you and the friends you have in the Great Pyramid."

"Really?" asked the kid, astonished.

"Really. And now go and tell the others. Inform that soon there will be a school and all of you will learn to read and write, like Great Masters' children."

"Right away, mistress." And he rushed off the room.

"I'm going to love this, Tyrion," said Sansa, excited.

"Of course you're going to, my love. You can do great things. You only had to discover where your talents resided."

"I was convinced that I didn't possess any."

"Well, you see. Never undervalue yourself, Sansa. One never knows which surprises locks inside until they're unleashed. It's only necessary the proper encouragement and a little help."

"You're my encouragement, Tyrion. No other man would have made me feel I'm good at
something. I would have been no more than a trophy wife, a puppet, a forgotten piece of furniture, a belly to give birth to children, and I'd be wilting in loneliness without anyone who took care of me."

"Those men are stupid, and it's useless to cast pearls before swine. I have lots of flaws, Sansa, but I'm not immune to a beautiful woman like you. I can't look at you without feeling that every day by your side is a gift."

"You're going to make me cry again, my love. I don't want to turn into a wheepy," said her, laughing.

"You're the prettiest weepy I've ever known," needled him. She tugged a lock of his long hair.

"I can pull even harder," threatened her.

"I know, I know. I've checked it first hand," conceded him, with his naughty grin. "Pull my hair as much as you want."

He pushed her softly towards the bed and got ready to go on losing count of the times they made love.
Meereen: Day 2

Tyrion sent Mhyraz to ask Missandei if she could see him. Shortly after, the boy guided him to Missandei's chamber and she invited him to take a seat.

"I guess you have resorted to me because of the matter of school, don't you?

"Yes, my lady. I would want to request you that, if it's not much trouble, you accompany me to help me with the transactions I have to carry out. The freedfolk know you and I must go to their camp to make some inquiries. I would thank you very much for your support," pleaded him politely.

"Of course, Lord Tyrion. There is no problem. The Mother does not need me this afternoon," agreed Missandei. "Two Unsullied will escort us."

"You are very kind, my lady." Tyrion dedicated her a bend and they got out to the corridors. Missandei spoke in Valyrian to several soldiers who were patrolling that area. One of them went to inform the queen of their departure, and the other two followed them outside the pyramid.

The sun blinded them momentarily and, while they were walking along the streets, Tyrion again noted that unwholesome sensation. That worried him; he sensed that sooner or later the tension would break out.

They walked through the gates of the ramparts and got ahead across the surrounding barren lands towards the Skahazadhan estuary, where the camps extended. The Unsullied had organized them with great effectiveness and they kept order and discipline, a praiseworthy achievement taking into account that there assembled about fifteen thousand people altogether among Unsullied, sellswords, dothraki and freedfolk. The ant's nest of portable tents, rudimentary buildings made of wood, stone and brick, basic tools and campfires stretched over where the eye could cover.

Missandei brushed him up about the particulars of the camp. All the freedpeople who could not be put up inside the city massed outside. They were five thousand more or less, and a constant trickle of runaway slaves did not cease to arrive. That was one of the queen's main worries, who kept awake in the nights thinking of how to maintain and feed everyone. She was going to open collective lunchrooms for the disadvantaged (old people with no family, disabled people...), but she knew that would not be enough.

She had distributed the craftsmen and craftswomen in brotherhoods; thence Daenerys had been in a hurry to count on a merchant captain to commercialize their products. But her worst worry, apart from war, was the coming of winter. Although winters were not too extreme in Meereen, it was very hard not to have available a roof above one's head, and it was likely that lots would die if they stayed out in the open, above all the children and the feeble. And not to mention the lacks of winter; the harvests would be in short supply, the hunting would reduce drastically and... It was frightening to think about the implications of all that.

Each brotherhood was divided into groups of around fifty craftspeople including their families, and every group had chosen a spokesperson and intermediary. Moreover, among all these representatives had been chosen the highest spokesman, who was with whom the queen consulted directly the matters of the camp.
Tyrion asked to talk with the highest spokesman. His name was Kerro and the fibrous muscles under his bronze skin jutted out; it was blatantly obvious that he was a builder. Tyrion was told that Kerro was very active and practically tireless, clever and had a good hand to diplomacy, attributes by which the majority of craftspeople had voted for him. Tyrion found him in full operation, directing the construction of a small building that must be destined to some job. Sweat ran down his forehead though the air had stopped burning several weeks ago.

Tyrion greeted the man and Kerro looked at him with curiosity, like many who had seen barely a few dwarves in their lives. But, unlike others, the man did not make any humorous comment on his height, what persuaded Tyrion's liking toward him.

Tyrion came to the point and explained that he wanted to find out how many literate people resided in the camp, clarifying that the Mother had the intention to open a school for the children and teachers were required. Besides, he must know the total amount of kids over five years old. Kerro said to him that, in order to make an accurate count, firstly he had to call together all the representatives and these on their part had to calculate how many literate people and children over five there were in their groups. In the end, they only would have to add all the numbers. This operation would take days to be accomplished, probably a week or two. Kerro promised that he would begin the arrangements as soon as possible and within a fortnight he would convey the results. Tyrion thanked him for his diligence and left with Missandei and the two Unsullied. The children of the camp looked at him with the impertinence that was so typical of their age and Tyrion smiled at them. He and his companions turned back across the arid lands.

"They look very well organized," he admitted.

Missandei nodded. "They have little resources but are people with great courage and willpower. Now they are free and, though their situation is difficult, they prefer to choose instead of others choosing for them."

"But surely not all think that way. For some of them the chains are comfortable and safe, if they are lucky enough to have masters who don't mistreat them; more comfortable and safer than scraping out a living in freedom," objected Tyrion.

"Some of them must think that, of course. Not everyone joined the Mother for thirst of freedom; a few did it because they had no other place to go," accepted Missandei.

"It's necessary to analyze in detail the issue of these people's lodging; they can't stay here much more time," reflected Tyrion out loud. "The soldiers and the dothraki are used to living in the open, but not a great amount of women, children and old people."

"That is one of the Mother's main worries."

"I'll see what I can do with respect to that."

Missandei gazed at him with gratitude. "I hope you are of great help to the Mother. She needs all the advice and aid she can get."

"I'll do what I can. I think that I finally have found my place in the world, my lady. I'm small but until now there has not been a place for me anywhere. I was born for this." Tyrion realized that those words were true. The formidable challenge which they had to cope with caused him a tickle, exactly the same as when he was Hand of the King.

It was the tickle of doing what he did best. 
Once in the Great Pyramid, Tyrion was summoned by the queen and he related her all he had spoken with Kerro and the advances they were making. He as well told her about his worries, shared by her, regarding the freedfolk's lodging and they agreed that they should deal with the subject in depth henceforward. Daenerys showed very content with his interest and his services of the day and said that he was allowed to retire to rest.

Tyrion narrated everything to Sansa and she melted him with her look, so overflowing with pride. "Every day I see you as a better man, my love. You're a source of joy."

"I wouldn't be that without you, darling. I'd be a dead man."

"You can achieve so many things here, Tyrion..."

"You too, Sansa, don't forget it. You too."
Meereen: Day 2 - 3

While they were eating dinner, Sansa told him about her afternoon. She had visited Pod and Leena, whose rooms were in the second floor too, near Tyrion and Sansa's ones. Soon after Tyrion's departure to the camps, the queen had sent a message to Pod and Leena because she wished to speak with them. She asked Pod if he was interested in becoming Ser Barristan's assistant in the boys' military training, since the queen was informed about his good qualities as a squire and the old knight needed a capable helper. Pod accepted, but pleaded with Daenerys to let him go on serving Lord Tyrion. She guaranteed him that he would not have to break his fealty oath to his master. She later questioned Leena if there was something she could take up. The young lass admitted frankly that she could not do many things as she had lived for several years in brothels and prostitutes scarcely learnt other abilities apart from pleasing their clients. But she said that she loved reading and, while she continued her learning with Sansa's help, she would be glad to give a helping hand with the little students. The queen praised her willingness and gave them both her permission to retire.

In the first audience, when they had just arrived at Meereen, Daenerys had showed herself interested in the circumstances that allowed Leena to escape slavery. The girl narrated her whole story from Lys to Volantis and how Pod, Tyrion and Sansa had crossed paths with her to change her life forever. She too referred fondly to captain Letho of Lorath, who in addition to rescuing her and her two friends, had adopted the youngest.

The young couple radiated happiness. *Like Sansa and me. That's how must look all happy lovers,* thought Tyrion. He had very limited experience in happy lovers.

Tyrion felt touched when he knew that Pod had decided to remain loyal to him. He was free to choose what he wanted, and the boy had chosen.

*One day he'll be rewarded. I'll get his appointment as a knight when he's ready.*

It was the least he could do for the brave lad.

Sansa was very excited with the subject of school and she explained to him her planning of how she was going to develop her lessons and which equipment they must use. Moreover, some books would be necessary for reading. Daenerys probably had some and Sansa had the intention of borrowing them.

That night, after making love, Tyrion kept awake a while longer with some bothering flies circling his head: how would be unravelled the Great Masters' resentment, what were plotting the Wise Masters of Yunkai and their allies from overseas, and what could be done with the five thousand extra-mural freedfolk. Not to mention the problems with the dragons, which turned more uncontrollable with the passing of days.

And Westeros was still very far.

In the morning, after breakfast, Dara combed Sansa's hair in the Mother's braided style. While the little girl was making her best effort, Sansa asked her questions.

"Your family were from Meereen?"
"Yes, mistress. My mother and my sister. My father died a long time ago and I don't remember him."

"Who were your masters?"

"Pahl Great Masters, who live in one of the pyramids. However most Pahl masters have died and in the pyramid only their women and children are left."

"Were they good to you?"

Dara did not hesitate. "No, mistress. They beat us. Some masters forced my mother to do to them those things adults make in bed," related the girl, and Sansa felt a shiver run down her spine. She quickly changed the subject.

"You speak the common language very well. Who taught you?"

"My mother. And she learnt it from my grandfather, who wasn't a Meereenese."

"And the other children who live here with you? They understand the common language too."

"They're learning. Mhyraz and I are teaching them." Sansa looked at the girl with admiration. "So you are both little teachers?" She smiled to the child. "And, why are you taking that task?"

"Because one day we'll go to Westeros and the common language is spoken there. It's the Mother's language and now is ours as well," declared the child, solemnly.

"But the Mother speaks Valyrian too. She has not asked you to learn her native language, has she?"

"No, mistress. But my friends want to learn it."

*Children's loyalty can be unswerving,* thought Sansa.  

"You know what, Dara? You have just given to me a great idea for the school. I think I'm going to suggest the Mother that all children are taught the common language. And I'll tell her that you have inspired me that idea."

Dara's black eyes lit up. "Really, mistress?"

"Really. And, if it's not inconvenient for you, when the lessons start sometimes I'll ask you to give me a hand with the teaching of the common language. I don't speak a single word of Valyrian and I'm afraid that I won't be able to manage alone."

The girl was beside herself with joy. Never a mistress had asked her to do something she liked. They had only commanded her to carry out unpleasant tasks.

"Of course, mistress. I'll be delighted."

"Then we have come to an agreement. I see that I would be quite lost without you, Dara. You're helping me a lot," encouraged Sansa, conscious that one of the best ways to motivate children was to make them see that they were needed for important things.

As he was dressing for the day, Tyrion listened to the conversation between Sansa and Dara. Undoubtedly his wife was developing a vocation as a teacher. With her sweetness she discovered how to win the children and that was the most proper way to influence them. *She's full of surprises. I'm sure that every passing day I'll come upon something new in her. Take that, Cersei. You're not*
as clever and beautiful as you think. This sweet young woman surpasses you by far.

His dear sister was not known for her keen eyes for people.

What Tyrion had not come to understand was what Jaime must see in her. That they were twins and that connected them with an unbreakable bond? Bullshit. That they lost their mother early and they turned to one another? That sounded more likely. But Cersei had always been a tyrant bitch, in that she had not changed an ounce. Maybe that was Jaime's type, tyrant bitches. He had not had other women to compare, or it was more like that he was not interested in them. He had only eyes for her.

But something broke when Jaime remained so many months as a prisoner of the Starks. Tyrion hardly had time to analyze the decline of the relationship between his twin brother and sister before escaping from King's Landing.

He had not talked about that subject with Sansa. It was not an easy subject to tackle. His family were not an easy subject to tackle.

The only thing he had told Sansa was that Jaime loved him and would do anything for him. But for now Tyrion did not dare to comment about his own kidnapping in Lady Catelyn's hands and how Jaime confronted Ned to demand his little brother's liberation.

It was better to keep those things a secret, at least for now, until the suitable moment came. They were memories that could create shadows between them and Tyrion did not want that, not for anything in the world. Perhaps later, when she were ready.

"What will you do today, Tyrion?," asked her, with her hair already styled. Dara had made a good work.

"I'm going to walk around the pyramid with Pod and perhaps I'll go to the camp to continue catching up. I need to gather information and reflect. What will you do, darling?"

"I'll look for Leena and we'll apply ourselves to our lessons."

"Very well, Sansa. See you later." She bent to kiss him and he went to fetch Pod.
Chapter 43

Meereen: Day 3

Tyrion checked out the second floor helped by Pod, and he counted the rooms it had. He reckoned that if the pyramid diminished in function of the height, he would have to deduct a couple of units per floor. Many rooms were not taken up and Tyrion thought that it was a waste of space, having into account the high number of people who could be put up there. A scheme began to take shape. What if the most disadvantaged families with little children moved to live in the empty rooms, to find a shelter against winter? Some units would be kept for the school, but the rest could have other usefulness. He would research which spaces of the city could be fit out to accommodate more families. Apparently Daenerys had occupied with freedfolk empty, confiscated and abandoned houses, but he had to ensure that the space was being fully used.

In the other hand, some brotherhoods of craftspeople needed proper places to work, like the blacksmiths, who could not carry out their job without forges. It was necessary to construct adequate buildings and not the rudimentary provisional constructions with which they managed at the moment. Where could be prepared an area for those jobs? He would consult Daenerys in their next meeting.

He took a mental note of everything and decided to head for the camp. He wanted to introduce himself to the captains of the Unsullied and the Second Sons, and by the way visit Jorah and ask him how he was doing. In another occasion, he would approach Ser Barristan and try to break the ice with the knight.

Pod and he went in search for Missandei.

"It's the last time I'll ask you this favour, I promise," apologized Tyrion. "Once I've become familiar with the different sections of the camp, I won't have to request your company."

She made a gesture with her hand, rejecting his scruples.

"It's not trouble, Lord Tyrion. On the contrary, it's delightful to see that you are so interested."

They walked outside again, with the two Unsullied behind them.

"I want to be introduced to the captains of the armies. And by the way I'll visit Ser Jorah."

"Grey Worm is the captain of the Unsullied. I'm teaching him the common language, but he has only been learning it for a short time still. You have done well asking me to accompany you. I'll translate for you." She spoke about the Unsullied captain with fervour and a flush. Tyrion watched her furtively. A woman in love can be seen from leagues, he thought, amused.

He felt curious about the sentimental side of eunuchs. It was natural that castration deprived them of certain desires, but no one could know what each person was able to feel, castrated or not. And the lack of sexual attributes did not erase feelings.

Varys's appetites had channeled completely towards secrets and affairs of state. The pleasures of flesh did not say anything to him.

But perhaps other castrated people were different. Imagination could work miracles.

"It will be an honour to talk with the captain of the best army in the world. I manage in Valyrian,
but it won't be left over the assistance of an expert in languages," praised Tyrion. The young woman got puffed up beside him, pleased for the double flattery. He smiled.

"And the captain of the Second Sons?," inquired him. The sellsword company had a curious name. He himself was a second son too. Or at least born in a second labour. He understood the philosophy of that name. Second sons were not direct heirs, unless their eldest brothers died or held posts (like kingsguard) that prevented them from any inheritance. They had to fight to obtain something in life. Many went far to seek glory, adventure, love, a place in the world. Like him.

"His name is Daario Naharis. The night he swore fealty to the Mother, he appeared in her tent with the heads of the captains of the company, because they planned to assassinate her. The Second Sons had signed a pact with Yunkai, but Daario decided to break it to gift the company to the Mother," explained Missandei. "I was present when he infiltrated into the tent with his mates' heads and he kneeled, swearing his sword and his heart."

"He seems a guy with clear ideas," said Tyrion, ironically. "I sense that subtlety is not his thing."

"He has devoted himself completely to the queen's cause."

"I don't doubt it." He neither doubted which other cause the sellsword would like to devote himself to. What was between Daenerys's legs, of course. Which better cause than that if oneself was a sellsword who did not care about loyalty unless it merged with his crotch?

Tyrion did not reproach him at all. He was fighting for the same cause, after all. Sansa. Everything else was merely subsidiary.

He had the impression that he was going to like the sellsword.

(Part of a longer chapter)
If something made the Unsullied different from the rest was their strict sense of discipline. Even Tywin's armies nearly seemed hordes of wildlings compared to them.

They kept the camp perfectly organized and distributed. There were areas marked out for every necessity and activity. The portable tents made up rows as far as the eye could see, so straight as Valyrian roads. Many of the men trained in the training area, others bathed in the Skahazadhan, others cooked, and the rest sharpened and greased weapons or repaired or made basic tools. No one remained idle at those hours of the morning. Tyrion was sure that those men practically ignored what leisure was, or hardly would be beginning to discover it. It would be interesting to observe how freedom influenced their customs and he wondered if that would lessen or strengthen their qualities.

All them were free and had chosen unconditionally the Breaker of Chains. Perhaps that encouragement was more efficient than any whip, torture or castration. Daenerys had performed an impeccable maneuver to gain the best army in the world and guarantee their unwavering loyalty.

She was much more cunning than anyone would have imagined, reminding her as a fragile and fugitive girl at the mercy of a brother with an air of superiority.

Missandei spoke in Valyrian to one of the soldiers, asking him where Grey Worm was. The man answered that his captain was in the training field.

They walked between the rows and all the soldiers bent when they saw Missandei going ahead. The lass inspired a great respect in everyone. Tyrion supposed that rarely a former slave would receive a treatment so worthy of a high lady. But that was her in her demeanor: a high lady. Her manners were flawless, she always said the correct thing in every situation and had the talent to make others feel at ease. Many high ladies should learn from her.

Grey Worm trained hardly among a great crowd of companions. Missandei located him in the middle of the dreadful noise of steel, increased a hundred times over.

The young man did a pause and went near them. In spite of the intense physical exercise, he was not even sweating and his breath was not faster than normal.

*It is said that they are impervious to pain and suffering.* Tyrion thought, saddened, about the severity of the dreadful learning those boys had endured for at least ten years to reach that degree of self-control.

Thanks to Daenerys, those were the last Unsullied. She had snatched them from the Astapori Good Masters' hands and many of those masters were slaughtered by their former slaves. The Breaker of Chains had ensured that no other boy was forced to bear the inhuman process of becoming an Unsullied.

Missandei spoke to Grey Worm in Valyrian and told him who Tyrion was and what he expected. Grey Worm greeted him solemnly. His expressionless face must have scarcely known how to laugh, if he had any hint of what laughing was. But every time he looked at the young woman, a change was brought about in him; the mask of inexpresiveness vanished subtlety and behind it
only was left the face of a man who was falling in love for the first time.

Missandei proceeded to translate every sentence they said.

"I would want to consult you an issue that worries me, captain. Since I arrived at Meereen I sense that something goes wrong in the streets of the city. Every time I walk along them I feel like I am being watched by hostile eyes," said Tyrion, coming to the point.

"We notice too, master. We are convinced that the Great Masters are plotting something."

"We'll have to do a research. Do you think you'll be able to do something about it, captain? We can't stay still for the lid being blown off without warning. I'm aware you only accept orders from the Mother, but I plead with you to maximize the surveillance for her sake and everyone's. I know well what I mean, I've been a royal counselor before in a city full of rats," Tyrion justified himself, in order no to give the impression that he, a newcomer, had the intention to assign himself any authority that did not belong to him. He was not Hand of the Queen, so he had not the power to give commands, unless the queen herself awarded him that power.

"A hundred of my men patrol the city to keep order. Until now it has not been detected any activity out of the ordinary," clarified Grey Worm.

"I ask you that, if you watch something unusual, convey it to the Mother quickly. We must foresee any eventuality to act in consequence. I don't trust the Great Masters."

"So it will be done, master," affirmed Grey Worm.

"And what do you know about the Yunkish? How are they getting ready for war?"

"When the Mother took Yunkai, the Wise Masters lost nearly all their slaves and that was a fatal blow for them; they were very weakened. Now they are turning back to their old customs and buying new slaves to replace the lost ones. We believe they have the intention to come with their slave soldiers to lay siege to Meereen, but the Mother is sure the new slaves will rebel too."

"Probably the Mother is right; when the fuse has been lighted, it's really difficult to blow it out. The Yunkish won't be able to attack Meereen with slaves. We must take advantage of that handicap. But... What about the free companies? Is there any other which could have signed a pact with Yunkai?"

"Not that we know, master. And anyway the Mother already gained the Second Sons for her cause; with other companies could happen exactly the same, if the case arises."

Tyrion meditated.

"Then for now a ground attack is improbable. The enemies can't trust their own armies, by fear of being abandoned. Good. But, and the sea? They can send fleets to attack our ships and block the entrance of Meereen's Bay. That would break our spine in two; we depend on the ships to sell what we produce and buy what we need."

"The Mother has foreseen that problem, but I'm not authorized to reveal that information. You will have to ask her directly," suggested Grey Worm.

_A secret deal? With whom? _Which allies could Daenerys count on to help her? A light ignited in his brain. The Martells of Dorne? It was very likely. Dorne always had been the most independent of the Seven Kingdoms and was a natural ally for the Targaryens. Oberyn Martell quite disliked dead prince Rhaegar since he left his wife Elia, Doran's and Oberyn's sister, starting Robert's
Rebellion because of that issue. But Doran, who was the ruling prince in Dorne, was not like his bellicose brother.

The secrecy was more than justified. If Tywin found out about the Martell's open alliance with the Dragon Queen, there would have disastrous consequences.

Tyrion was determined to catch up on all that, but something in his insides told him that he was right with that intuition.

It was a good plan, by all means; Dorne was a powerful ally. The trouble was the lack of time. Would it be fast enough the support that Dorne would send to the queen? It must consist of a fleet of vessels which Daenerys probably would turne into patrolling ships in order to escort her merchant boats and keep Slaver's Bay clear.

He hoped to be right.

Tyrion thanked the Unsullied captain for his kindness. The soldier bent as a farewell and aimed a brief grin to Missandei. She flushed.

The next destination was the camp of the Second Sons and there headed Tyrion, Pod, Missandei and the two Unsullied who were their bodyguards.
Chapter 45

Meereen: Day 3

The camp of the Seconds Sons flaunted an idiosyncrasy radically different from that of their eunuch's comrades-in-arms. All the men who belonged to that company were peasant's, fishermen's and prostitutes' sons, as well as former runaway slaves and Westerosi from minor houses who, instead of serving as knights or squires of higher lineage lords, had preferred to travel across the Narrow Sea and join a free company of sellswords.

Most spent their time drinking, gambling and betting whenever it was not their turn to train. Their cackles and dirty jokes could be heard from far away. The moment they saw Missandei, everyone ogled her and many flattered her, though without daring to overstep the bound. Even they respected her, above all for fear of the queen and Daario Naharis, who did not tolerate any of his man to offend her.

Daario was training at those hours, like Grey Worm. He made a courteous and exaggerated bow in front of Missandei, and fixed his dark blue eyes in Tyrion.

"Wow! Who I have the honour of greeting?," asked Daario, with a brazen smile that must be his main hallmark.

"Tyrion Lannister, the queen's new counselor," announced Tyrion.

"New counselor? So soon? Have you come out from under a rock?," said the sellsword, surprised. He raised an eyebrow.

Tyrion suspected that the man was one of those who could get any women to warm his bed for free. He looked like a bloodthirsty but likeable naughty ladies' man who at night, when he was not in the arms of some gorgeous lady, he slept soundly without any worry depriving him of his rest. Somehow he reminded him of Bronn, but younger and more attractive. Tyrion as well felt a burn of jealousy. He was not pleased with the image of Daario wandering around near Sansa, but not because he did not trust her, but because the sellsword was too much charming. But it was possible too that he had his sights set on Daenerys only. He hoped it was so.

Despite that, Tyrion liked him.

"Not precisely. Thousands of leagues and several ships have brought me here. I wouldn't call that to come out from under a rock," specified Tyrion.

"Lannister..." Daario was rubbing his chin with a finger, thoughtful. "House Lannister, of Casterly Rock?" The sellsword whistled in surprise. "I've heard quite a curious story about a Lannister dwarf who assassinated the Bastard King of Westeros."

"I see you're well informed, but there's a little mistake. The Lannister dwarf didn't kill Joffrey. Unfortunately," pointed Tyrion with sarcasm. "Someone else stole him that honour."

"So, the dwarf has fled through thousands of miles for a crime he didn't commit? That's a big bummer. At least, if one has to escape to save the neck, it should be for a real reason, don't you think?" The charming, mocking grin danced on his lips.

"I do. It's a big bummer," agreed Tyrion.
"You have something to do with Ser Jorah's return? It has shocked me very much that he is back. He said to me that the queen has forgiven him his sentence of exile and now he is under my command and Ser Barristan's and Grey Worm's, and he has settled over here."

"Jorah has come from Tolos with me, my wife and my friends. I found him there by chance. It didn't cost me a great effort to convince him."

Daario raised his eyebrow again.

"Your wife and friends, you say? I see that you had plenty of time to plan the run though you were charged for murdering the king," said Daario with teasing skepticism.

"Even though it looks like the opposite, everything went offhand. Someone told me I'm a lucky dwarf and until now he's not wrong."

"One day you'll relate me your interesting adventures and I'll do the same, sharing a good wine," proposed the sellsword, blinking an eye. "If the queen has accepted you, you're welcome. But if you betray her, you'll have to go searching for your balls to the same place where Grey Worm lost his," he said with his enchanting smile.

Tyrion tilted his head, amused.

"It's a fair deal. But I'm afraid that yours could suffer a similar fate; here my friend Pod is a bit susceptible regarding my physical integrity. I'd advise you not to underestimate him."

Daario and Pod studied one another.

"But none of that will be necessary, I assure you, faithful sellsword captain. I have in high esteem my male attributes. And I enjoy being contrary to my beloved father Tywin and my sweet sister Cersei; I'll never do anything that makes their day. That includes not selling the queen to them or plotting to kill her. Do my upright motives convince you?"


"Great. I'm glad we're friends now," said Tyrion, ironic.

"Me too," responded the sellsword captain.

"Where's Jorah? I want to talk with him."

"Look for him in the practice field."

"Thank you. See you, captain," said Tyrion as a goodbye.

"See you, friend."

(Part of a longer chapter)
Chapter 46

Meereen: Day 3

Jorah and a sellsword practised with blunt swords. The knight, however being nearer fifty than forty years old, could knock down many youngsters.

He saw the familiar party of visitors coming toward him and signaled to the other fighter to take a rest.

He wiped sweat off his forehead and went to meet them.

"Good morning, Jorah. How is life over here?"

"Good morning, Tyrion. Not as bad as it seems. But you look good. The khaleesi treats you well."

"I'm making an effort to deserve it, believe me. I'm conscious that I'm not known for being the hardest working dwarf in the world, but I'm surprising even myself. That's one of the reasons for which I've walked across this wasteland to see you."

"And I thought you missed me," joked Jorah.

"One thing does not remove the other," said Tyrion, grinning. "Have you noticed what's cooking up through the city? If I tell you the truth, I'm uneasy."

"Neither I feel as light as a bird. The Great Masters are not going to remain idle."

"I agree. I don't trust them. Too much calm. What do you think they're hatching?," asked Tyrion.

"I'm determined to find out. I'll request Daario to let me patrol the city with the Unsullied to examine the situation."

"Well. I've already consulted that trouble with Grey Worm. Let's hope to make it clear before the burst of the storm. We all must join our forces. But if your efforts bear fruit, you'll increase fondness in the khaleesi's heart," insinuated Tyrion.

Let's see if thus we can figure out the intrigues of those son of bitches in the pyramids. Though I'm afraid that they're too much tricky for my liking.

"I'm going back, Jorah. Think of what I've told you and the sooner we act, the better. Have a good day."

"The same for you, Tyrion." He was going to add some more but he hushed. Tyrion guessed it was: Send my greetings to the khaleesi. But the knight did not dare. He was not sure that she wanted to hear his greetings at the moment.

Jorah offered them a bend and turned around, heading for the training field.

They started to walk over the parched lands.

Tyrion, searching for a topic of conversation, asked Missandei a question which stirred his curiosity.

"If you don't mind me asking, my lady... How did you join up the Mother's service? If it's an
impertinent question, I ask for your pardon. You don't have to answer," apologized Tyrion. "It's only that you're one of the most polite people I've ever met, apart from my wife, and I feel curious. I can assure you that in Westeros they usually don't possess even a portion of such exquisite manners," praised him. "I've met hogs better mannered than half the Westerosi lords."

She smiled with her usual shyness. "It makes me happy to tell this story because it happened when the Mother set me free. I do not mind, my lord." She did a pause. "I belonged to the Good Master Kraznys of Astapor, who was involved, along with other masters, in the training and selling of the Unsullied. As I'm good at languages, I served as an interpreter," explained her. Tyrion suspected that it was not the only deed with which she served the Good Master Kraznys, who would not have more goodness than that of his title. She was too pretty for the dirty old man letting her alone. Lots of masters raped their slaves though they were uglier than sin. "The Mother appeared, interested in buying the entire batch, including those who hadn't finished their process yet. The master had a dirty tongue and spoke to the Mother with contempt; I tried for his sentences to sound polite in the common language. When she returned to confirm that she wanted all the Unsullied and sealed the deal, she gave her biggest dragon, Drogon, to the master. But the Mother said that dragons could not be tamed and would not obey anyone apart from her, and commanded Drogon to burn him alive. Moreover, she ordered the Unsullied to slaughter the Good Masters and rescue the slaves. Finally, she proclaimed before the soldiers, in perfect Valyrian, that they were free and they, from the first to the last, chose to follow her. As for me, the Mother had demanded that she wanted me as a gift, and the master consented. When everything was over and we left Astapor, she made me clear that if I stayed beside her it was possible that my life were in danger, because she was a rebel queen whom all the masters hated. She offered me the chance to go back to Naath, my native land. I assured her that there was nothing left for me in Naath and I wished to stay with her and, if we had to die, so was it. Valar morghulis. She repeated the bravoosi sentence in the common language: All men must die. And then she said something that made me smile. She said: "But we are not men."

Tyrion too found witty the queen's wisecrack.

"I'm very glad for you, my lady. And for you being the Mother's right hand."

"I hope to deserve that honour," said her, modest.

"You deserve it. No one could deserve it more, my lady."

They went on walking in a comfortable silence, followed by Pod and the two Unsullied, and entered through the gates of the ramparts as the sun warmed up in its zenith, in full midday.
The queen invited Tyrion and Sansa to have lunch with her in her private hall. Tyrion narrated to her his advances of that day, the conversations he had in the camp and conveyed her his worries about the freedfolk's well-being, the Great Masters' resentment and the future maritime missions of captain Gilean. This one departed that same afternoon to Tolos to pick up his family, with his crew and the fishermen he would take to Bhorash. In passing, he would transport his first cargo, which with good luck he could sell to some traders from his city. The queen had commanded him to buy wood, staples, wool to make winter clothes and utensils of daily use, among which were paper and ink. The captain told all this to Tyrion during the brief visit the latter payed to Gilean after arriving from the camp, because they had a pending chat before Gilean set sail. On his part, Tyrion told him about his flight from Westeros, though the captain already kept abreast of everything, but he thanked Tyrion for his apologies for not having told him the truth until they stood at the gates of Meereen. Both men bid farewell and Tyrion wished him a good and profitable journey.

He then picked up Sansa and they went to Daenerys's private hall, where she asked questions to them both. Sansa consulted with her some subjects about the school, such as her intention to teach the common language to all the children, what the queen found ideal. Tyrion revealed to her all the doubts he had been considering since the day before.

"We agree that people can't spend winter with only portable tents as a shelter, Lord Tyrion," said the queen. "I'm going to prepare the empty rooms of the Great Pyramid for the families in worst situation. I'm looking up maps of the city and marking the places already taken up. You and I will examine later the areas and buildings that can be fit out for the roofless freedfolk, and for the buildings of the brotherhoods. I've established that the builders remodel and repair all that can be useful." She kept quiet for some moments. "We have to plan in long-term, because, if I am completely sincere, I have not the least idea of when we'll march on Westeros. Just in case, we must provide the population for the hard times to come."

She turned to Sansa.

"I'll lend to you books from my library. They are not many, but you can use all. Care for them neatly. If I get new books, they'll be at your disposal. Captain Gilean will bring the rest of the materials and the quills will be picked up on the beach. In the meanwhile, if you want to start in short the lessons with the orphans, you can dedicate them to the oral teaching of the common language and other subjects, until you have the writing items. And nearly the whole second floor will be destined to the school."

"Thank you very much, Your Grace. I'm looking forward to the project of the school and I'm going to devote to it with all my will."

Daenerys spoke to them both.

"Do you feel comfortable in your rooms?"

Tyrion and Sansa looked at each other, smiling.

"Yes, Your Grace," affirmed Tyrion. "For us they are enough. Other people have no roof yet, so we're very lucky. We don't need anything else."
"I'm pleased with your modesty. These are bad times and we can't afford prodigalities, having into account that so many people are in a precarious state."

"We always have it into account, Your Grace," said Tyrion.

"I know. You have come to me in the timely moment. It will be difficult for us all, but together we can cope with the adversities."

Daenerys stood up and the couple imitated her.

"It has been a fruitful lunch. Lord Tyrion, I'll summon you through Mhyraz in a few hours and we'll discuss the most relevant matters. Ser Barristan, Grey Worm and Daario Naharis will attend as well. Have a good afternoon."

"You too, Your Grace." They bent in a bow and left the queen alone with her thoughts.

(Part of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 3

Tyrion laid down on the bed with a long sigh and Sansa sat next to him.

"Tired?"

"A lot," said him. "I think I need to be cared."

"I see. Poor husband of mine," said her, with a cuddly voice, stroking his long hair.

"Ummm, so pleasant," murmured him, sleepy.

"Ah, then you'd rather sleeping." She feigned disappointment. "It will be better to leave you alone."

He opened his eyes and held her hand. He kissed her palm.

"It's not sleeping what I'd rather, Sansa."

"And what is it?"

"Don't you know?"

"Tell me, Tyrion."

"You. All of you. Do you want me to describe what I'd like making to you?"

"No," denied her, shaking her head.

"No?," asked him, surprised.

"I don't want you to describe it. I want you to make it to me."

Desire flowed like a current between them. Sansa felt her womb burn and Tyrion's trousers were so constricted he was amazed they had not ripped yet.

"Straddle me," ordered him with a deep and vibrant voice.

She obeyed. Tyrion moaned when his sensitive and imprisoned manhood felt her above. Neither of them broke their eye contact.

"Begin undressing. Slowly. Very slowly. I want to see how you do it, piece after piece."

Sansa proceeded to untie the front of her dress, loosing the laces of the bodice, and undid the knot of the laces which went up from her neckline to her nape. She lowered the bodice as slowly as she could, until exposing her breasts.

He did not touch her, but his eyes were like his hands. Her skin burnt in the places he gazed.

She kneeled to take off the dress and lowered her underwear, slipping it over her hips in the most insinuating way she managed. Her secret curls were as reddish as the hair on her head.

Tyrion gasped and she felt him trembling. That aroused her even more.
When she was naked, she stepped down the bed and he emitted a complaining growl.

"Shhh," shushed her. "You're an impatient lover, my lord. You should value the virtue of patience," scolded her as if she were reprimanding a capricious child.

She rummaged in a drawer. She was offering him a magnificent sight of her back and buttocks.

She took out a wide ribbon and climbed onto the bed again.

"I'm going to blindfold you. I want you to sharpen your other senses."

He let her do. Sansa tied the ribbon on the back of his head, making sure that he could not see anything. Tyrion burnt with lust. For the one hand, what he wanted was to grab her and fuck her like a wildling until ending fully sated. In the other hand, he wished that the delightful agony lasted and he would be able to delay their climax as long as he could. With her and her wonderful body it was really difficult for him to control himself, but he was learning to slow down his highest pleasure to please her and follow her to the heights she wanted to take him. That way the climax was infinitely more intense.

Deprived of his vision, Tyrion raised his hands and caressed. Her extremely soft cheeks, her chin. She sucked and licked his fingers and he held his breath. He slid down his hands to her neck, her shoulders, her arms. He scarcely grazed with his fingertips but they left a burning trail. He sought the straightened nipples, closed his fingers around the curves of the breasts, holding them, hefting them. Sansa stretched her neck and threw her head back, moaning with surrender.

"I want to feed from your gorgeous tits. I want to feel them in my mouth," declared him. She bent down and he buried his face between her breasts. Sansa was straddling him once more and her wetness coated his pants. She rested on the bed with her elbows while he tasted the nipples and the rest of her exquisite protuberances. Tyrion did not remember to have had in his mouth such a glorious skin before.

He made her move over him. Tyrion licked her belly, then her pubis and after that...

"Straddle my face."

Oh, gods. This is too good, thought her.

She rode his face, knelt with her legs very near both sides of his head, and his tongue caused her a sensation very near frenzy. Tyrion held her hips and fondled her buttocks. Sansa moved in a soft swaying and felt herself flying out of her body.

"Tyrion!," she cried out in ecstasy, with the strong waves shaking her. He held her on her place upon his mouth until the spasms stopped. Then he let her go and she fell onto the bed, panting.

Tyrion remained with his eyes covered, smiling.

"You have been a very bad boy, my lord. What am I going to do with you?"

"Yes, I've been evil, thinking up ways to make my lady cry out. How are you going to punish me?"

"You'll see. You'll get what you deserve."

He still wore all his clothes.

She took off his doublet and kissed his chest over the shirt, but did not touch his skin directly. He
felt overexcited with her hot breath on the fabric, anticipating the glory of her lips directly on his skin.

But she did not take off his shirt. He did not mind in the least. That was tremendously erotic.

She licked his chest and belly, leaving the fabric soaked with her saliva, and it clung to his skin. After a while devoted to his torso, she at last addressed her attention to his lower regions. She rubbed her face against the hardness that made his trousers bulge, without taking out yet his eager manhood. She caressed his legs. He made great efforts to hold on.

After what seemed a joyful and agonizing eternity, she lowered his pants and breeches, very slowly. His hungry manhood jumped out of its confinement and Sansa touched very softly, like feather touches. He moaned, with his skin so sensitive that any brush amplified. The fingertips raised slowly to his tip. She then licked all his length and extracted from his throat another deep and gutural moan. She moved aside and removed the ribbon from his eyes. The sight of her flooded through him and he devoured her with his dilated pupils.

Sansa, so slowly that it was a torture, placed her entrance on his tip and moved down along him to the base of his manhood. They both moaned. She started to rock and stimulate herself at her spot of pleasure. He raised a hand to touch her, but she stopped him. Understanding, he left his arms resting on the sheets and stared at her, rapturous. He fought to hold back while she sped up. Finally she shouted his name once more and, when he felt her hot insides closing tightly around him, Tyrion let himself go and spilled his seed into her, grasping her hips so strongly that, when he returned from his ecstasy, he feared that she could have bruises after that. But she did not even notice.

Exhausted and satiated, they collapsed on the bed, laughing.

"Don't you think that there would be less trouble in the world if people dedicated to fuck this way, Tyrion?"

"Partly yes. If oneself has the good luck to live with the person to whom one wants to fuck day and night. If don't, sex can start wars. Remember how Rhaegar abandoned Elia for your aunt Lyanna. I'm sure that the noble, gentle and brave dragon prince was hotter for her than the sand of a desert in full summer. Bad luck that Elia never aroused that fever."

"Do you think my aunt felt the same for him?" Sansa rested her head on his shoulder and he was encircling her back.

"I reckon that she did. I doubt Rhaegar abducted her, as the official version tells."

"And Robert? You reckon that she didn't love him?"

"I think that her betrothal to Robert was simply a duty which she, like all ladies, must assume. Lyanna, with almost full certainty, didn't love him. She probably respected him, felt fond of him, maybe she admired him. Robert was handsome and gathered enough qualities to make any lass fall at his feet. Perhaps she resigned herself and accepted serenely her fate until the moment Rhaegar crossed paths with her."

"And the realm bled for that."

"Yes, the realm bled. And all happened because they wanted to do the same as we do. Many wars have begun because of that reason."

"Is it not horrible that a whole kingdom bleeds simply for two people? It's mad," commented
Sansa, thoughtful.

He looked at her deeply.

"It's horrible. But I understand Rhaegar, Sansa. It doesn't mean that I approve him, but I understand. Perhaps I'd have done the same for you."

She fixed her eyes on him, touched, and rested a hand on his cheek.

"Our actions affect others, especially if thousands or millions of people depend on us. Every time a powerful person moves a finger, someone can fall. It's frightening," said Sansa. "Even love can destroy. I don't want you to destroy any kingdom for me, Tyrion."

"Only if that kingdom doesn't tear you off my side, my love." In his eyes there was no mockery. He was totally serious.

"I have the intention to remain stuck to you for all my life and there won't be any kingdom that can prevent me from it," declared her, with a sad smile.

"Neither me."
Chapter 49

Meereen: Day 3

The queen and Ser Barristan occupied their places by the Council table when Tyrion stepped into the hall.

"Good evening, Your Grace. Ser Barristan," he said with a bow.

"Good evening, Lord Tyrion," answered them. Ser Barristan kept his distant attitude, though not impolite.

"Grey Worm and Daario Naharis won't be long. This is a meeting of high importance and we all must be present. Missandei should have come too, but this afternoon she hasn't felt well. She conveys her apologies to everyone for not attending."

"Is she ill?" said Tyrion, worried for her health.

"She says no, that it's only a very bothering headache, but nothing which some hours of rest couldn't soothe," explained Daenerys.

"If you see her, tell her for me that I hope she recovers soon."

"I will," said the queen, with her kind smile.

Tyrion knew that, apart from Missandei, would be missing someone in whom the queen had placed all her trust some time ago. She must be longing greatly for Ser Jorah's wise guidance.

She had blushed a little when she mentioned Daario. Jorah was not going to like that in the least. Daenerys felt attracted to the captain of the Second Sons. She knew perfectly well how to maintain her composure, but she was not so good in hiding her feelings. Her expression usually betrayed her if something touched her heart directly. And in her face was obvious her pain for Jorah's absence, as well as the excitement for Daario's presence.

It was very clear what the sellsword wanted, and Daenerys was a young and beautiful woman with a woman's passions. How much time would she last to succumb to the gallant's charms? She had been lonely for a long time, since she widowed. Tyrion ignored if she had taken some lover, but at present she was about to take one. Daario did not look like a man who missed the chance to get into a pretty girl's bed. And if she was a queen, the better. Nobody's day can be bitter with such sweet and tasty candy. Daario isn't a fool.

She did not have to fear pregnancy and, though that were the case, the moon tea existed for that. Keeping her romance discreetly, it did not have to affect her public role. Most kings and queens, single or married, became entangled with other people in a higher or lower degree of secrecy. It could not be affirmed that Robert and Cersei were a model of discretion, of course. Robert laid any thing with tits that got within his reach, and Cersei bedded her twin brother and even had given birth to three blond children who had so much Baratheon's blood as Tyrion felt inclined to a septon's vow of celibacy.

Daenerys was not Robert or Tyrion's dear sister. But it was difficult to keep a lucid judgment when oneself was in love. Especially if the recipient of that love was an enchanting scoundrel who was part of the Council.
Grey Worm and Daario arrived. Tyrion watched the queen and Daario while they were greeting one another; he cast aside any doubt. It was only a matter of days or, at most, some week, but she would fall in the sellsword captain's arms.

Grey Worm asked prudently for Missandei and the queen told him about her headache. The soldier did not exteriorize anything, but Tyrion had the impression that the young man was a bit disappointed. Daenerys looked at the Unsullied captain with attention and certain surprise, but did not say any comment. Tyrion left a slight smile spread over his face.

Daario addressed a blink to him. "Greetings, little friend."

"Greetings, sellsword friend."

The five took a seat by the table, where Daenerys had spread out the plans of Meereen.

In that moment some knocks sounded at the door. Missandei announced herself from the outside. "It's me, You Grace. I'm feeling much better now." The queen looked at the door, pleased.

"Come in, Missandei. We are about to begin."

The girl entered and greeted the assembled timidly. Everyone bent before her. Grey Worm suddenly was nearly lightening the room by himself. Missandei shot him a sweet and flushed smile.

Daenerys started, without preamble.

(Part of a longer chapter)
"As you know, we have to find, for all the freedfolk we can, a shelter for winter, in this pyramid as well as in the rest of the city. In this plan the occupied areas are marked, either by long-standing residents or newcomers. Tell me your opinions."

"We won't be able to accommodate or feed everyone, Your Grace. Daily, new fugitives join us. Your heart is generous, but there are too many slaves in Essos," declared Ser Barristan, realistic.

"You know that I'm thankful to you and value your sincerity, Ser Barristan. But they call me Mother and I can't abandon them. I'm convinced that the city, well used, is big enough for all. Here lived hundreds of thousands of slaves. Many of them have died in war and the rest is free now and have inhabited their former masters' houses. But in spite of that there is still enough space available. And we'll make sure that we share this space as fairly as possible," objected the queen.

"Of course, Your Grace. I only was showing the problems," apologized the old knight.

"And I take them into account, my friend. But now let's focus on the task."

"This unmarked places are completely uninhabited?," asked Tyrion, who was examining the plans carefully.

"Yes, my lord. They mostly are disrepaired or half ruined," informed Missandei.

"Are the builders working in them already?," said Tyrion, interested.

"They are removing the rubble and bracing the structures," said Missandei.

Tyrion had an idea.

"Do you think they'll be able to construct multi-storey houses? As well as raise other houses a little, reinforce basements, and add more habitable spaces."

"It's a good suggestion, Lord Tyrion," approved the queen.

"The buildings are better used if they are raised. Look at these pyramids, with capacity for hundreds of people. If we build the houses upwards, they will be home to many more people."

"So it will be done, Lord Tyrion." The queen shot him a grateful smile. "It won't be a fast process but it will be effective." She spoke for everyone. "And the buildings for the jobs of the brotherhoods? What will we do regarding them?"

Daario intervened. Tyrion suspected, amused, that the young man was a little annoyed because of the smile that the queen had gave Tyrion when he proposed the idea of the housing.

"And the Square of Graces? It's very large and a big part of its surface can be used," suggested the sellsword.

Daenerys reflected.

"The Square of Graces is sacred for the Meereenese," opposed her.
"Who has conquered the city, Your Grace? I thought that kings and queens have authority to change the things they wish to change," said Daario.

_We must admit that this sellsword have guts_, thought Tyrion, with a certain admiration. _But, as Daenerys says, the Meereenese won't esteem her more for that._

"I'll consider it," conceded her, hesitant. But Tyrion was aware that the sellsword was winning her and she would not throw away that advice.

An idea came to his mind.

"That seems to be the only choice left. The rest of the grounds are quite saturated already. But the Meereenese will take it as an insult. It will be necessary to offer them something in exchange," he set out.

The queen tore her eyes from Daario and looked at Tyrion.

"What other concessions can I make to them? I've respected the lives of all who have asked for mercy and verified that they and their families aren't threatened by their former slaves."

"You know that they have in a high value their culture and traditions. They are very proud people and used to hold power. There has been no king in Meereen for more than a thousand years, but the nobility has ruled. If you guarantee them a post in the power dome, they could accept the terms of peace with you," said Tyrion.

She once more looked at him, surprised.

"Do you refer to including representatives of the noble families in the Council?"

"But not one of each family. Tell them that you'll choose one among the candidates who volunteer. The chosen one will be given voice and vote in ruling and let's hope that thus they calm down enough to stop being a serious threat."

"How could I trust this representative? They won't appreciate me really, no matter what I do. I will continue to be the foreign queen."

"That's the price all the foreign kings and queens must pay. And of course you can't trust. But choose the candidate you consider more reasonable and suitable for diplomacy. We'll keep an eye on him and will make sure that he doesn't plot any treason. And if he does, his fate wouldn't be very promising. A minimally reasonable man, who is not a fanatic, will have in high value his own neck and I doubt that he puts himself at more risk than necessary. Most people want to live and I don't think this representative will be an exception."

"It could work," admitted Daenerys. "Very well. We'll do that. But, to be fair, I also want a counselor from the freedfolk. I propose Kerro. Missandei is a freedwoman but she doesn't live with them."

"It's very fair, Your Grace." Tyrion bent his head to her in a gesture of acknowledgment and respect.

"Well, then we have channeled three key questions: the freedfolk's housing, the position of the ancient families of Meereen and the school for children. Now we have to deal with another crucial issue: my enemies' dirty war overseas. And there comes into play an important alliance," exposed Daenerys.
There comes the secret deal I suspect she has made, thought Tyrion.

"What I am going to reveal to you is top secret: it will be a secret for a short time, but I don't want it to come to light yet. I don't need to remember you that everything discussed in this Council remains indoors. I trust you; that's the reason why you're here." She kept silent for some moments and looked at them one by one. "I've spoken of all this with everyone separately except for you, Lord Tyrion, and because of that I'm informing you now. But there's something only Ser Barristan and I know since today."

"Thanks, Your Grace. I'm all ears," said him.

"I've made contact by raven with prince Doran Martell and we have come to an agreement. At this moment a fleet of Dornish ships is traveling to Meereen. They'll be our coastguards and they'll safeguard our merchant vessels to prevent attacks from my enemies. I'll use some of those ships as well to expand my merchant fleet. The more we can sell and buy, the better.

"What have you offered him in exchange?," asked Tyrion.

"My complete support to Dorne from now on. And I've just sent a raven to him with the news that he will dispose of a permanent chair in the Council."

Tyrion felt that there was something which did not suit in all that.

"Doran Martell is going to place a counselor here, Your Grace? It won't take my father much time to find out about the open collaboration of Dorne with you."

She addressed him a strange look, which he could not interpret.

"I know that I should have said this to you today, as soon as I was informed, Lord Tyrion, but I've awaited until tonight because it's a turn of events of vital importance and it not only concerns you."

For the first time, since the day he dealt with the old Olenna Tyrell to lessen the overspend of Joffrey's wedding, someone had achieved in leaving him speechless.

"Your father is dead, Lord Tyrion."
Chapter 51

Meereen: Day 3

A stony silence fell over the hall while everyone stared at Tyrion. He, stunned, took some seconds to catch the magnitude of what the queen had just told him.

"Dead?," repeated him, with incredulity.

_The gift of opportunity always was one of your talents, father. But I didn't think that you were going to favour me with it. Though I'd say you haven't chosen that. Death has chosen for you._

He had no idea about how he should feel. He searched in his soul for some filial feeling but he was muddled. Or perhaps it was that, by dint of becoming inured to his father's contempt, he had come to really not feeling anything for him. Save resentment.

_You see what has served you all the suffering and horror you have caused along your whole life, father. Now you see where has gone your restless fight for the honour of the sacrosant Lannister name. You're dead and your eldest son is a cripple kingsguard who will not inherit Casterly Rock, your daughter is a mean bitch who now is going to have free way to cast down all your efforts and will destroy Westeros, and your despicable dwarf son is very far, plotting with your enemy. What have you left behind you, father? Is that the legacy you dreamed of?_

Tyrion distinguished inside him a sarcastic sensation of vengeance. However, that sensation did not make him happy, either. Simply, apparment from payback, he did not feel anything.

He reacted and returned to reality.

"Is it known how it has happened, Your Grace?," asked him, in a pragmatic tone, as if the deceased had not procreated him or had not been in the verge of screwing his son's entire life.

The queen looked at him cautiously, as if she expected some reaction from him and understood that. After all, Tywin or not, had he caused the fall of the Targaryens or not, he had been Tyrion's father. She knew what hers, the Mad King, had done. But he was her father despite all.

_He died in bed, apparently asleep. He was found the next morning. He didn't show signs of violence or poisoning. The chamber was as he always kept it,_ explained Daenerys.

_Natural death? It's very possible. He was not young already. But all is too... opportune. There are poisons that leave no trail. In that case... Who? And why?_

He would have to meditate about that carefully, later.

She watched him with attention and Tyrion knew that she had guessed what he was thinking.

"Do you reckon he has been murdered?," inquired the queen.

"I don't reject the idea, Your Grace. My father wasn't the most loved in the Seven Kingdoms." For the moment he did not say anything else, but Daenerys exchanged with him a meaningful look. _Yes, she understands it will be better to discuss such a delicate subject in strict privacy. She realizes that I have suspects in mind._

"This unexpected incident means an overturn in the government and politics of Westeros, and it
involves us as well. I would dare to assert that the consequences will be more important than we believe. For now, the Seven Kingdoms have lost his figure of power and authority. The new Boy King isn't anything by himself. His mother and his Tyrell fiancé will nail their claws to each other in the dispute for who of them will manipulate the boy most. The realm has been left in a chaotic and fragile situation. Very bad times are drawing close and winter will not be merciful." She looked at everyone. "The kingdoms are bleeding and in the North have been detected movements of the White Walkers. It's not an unfounded rumour any more; many assert that those monsters have awakened after being asleep for thousands of years. The Free Folk are fleeing to the South and the Night's Watch is scant and is poorly provided. Without enough defenders in the Wall, the Walkers sooner or later will find the way to cross."

The atmosphere in the room had turned tense.

Tyrion intervened.

"The only effective ways to fight them are Valyrian steel and dragonglass, but there's left very few of those materials. And there won't be enough fires for the increasing armies of corpses which will march with the Walkers. They are the only armies in the world that increase with every battle, instead of reducing," explained him. "Those creatures smell darkness and chaos and it's foreseeable that soon they'll spread terror in the kingdoms, unless there's a way to stop them." He did a pause. "My father made the serious mistake of not paying attention to the threats from beyond the Wall. He was convinced they were old wives' tales. In the South most people think the same. Until they have destruction at their own doors they'll deny the truth."

"That's what happen when kings spend time scratching their bellies," said Daenerys with a bitter tone. "Almost all do it."

"Then you have the chance to change the situation, Your Grace," said Ser Barristan, looking at her with fatherly pride.

"But for now the only I can change is Meereen," muttered her. "Troubles must be coped with one by one, my lords."

"Of course, Your Grace. We can walk along the path only step by step," said the old knight.

(Part of a longer chapter)
Chapter 52

Meereen: Day 3

"At last, it is the issue of my dragons. I admit that it's going out of hand and I'm hardly able to control them. I ignore where Drogon is; I haven't seen him for weeks. I trust that he will come back, but he comes and goes at his will and I fear what he can do. He needs to eat a lot of meat and will be harmful to shepherds, if he roasts their flocks of sheep to feed. As regard the other two, their imprisonment hurts me. They're not made for confinement, but, what other solution there is left? And I don't know how much more time we'll be able to hold them prisoners until their fire is destructive enough to melt the iron chains and the stones of the walls. Even though I'm racking my brains restlessly, I don't find any choice," confessed her, crestfallen.

Tyrion tried to remember, recalling something he had read years ago.

"Your ancestors learnt to dominate them with the magical language. You have it in your blood. Maybe you'll discover it progressively. It's normal that it's so difficult for you because you don't have any other Targaryen to guide you," he said, trying to cheer her up. "Some years ago I read that your dynasty had compiled the magical language in a book. What book it was? I must try to remember." He put his hand on his forehead in a gesture of concentration. "Unfortunately, chronicles assert that the book got lost... I know! It was called The dragon's tongue and was written by maester Byloth, who served Aerion, Aegon the Conquerer's father."

"My brother knew the story of that book, too. It would be greatly useful for me, if it were found," sighed Daenerys. "But it's more likely that it has turned into dust some decades or centuries ago. Books are fragile."

"Let's not rule out its existence totally, Your Grace, but I agree that for now the only you have is your instinct," said Tyrion. "With regard to the problem of the dragons being loose or chained, I suppose that it's unsolvable. We can't build them a cage large enough, and in freedom they are too dangerous. Let's hope that time helps us to find some answer."

"If my ancestors could handle their dragons and live with them, I can do it as well. They cannot be tamed, but the Targaryens found out how to control them. And I am a Targaryen." Daenerys raised her chin in a challenging gesture.

Daario watched her with caressing eyes.

"That's my queen. She doesn't admit defeat," he murmured softly.

She looked at him sideways, pleased. She recovered and spoke once more.

"It's late. Go rest and reflect on all we have discussed. Tomorrow I'll give the orders so the adopted measures can start to be carried out. Your advice and support have been invaluable. Thanks to you all. Good night."

They left under the veil of midnight.

Sansa was asleep when he went into the bedroom silently, without lighting the candles. Moonlight passed through the windows and allowed him to see in the semi-darkness.

She had been waiting for him, but finally had succumbed to sleep upon the bedspread. He moved her softly to get her into bed properly and tucked her. He gave her a kiss on the forehead and stared
at her tenderly for some minutes.

When she was sleeping she looked like an innocent little girl again, who had not met sorrow yet, or the bitter taste of disappointment.
Chapter 53

Meereen: Day 3 – 4

As he knew that sleep would not come easily, he accommodated on the windowsill. The beautiful scenery of the bay relaxed him and let him think with clarity.

Tywin, the terror of the Seven Kingdoms, was dead. It was difficult to take in. Not only because his stony and hard hand had glided over him like a cold shadow since Tyrion was born, but because he had the whole realm in his fist for so many years. But he was also who kept it united until Joffrey sat on the throne and began with his mad deeds, and his grandfather was too far away waging war on the Starks to stop his grandson.

His father fought for the peace of the realm at any price, though that entailed eliminating entire houses at a stroke. No one dared to question Lannisters' honour or pride, or stand up against them without obtaining the worst of condemns. To utter Tywin's name was to name horror, the most implacable justice.

Would it be the hand that had murdered him, if that was the case, the same that had poisoned Joffrey? If Littlefinger was behind all that, he was more than capable. Tyrion visualized him with his wily smile and the monstrous ambition reflected on his eyes, and he expected anything of that man. Perhaps that was what he set out to, breaking the spine of the realm to weaken it and sow confusion. According to a proverb Tyrion had read, it was possible to take advantage of the building of a civilization, as well as of its collapse, and Littlefinger did not care about seeing the Seven Kingdoms burn if he sated his craving for power. He was like a voracious vermin that never had enough and, when he had devoured the basement of a house and saw it fall, went looking for the following one.

That was like Tyrion imagined him.

On the other hand, the enigmatic Varys was an extremely tricky character also. He possessed a higher amount of information than anyone else in the world, but Tyrion believed that he used only the secrets he considered convenient for his purposes. His inner voice said that the Spider really looked after the realm, not for any specific king or queen. In fact, the kings came and went and he, as he had told Tyrion once, continued to row. If he had decided to remove Tywin off the board, it was because he had stopped being useful for Varys's aims. If the Spider was the murderer, he did it because he wished a change. Perhaps his intention, like Littlefinger's, was to weaken Westeros and thus prepare the ground for...

Click. A little light lit in the bottom of his brain.

Daenerys.

What if Varys was preparing the ground for Daenerys?

She was getting stronger with every passing day and Varys knew it better than anyone in Westeros. She was the most suitable candidate for the Iron Throne. Tommen was a characterless puppy and Stannis with his red witch and his god of fire was disgusting. Varys loathed Stannis. Tyrion remembered the conversations in which the eunuch had confessed him his horror of black magic and those who practised it, since a mad wizard had castrated him as a child to offer up his attributes to some fire demon.
He would never allow a follower of a bloodthirsty god of fire to sit on the throne.

Recently Daenerys was very well informed of certain things. She had known opportunely that Ned Stark had confronted Robert to save her. She also knew very soon the news of Tywin's death. And following that reasoning, he wondered...

He had no idea of how he must feel regarding what he was thinking.

Had Daenerys conspired with Varys to kill the Lannister patriarch? Or... Had Varys acted on his own, without revealing that part to her? If that was the case, Daenerys was intelligent and at least she would wonder if the Spider could have something to do with the old man's death.

Either way, Tywin was no more an obstacle. But... Would Tyrion like to find out that she had taken part? Would he stay as if nothing had happened and would go on without a second thought? It was true that his father had not loved him and Tyrion broke all bond when he escaped. What did it matter already?

No, his inner voice exclaimed roundly. She's not that way. He knew too well that he had always been a hopeless romantic, but he wanted to believe that Daenerys had trustworthiness. He rarely was wrong when he judged people's nature, and his judgement dictated him with no doubt that she was not a person who acted despicably. She was not like Tywin. Or like the Mad King in his worst times.

He shook his head and forced himself to focus on present and near future. He must look on the bright side. Tywin would not screw him over any more, or turn anyone's life into hell. Daenerys was strong and unsparing with enemies, but generous with friends, pitiful with the feeble and had sacrificed herself entirely to her cause and her subjects. Tyrion had taken his decision already, he had taken sides for her and would not let any insidious spider to sneak into his solid lucidity.

He reflected on Varys's next step. Would he stay in the Red Keep, watching how Cersei succeeded in ruining Westeros and thus she would contribute to speed up his plans to serve the kingdom to Daenerys on a silver platter?

All right, not so much as on a silver platter, of course. But a shattered kingdom claimed for a savior hand that came to give back peace and prosperity.

Or maybe the eunuch any day would take a ship to Essos and make the same journey as Tyrion to join the Dragon Queen's service.

Tyrion doubted it. Varys in Meereen? What for? What did mean to him a simple city when he already controlled the grafts of the Seven Kingdoms?

No, Varys would await in Westeros. His place was there. For keeping in contact with the queen, ravens were a fast and effective system and for the moment was not necessary to be next to her physically or geographically.

Tyrion told himself that the best was not to worry more about it. He was sure to have got to the bottom of the matter. Daenerys was as he judged her and Varys was a necessary and valuable ally for her, did she like it or not. Kings and queens should keep close those they did not like or liked less.

And the definitive thing, what calmed him down once and for all and helped him get back his conviction, was that he finally was doing the second thing which he liked most in life, the game of thrones, very far behind, of course, from seeing Sansa's lovely face and making her happy.
Chapter 54

Meereen: Day 4

He awoke with his arms around her, enveloped by the soft light of an early hour.

Sansa some nights had nightmares and he comforted her until she quieted down, and then they made love, chatted or fell asleep again almost immediately, depending on their mood or the degree of tiredness they felt.

Sansa had consulted him the previous afternoon if he thought it was still soon to have a child.

"What do you think, darling?," had asked him.

"I don't know, I'm not clear about it. Perhaps those doubts mean that it's not the moment yet," said her, smiling to prevent herself from turning melancholy.

"Then no more talk. Don't worry about it. You're very young and can wait, and me too. I'm not as old as you think," joked him.

"How old do you believe I think you are?," blurted her, with her mischievous tone.

"You're a rascal. You mess me up so I show myself up. Clever girl."

"Come here, oldie. Prove to me how old you're," needled Sansa.

He had tickled her until she pleaded with him to stop and then he had pinned her to the bed. She felt surprised and excited by the unexpected strength of his small body, and he was aware of that. He had made love to her once more before going to the Council meeting of that evening.

Perhaps thanks to that he was so full of energy and his mind bustled with activity when they had discussed the most crucial matters on which depended the well-being of Meereen. He was so happy that he felt all his physical and intellectual faculties in their full measure. And that taking into account that his physical faculties were not precisely outstanding.

He was smiling for himself, when he suddenly remembered that he would have to tell her about the subject of his father when she woke up. His smile soured a little.

You never had a sense of humour, father. You didn't like to laugh. Another of your gifts was to succeed in preventing everyone from laughing around you.

You laughed with mother when she was alive? Or you also stole her laughter?

He never could find out.

Sansa opened her eyes and met his gaze. He stayed lying beside her though he must have been awoken for a while. She saw something in his eyes which alarmed her a bit.

"What's the trouble, Tyrion?," she asked, with her early hoarse voice of the morning.

"My father is dead, Sansa."

She fell silent, perplexed. She stared at him in silence for a minute.
"Did the queen tell you?" Her look was prudent and did not reveal anything.

"Yes. Last night, in the meeting. She told me that, as it seems, he died in his sleep. There were no signs of violence."

"But you don't believe that."

"No, I don't believe that."

"I know you were awake until late. I hope you have found your peace." She rested a hand on his cheek, the familiar gesture that melted him.

"I found it, my love." He looked at her in amazement. She did not offer him fake condolences, or said to him an "I'm sorry" that she did not feel really. Neither asked anything else, simply left her hand resting on his cheek and did not tear her eyes from his. His young wife understood him without words. He did not speak more about Tywin, but he knew that she understood, at least what was related to the uncertain and chaotic situation of Westeros and the drastic turn which the absence of her hated father-in-law implied, even from that distance. She also understood his confusion regarding what he ignored he should feel.

He loved her more than ever. He squeezed her hand, touched.

"And the rest of the matters? Have you made something clear?"

He narrated her all they had debated before Tywin's news.

"You're amazing," praised her, caressing his cheek. "And you say that captain Daario Naharis is seducing the queen?" She could not help her curiosity.

He shot her a mocking look.

"With all his insolence. That man ignores what complexes are."

"You think he'll be successful?"

"Undoubtedly. You should have seen how she reacted. In those moments she looked merely like a young girl in love."

"Don't all women in love look like it?"

"The truth is that you all do. You blaze it, dear."

"Do I become so obvious?," needled her, seductive.

"I'm convinced that in a short while there will not be a single soul in Meereen who doesn't know that you have a great crush on me," said him, cocky.

"Really? You think they know in Yunkai, Astapor and, by the way, in Asshai?"

"Surely. Soon they'll sing songs about the beautiful princess infatuated with a dwarf."

She hit him with the pillow and he tickled her to stop her until them both fell on the bed roaring with laughter, and a shocked Mhyraz found them playing the fools like kids when he arrived with breakfast.
Chapter 55

Meereen: Day 4

"The Mother summons you in her private hall, master," announced the boy while the couple was sitting by the table. He went on looking at them as if their previous childish behaviour did not fit his image of two adults who he respected so.

"Thank you, Mhyraz. Tell her I'll attend in short." The boy nodded and went to convey the message to the queen.

Sansa also had noticed the kid's puzzled look.

"Poor thing. He must believe we're a bit crazy," pitied her, amused.

"Then he better get used to it. And to worst things than that. He could catch us playing other games," insinuated him with his ardent look, which roamed her as if she were naked.

She sensed the heat that automatically flowed down to her womb whenever he gazed her that way, and turned a bright red.

"You're incorrigible," reprimanded her unconvincingly, fighting back her smile. She made a great effort to remain serious and change topic.

"Do you think the queen and you will talk about the subject?"

He let off a long sign of resignation. In that moment, if it depended on him, even the queen herself would have to wait. All his wife's body, dressed in one of those light gowns which tempted him with the vision of her cute skin, was begging him for a truly wild fuck. They had not made it since the previous evening and that was an eternity for him, as he spent the day feverish with sexual desire for her.

He had to resort to all his self-control. He breathed deeply.

"Yes. Last night she and I could not speak in private and that conversation was left pending. Moreover, I suppose she will want to hand over to me the tasks of the day," succeded him in pronouncing, almost with normality.

She knew what he was pleading for wordlessly. She suddenly stood up from the chair and offered him her hand.

"Come with me. If we hurry up we can make it before Dara comes. Make it to me quickly," said her, breathless.

He jumped from the chair, took her hand and guided her to the bed. He raised her dress to her waist, removed her underwear with a pull, lowered his pants and penetrated her urgently. She rubbed her spot of pleasure and in a couple of minutes she reached her peak, restraining her screams for fear that Dara were near their chambers. He moaned and trembled and filled her with his last rams.

"For the gods. It has been incredible, Sansa. You're incredible." He gave her a wet and deep kiss. With regret, he got out of her and mended his dishevelled hair and his half removed trousers.
"You too, my love," said her sweetly.

"I desire you more and more. How can it be possible?" He feigned surprise and kissed one breast, covered with the light dress.

Just then Dara knocked and Sansa invited her to go in, putting on quickly her underwear and smoothing her skirt.

Tyrion and Sansa smiled at each other with the complicity of furtive sex.

"See you later, darling. Have a good morning and think a bit of your poor husband far from you and wanting you."

She pushed him softly to the door, laughing.

"Come on, go now, insatiable man."

"See you, insatiable woman."

Dara entered and bumped into the small master, who went out grinning from ear to ear.

(Part of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 4

"We must talk about what happened to your father, Lord Tyrion. I hope it's not a badly-timed moment for that," said Daenerys with a tone of apology.

He still was trying to quiet down the desire that flooded through his veins and it took him several seconds to process which moment she referred to. Of course she did not refer to having interrupted him a glorious morning of sex. It was that she respected his mourning for his father, though if he told her how he was celebrating that mourning... A smile nearly spread over his face, but he succeeded in keeping a serious countenance. Focus, for the seven hells. You're not a teenager.

"Don't worry, Your Grace. I haven't much to mourn him, if I am totally sincere. He didn't love me. Any son of any normal father would be devastated for his loss, but it's not my case. He wasn't what is considered a normal father. The truth is that I can't feel anything, save resentment and a sensation of satisfied revenge. Do you think I'm awful for that?"

"I know how your father was, as I know how was mine. I suppose that everyone gets what sows," conceded her.

They kept a silence of understanding.

"Let's go to the heart of the matter. I know you don't believe he has died a natural death," admitted her.

He studied her with attention.

"In the Red Keep it's difficult to find a natural death lately. I tend toward other alternative."

"Who do you think is the author?," asked her. She did not give the impression to be feigning. She knew well how to conceal her feelings, but feigning something who oneself did not feel was very different to cover up, and Tyrion was quite capable of distinguishing when someone was faking. He had passed his youth among whores trained for that. "I have my suspicions, Lord Tyrion. Perhaps we'll coincide."

"It's very likely. I have a candidate for whom I bet, more than any other."

"Me too."

Tyrion decided to be bold.

"Tell me a thing, Your Grace. Who you suspect most is the same who has been reporting you about Ned Stark, my father's death and surely about other matters as well?," blurted him, straightforward.

Astonishment crossed over the beautiful face for an instant.

"You know," affirmed her.

"I know. I guessed last night, awake in my bedroom. I have come to know Varys all that enigmatic man can be known, what it's not much. I think of him as very capable of killing my father to reach his purposes."
"He is with no doubt a strange man," reflected her. "But I'm convinced he's a valuable ally." She looked at him and he noticed that she was trying to find the words to explain herself. "Lord Tyrion, if my oath is worth anything to your eyes, I can swear that I've had nothing to do with your father's death. If Lord Varys schemed it, he did it without my knowledge." Her look was clean and honest. "I know I can't trust him, but I need him. He is in possession of too much information and knows everything of everyone. It's better to keep him around and as an ally, than as an enemy."

"I know, Your Grace. I agree with you." The confirmation of the conclusions he had reached the previous night in his sleepless hours lifted a weight off him. "Varys indeed can be greatly useful. He's preparing the ground for you in Westeros. He wants you on the Iron Throne. At this point you must know that all his loyalty is for the kingdom, not really for you or anyone specific who sits on the throne. To which he devotes his life is to achieve a strong realm with many years of prosperity. His means often are not very lawful, of course, but in spite of all Varys possesses a rare kind of dignity. I neither trust him too much. Who would? But, as strange as it sounds, in certain things I would trust him my life. He was honest with me in King's Landing, at least so honest as he can be, and we developed a sort of friendship of convenience." He kept quiet for some seconds. "He may serve you with great devotion if you're the queen he wants for Westeros. And you are."

She stared at him, trying to keep her solemn composure. He smiled for himself. But suddenly he remembered something and saddened.

"I feel pity for my nephew Tommen. He's a good boy, too much nice and innocent, and I'm afraid that the throne will destroy him. I hope Varys don't harm him. I love the boy, he's no more than a kid and I don't wish him any damage. The truth is that just now I have no idea of what can be the Spider's next step." He reflected with a hand on his forehead. "Tommen isn't really an obstacle for him, because he isn't who is in charge. Varys knows too well that the poor boy is a wimp. I trust in that for Varys not killing him. Who could be at higher risk at this moments would be my sister. She's who truly wears the crown, though she doesn't wear it very well. And it's going to be funny to hear the story of how she and Margaery Tyrell rip out each other's eyes." He grinned, teasing. "Excuse my words, but my sister is a bitch with scarce scruples whose only outstanding feature is her maternal instinct, even though she hasn't been a good mother either. Loving oneself's children and leading them along the right track not always go hand in hand."

"I guarantee you, Lord Tyrion, that I won't build my reign upon an innocent child's murder. I have not the least intention to kill your nephew, and Lord Varys is aware of that. He won't touch him. I've dropped clearly the hint that it mustn't happen anything to the boy, what implies that Varys must care for him against the possible enemies," said Daenerys firmly.

Relief and gratitude expressed clearly on Tyrion's face.

"Thank you, Your Grace. Every day I am more and more glad of having come here."

They shut up, giving themselves time to recover their composure.

"Lord Tyrion, I would wish that, besides being one of my royal counselors, you're my general supervisor. In King's Landing you were a competent Master of Coin, saving very much gold for the Crown. Here you'll supervise the builders' work, keep a constant contact with Kerro for the freedfolk's matters and you'll keep records and inventories of the products our craftspeople manufacture, as well as a prediction of what must be acquired to cover basic needs. And of course, you'll keep the accounts. Thus, every time captain Gilean effects a journey, he'll have the exact list of products he must sell as well as buy, and we'll save time and money in the organization of commercial trips. Do you agree? I believe it's a good way to take advantage of your abilities."

His face lit with a wide smile.
"You couldn't have honoured me with anything more appropriate to my abilities, Your Grace," thanked him, with a bow.

"You may start this same moment. I'll assign you two Unsullied to be your permanent escort in all the transactions you have to carry out outside the pyramid. As long as you need an interpreter, count on Missandei or one of the orphans. And don't doubt consulting and asking me for whatever you need for your work. By the way, Missandei will give you a supply of paper and ink that I'm saving for tasks like that you are going to undertake. Go and have a good day."

"The same for you, Your Grace." Tyrion bent and left.
Chapter 57

Meereen: Day 4

The first he did was to go and see Missandei to ask her for the backup writing items and thus he
could begin his task. He asked after her health and she said that she already was well. She gave
him the items and he walked again to his chambers. He had to plan the activities and distribute
them in a timetable. His experience as Master of Coin would serve him a lot. For example, he knew
how to develop records and keep the books.

While he walked along the corridors, he decided he would dedicate the mornings to the supervision
of the works and to speak with Kerro and with anyone whom the queen commended him, and in the
afternoons he would carry out the office tasks. The trouble, he thought with his wicked smile, was
that the adjacent hall was not the most appropriate place. Sansa usually would be next to him and
the temptation would be strong. But he would have to dip into his willpower, because he could not
have at his disposal another place. His own hall was where he must put away his materials and
where he would have them within reach, so it was there where he should work. True that when he
fancied taking a break, she also would be within reach... You're becoming a dirty old man. Can't
you think of other things? He had to surrender. No, practically he could not think of other things.
The positive side of his work was that it would kept him absorbed and would require a high
concentration on his part, so there would be no other choice but burying himself in it. And, once in
the task, he knew he would not be distracted so easily. Unless Sansa stood naked before his nose,
of course. He grinned and shook his head.

He entered his rooms. Sansa was teaching Leena her lessons and he greeted them. They responded
to the greeting and Sansa smiled to him sweetly.

"Excuse me. I must put these things here. We'll talk later, Sansa. I have things to tell you."

"All right, Tyrion."

"I'm going again. I'll be back for lunch."

"See you later, Tyrion."

He blew her a kiss and she pretended to catch it on the fly. Leena observed them, smiling.

He would stroll through the city and go visit some of the buildings planned for the works. He had
not a great idea of construction. He had read books on the topic, but that was all. Anyway, Tyrion
knew that his supervision would encourage the men to work with more effort, especially being
aware that the queen sent him and he, though barely knew about building, was not a fool.

The Unsullied she had assigned him stood guard at his door. He asked himself if from that day on
those soldiers would spend the whole day positioned there when he did not require their services,
but he would not be surprised if it were that way. To them, spending the day still as statues was the
usual. But he supposed that they had other occupations, such as training, bathing in the river.
Eating. Sleeping. Stuff like that which every mortal did. He told them that they only would have to
accompany him in the mornings, and they could expend their afternoons as they liked or how the
mother would point them. If he some time needed their services after hours, he would send
message to them. He requested them to search for Mhyraz, because the boy would be his
interpreter. They returned a short while later and the kid nearly started to jump out of joy when
Tyrion notified him that he was going to carry out a very important mission.

The four of them went out of the pyramid and he carried the plans to go with a sure aim, without getting lost. He scarcely knew the city still, only the section between the main gates of the ramparts and the Great Pyramid. It would suit him well to examine the streets.

The nobility of Meereen must have received the announcement about the selection of one of their members to represent them on the Council, and the news would be flying from one pyramid to another. Maybe he was imagining things, but that time he had the impression that the atmosphere was much less oppressive. The passers-by were walking from side to side in the usual bustle of any city. The freedfolk had opened a market and they would be in full operation. He would go there in the first place and would consult the suppliers and sellers.
Chapter 58

Meereen: Day 4

The market was not very large yet, but Tyrion knew that as the production of the brotherhoods increased, it would expand. Around thirty guards, among Unsullied and Second Sons, were keeping a close eye on the stalls.

Tyrion asked for the foreman or supervisor of the market, and they pointed to a man named Sarik. The man, with a bronze and leathery complexion, explained to him that he had devised a system to sow on the shores of the Skahazadhan, where the soil was wetter and richer. Soon there would be a harvest of vegetables, if the gods let it flourish. They also were planting fruit trees, which with watering and the proper care could ripen. Before being sold as a slave in Astapor, he had been a farmer since his childhood and soil kept scarce secrets for him. Tyrion asked him for the progress of the market, the products that were sold and how much he calculated the brotherhoods produced every day. Sarik was the spokesperson of his brotherhood of farmers. It was a small group, as in Slaver's Bay agriculture was not plentiful.

What was plentiful in the market was fish and shellfish, which the brotherhood of fishermen obtained every day in the bay.

The man possessed detailed information about all that Tyrion requested him, and gave him the numbers. Tyrion wrote them down, along with the prices at which they sold on average each type of item. When he finished, he thanked Sarik for his kindness, pointing that the queen would feel very pleased with their fruitful collaboration. Tyrion said to him that from then on he would consult him all those aspects. They bid farewell with a friendly handshake.

"You're doing a good job, Mhyraz," praised Tyrion. The boy was translating all the conversations barely breathing. "Have you considered what you would like to be? A knight, like Ser Barristan?" He reckoned that the kid would dream of knighthood. It was every child's dream. It had been his as well, when he was a little boy, before his father wiped it out. You are a dwarf, an aberration of nature. How do you think you are going to be a knight?, said to him. Tyrion cried bitterly for days and never forgot the contempt in Tywin's voice.

"Yes, master. I want to be like him," affirmed Mhyraz.

In the other hand, with a master-at-arms as Ser Barristan, what boy would not dream of being like him? Tyrion smiled tenderly.

The small group walked to the following destination of their route, a street where at least half the houses were marked to be remodeled.

The place bustled with construction workers. The loose bricks had been moved away and those which could be reused had been put in order on the ground. The foreman was busy marking the spots of underpinning. Tyrion went next to him. He was a man of about forty, with fair skin tanned by the sun, and dark blond hair. He introduced himself as Koleos and described him the works of underpinning. Luckily, it would not be necessary to demolish those houses to start from scratch. Reinforcing the structures and rebuilding the useless parts, they would look like new. Tyrion asked him where they got the bricks and the fresh stone. The freedfolk had a workshop to manufacture bricks, but besides there was a granite quarry around five miles southeast of Meereen and the queen had claimed it along with the city. In Meereen the constructions were usually made of bricks, but granite was a very resistant stone and insulated the interior of the houses against
extreme temperatures. The queen had commanded that the granite were used in the new buildings. Some sets would be allocated to be sold. Every foreigner who wanted granite of the Meereenese quarry would have to pay to obtain it. The brotherhood of quarry workers went by horse several times a week to the place to shape the stone and classify it, escorted by Unsullied and sellswords who took turns. Tyrion took notes of all the pieces of information and, when he was satisfied, thanked the builder for his diligence. He looked at the position of the sun to calculate the hour. Soon it would be noon. He concluded that for that day he had done a good progress with his work and decided which, as he had some time left until lunch, he would go to the camp to talk with Kerro about the procedures for the school and perhaps he could pay a visit to Jorah.

Kerro was very busy organizing the removal of building materials to the city, but he dedicated some minutes to Tyrion to tell him how the project for the school worked. Every spokesperson of the brotherhoods had been conveyed the mission and in the moments they could, they were recounting the children and the possible teachers. The process was a little slow because they had to do it in their leisure, but he was sure that the results would be ready within time period.

Afterwards, they went to the sellswords' camp and Jorah, as it was expected, was training.

Tyrion shook hands with him.

"How do you do, friend?," asked Tyrion.

"You see. Keeping fit."

"How do your mates treat you?"

"In the beginning they looked at me as if they wanted to skewer me with their swords, but now they're getting used," said Jorah, with a half smile. "How is she?" It was obvious he was eager to ask that question.

"Full of projects. I intervened in my first Council meeting."

Envy chewed the knight's pupils.

"Anything you can tell me?"

Tyrion told him only about the topics he was authorized to reveal. And, of course, he kept for himself the budding romance between Daenerys and Daario.

"She misses you, Jorah. I've seen it in her eyes," he said to Jorah, to offer him a little comfort. "I know she's affected by your absence. You were her best friend and that's not easy to forget."

"Thanks, Tyrion. Take care of her and make wise decisions, though I imagine it's unnecessary to request you that."

"You know me, Jorah. I have this big dwarf head well leveled." He smiled. "She's all you said. She really is worth it."

"Of course. I can be in love, but I'm not blind, Tyrion."

"No, you're not. See you, Jorah."

"See you, Tyrion."

On the way back, he tried to understand how the put-out knight must feel without having the
chance to get near his loved woman.
Meereen: Day 4

Tyrion entered his chambers and looked for Sansa. She was sitting by the window, sewing. She raised her look from the needle and the fabric and smiled to him.

"What are you sewing?," asked him, interested.

"I'm making new clothes so the children are bundled up this winter. I have plenty of time and you already know that I want to be useful."

"And you are, my love. You teach Leena, you're going to work at the school and besides you make clothes for the children. I'd say you're very useful," said him, full of pride. "Moreover, there are other things you can do wonderfully," insinuated him, with that slightly hoarse voice that sped up her pulse. He got near her and rested his hands on her thighs. She looked at them, flushed.

*How can she go on blushing after all we have done together? She's lovely.*

"I love when you redden. You're so pretty with your face like ripe apples." Desire pulsed in his words and his hands, which were caressing the thighs over the skirt.

She placed her hands on his and they locked their eyes.

"How do you do it, my ardent husband? You have me like dizzy the whole day, thinking of you and the things I want you to make me."

"I could say the same to you, my ardent wife. The more we fuck, the more I want to make it. You're like a sweet wine that goes to my head and I want to spend the day drinking you. I've turned addicted to you and you have got into my blood."

Mhyraz's discreet knock brought them to reality and they broke the visual contact they had kept for several minutes without interruption. They moved apart a little.

"Come in, Mhyraz," invited Tyrion, slightly disappointed. Sansa grinned mischievously.

*She enjoys making me endure these little tortures. She smiles thinking that I'm going to spend lunch desiring her like a dog in heat and I'll have to restrain myself. Of course, I'm completely in her hands. She knows and likes it. She feels pleased exercising so much power over me. And at the same time it turns her on that I sometimes take control. This young girl drives me crazy. I don't know how I have willpower to spend a single minute far from her.*

He had not reached such degree of connection with any previous woman. Nor Tysha or Shae. With Tysha he hardly had time to taste love, and with Shae he knew at bottom that their relationship would end. It could not last forever. They would never marry, never would live together, never would share the deep degree of intimacy necessary to love one another helplessly.

With Sansa his chest felt a pressure until it hurt out of happiness with the single fact of looking at her. The love he felt overflowed him.

They sat to eat and Tyrion, in order to distract himself from the intensity of his feelings, related to her how his morning had passed. Daenerys had designated him general supervisor and he walked along the streets of Meereen listening to pieces of information and scribbling on his papers,
compiling everything. He told her about Sarik and Koleos, the market, the rebuilding houses and the granite quarry. He also told her about Jorah and how much he missed Daenerys.

"And Mhyraz is an excellent interpreter," dropped him, aware that the boy was listening, as he was serving the table and the wine. Tyrion already had indicated him it was not necessary for him to do the latter, but the boy liked it, so Tyrion let him do as he pleased.

"These kids manage wonderfully. I wish I would've known how to do so many things," pointed Sansa intentionally.

Tyrion and her smiled at each other above the table. Mhyraz puffed up for moments. **Any instant he'll raise by himself,** thought Tyrion.

"General supervisor. It sounds complicated," commented her.

"It's not easy peasy, of course. It requires a thorough work. I have to keep registers and inventories and balancing the accounts. Having been Master of Coin I'm familiarized with it."

"I want you to take me to any of your visits, while the school has not begun yet. I'd like to see how you work," pleaded Sansa, cheerful. She worshipped watching how his face transfigured every time she made him feel proud.

*He's so handsome in those moments, with his nice green eyes full of light, his golden and dishevelled hair, his ardent lips shaping that seductive smile which turns me on, his sensitive and expert hands touching inadvertently any object and I wanting to be in the place of that object...*

She was gazing at him awestruck and he noticed.

"Of course I'll take you when you want, darling. I look forward to it," said him, grateful.

*She loves me as much as I love her. That gaze melts my insides. It makes me feel as handsome as the Knight of Flowers.*

The current between them was so intense that Tyrion was amazed it went on being invisible.

"Though Jorah has been lucky after all, he must be suffering, without being permitted to see his khaleesi," whispered her, losing herself again in the depths of the green eyes.

"It must be very painful, for sure. Not being allowed to look at her eyes, or telling her how much he loves her, or how badly he desires to touch her."

Lunch finally ended and Mhyraz took away the utensils, leaving them alone.

That time they made it slowly, sweetly, with no hurry, with all the love they felt radiating from each kiss and each caress, in complete surrender and devotion, and at last the hunger of that day was sated, at least for the brief interval in which desire rested from its urgency.

*(Part of a longer chapter)*
Meereen: Day 4

In the late afternoon, he made a fair copy of his scrawling writing and classified the information so it were ordered and were easy to consult. One of any accounting's most difficult tasks was to keep the books as clear and organized as possible. He remembered the gnashing of teeth that had caused him the books Littlefinger had left him. Everyone believed he was a financial wizard and that he obtained money out of thin air, but nothing further away from reality. The only thing in which that infamous man had stood out was in convincing the Iron Bank of Braavos to accommodate the Crown with a loan of millions in gold, and to Tywin to invest some more millions coming from the amounts amassed in the underground vaults of Casterly Rock. And the problem with loans was that they had to be paid back. Tyrion had gone to great pains because of Littlefinger's magical accounts.

Fortunately, Daenerys to that day had not taken out any loan and managed reasonably well, but Tyrion was afraid that the situation could not be sustainable during winter. Summer was much more clement; it meant abundance. Nature, when it hatched out, provided most of the sustenance. But with the end of that long summer of nine years, who knew how many lean years would pass. If there was something consoling, it was that Meereen in itself was a tough and ungenerous land, even during the most favourable times of summer, so, if those experienced freedfolk were able to extract resources from that harsh and lean nature, they could also manage along winter. But the storehouses would need reserves to contribute to what the population could scrape together.

It was essential to acquire a good supply of non-perishable food that could be stored and which lasted years without spoiling. Captain Gilean had been assigned for that mission, and Tyrion hoped he could carry it out successfully. He would have to organize several travels and it would depend on him that Daenerys's people could endure the times of higher privation.

It would be important as well to store fodder and grain for the horses and the other beasts. Lots of freedfolk had farmyard animals on which they relied to help them in their subsistence.

On the other hand, fruit and vegetables were almost as valuable as gold. Meereen lacked trees, and the fruit trees Sarik was planting were insufficient and it was unknown if they would survive. Then it was crucial that Gilean brought as well those products which the freedfolk could not produce in enough amount for everyone.

He stood up and rubbed his sore and numb legs. The afternoon had passed faster than he expected. Glad, he went to the bedroom. Sansa had been sewing by the window to have more light, and afterwards she had laid down on the bed to read a book. She had fallen asleep upon the bedspread, with the book open over her breast. She was a lovely view that made him smile. The book was a volume of a collection which dealt with the history of Westeros. Sansa had reached the long part concerning the Dance of Dragons, the civil war which caused the fight between Rhaenyra Targaryen and her half brother Aenys II Targaryen for the Iron Throne, resulting in a massacre of people as well as dragons.

He removed the book from her carefully, but she awakened. She looked around, confused.

"It's near night, Sansa," said him, finding funny her pretty face swollen by her nap.

"Oh, I've fallen asleep. I've thought it was morning, but it was strange not to see you laying by my side."
"Soon Mhyraz will bring dinner. Your afternoon has been profitable, darling?"

"Yes, I've sewn a pair of trousers and a shirt and after that I've started to read this book because I'm explaining to Leena the most remarkable events of the history of Westeros, and so I was catching up with the Dance of Dragons. However I go part by part, because it's a long and complex chapter. The Targaryens destroyed one another and they eliminated many other people and most of their dragons. And all for the succession to that ugly Iron Throne, as Leena says. And she's right."

"Leena summs up perfectly the issue," admitted Tyrion, smiling.

"In the middle of a war they always force you to take sides," said Sansa, thoughtful. "And what happens if you reject taking sides?"

"In war, as in the Kingsguard, the Night's Watch or the armies of vassals of a main house, desertion isn't permitted. Rejecting is dying."

"And so is taking part. Wars almost never serve for anything."

"Here we are surrounded by thousands of ex-slaves who prove that this war is serving for something. But it's an exception. It's true, wars almost never serve for anything. Especially those which are fought for a throne."

"Let's hope all this serves for something. And that the Iron Throne doesn't destroy Daenerys."

Sansa did not utter the rest. *If she falls, we'll fall as well.*

He hugged her quietly, wishing to protect her from an uncertain future which only the gods knew what would bring.
Chapter 61

Meereen: Day 4 – 5

Some bangs sounded at the door and woke up the couple.

"The Mother summons you, Lord Tyrion." It was one of the two Unsullied who were part of his escort.

Tyrion and Sansa looked at each other in the darkness, shocked, and he glanced at the windows. It had not dawned yet. A sensation of bad omen invaded him. It could not be anything good at those early hours of morning. As they ignored what it was about, Sansa decided to get dressed too, just in case. Tyrion gave her a quick kiss and took her face in his hands.

"Keep calm, darling. Whatever it is, we'll confront it and do the possible to resolve it. I'll be back as soon as I can and I'll tell you. I don't like that you wait for me awake, but as I know you won't sleep until I'm back, at least stay wrapped up in bed and try to entertain yourself. Sew or read something. But don't catch cold," recommended him.

"All right, my love. I know you'll do what you can. Go now."

They kissed again and Tyrion left.

The Unsullied accompanied him to the queen's private hall, where she was awaiting with Ser Barristan and Missandeii. Daario and Grey Worm, as it was logical, would be the last as they had to go from the camps.

"What's happened?," asked Tyrion, controlling the alarm in his voice.

"An Unsullied and two freedpeople have been murdered tonight," declared Daenerys, with a bitter tone, controlling barely her fury.

"Where?," inquired him, with his mind starting to work at full speed.

"The soldier has been found in an alleyway, and the freedpeople, at the door of their houses," explained Daenerys.

Here we have the dirty war I was suspecting. The Meereenese haven't stayed lazily in their houses. I'm afraid that the proposal of a representative of the nobility hasn't been enough.

"Any suspicion about who has dared to do it?"

"On the walls next to the corpses they have written Sons of the Harpy and have left several masks."

Sons of the Harpy. A secret organization? This is going to be difficult to sort out, if not almost impossible.

"It seems that the Meereenese have conceived a plot to pester us with a dirty war, hidden behind masks and sheltered by the shadows of the night. It could be any noble family or all of them banded together," said Tyrion.

"I fear that. But, how are we going to uncover who are they exactly? Which procedure will we use to find out the truth?"
"It can't be let pass without acting, of course, but we neither can dedicate to arrest noblemen at random and torture them. We could be punishing innocent people. We ignore if all of them take part in the conspiracy," reasoned Tyrion. "Moreover, I know too well the methods my father used and I assure you that a poor wretched who wants to get rid of the agony of pain and who feels terrorized of dying in torment will react in two ways: or he or she will maintain to the end that hasn't done anything, or will confess all he or she thinks you want to hear so their torturers stop hurting him or her. Any way, that method won't be of any use, Your Grace. You may think that that kind of punishment will send a warning to everyone, but the only you'll get will be to worsen the hatred and the rebels will act with more aversion. And I suppose you don't want to be known as a butcher queen," warned Tyrion with all his boldness.

He noticed a slight flash of humour in Daenerys's eyes when she heard the nickname people called the self-proclaimed king of Astapor, Cleon the Butcher King.

"I prefer to be known as a stern queen. Then, what can I do? I'm not going to sit around watching how my people are killed."

"Lord Tyrion has spoken with good sense, Your Grace," pointed Ser Barristan, for the aforesaid's surprise. For the first time since Tyrion knew him, the old man was looking at him respectfully. "Torture only leads to more violence and doesn't solve anything. We have to think about more diplomatic means. You still must receive the candidates of the noble families that have agreed to meet you to choose their representative. We'll have to convince him or her to negotiate with his people and agree to a truce."

"But we don't know if those candidates belong to the Sons of the Harpy as well," objected Daenerys. "It could be their way to infiltrate here."

Just then arrived Daario and Grey Worm, who had gone running along all the way.

The queen informed them about all that was being discussed. The handsome sellsword's expression was dangerous; at that moment Tyrion could easily imagine him slicing his Second Sons captain mates' throats simply for a question of different opinions.

"Demand hostages from every noble house," proposed Daario. "A boy and a girl from every one. Their families will understand that it won't suit them to behave wrong while their children are under our custody."

It's the same custom than in Westeros, reflected Tyrion. Theon Greyjoy was made a hostage by Ned Stark to keep calm his father Balon Greyjoy after the rebellion of the Iron Islands. It's not a bad idea. It's a threat without coming to spill blood.

Definitely the sellsword was not a fool.

Tyrion intervened.

"Make them know that in Westeros it's a great honour that the king or the queen put up guests from important houses, and the boys and girls who receive that honour are treated with full consideration and brought up with all the care the Crown offers. That way you'll tinge it with a more diplomatic and friendship facade. But the threat will remain there and they'll have it into high account."

Daario shot a concealed blink to Tyrion for having given him a helping hand.

Daenerys considered the answer.

"So I'll do. I'll follow the Westerosi tradition of keeping hostages, or, said in a softer way, guests,"
decided her.

Ser Barristan spoke again.

(Part of a longer chapter)
"We'll study in detail the candidates they propose and you'll choose the one who makes you the best impression. We could interview them separately. But we must not be fooled by appearances. Sometimes a kind face can hide a knife which it's not seen until it has been stabbed into our backs," exposed Ser Barristan.

"We cannot trust them but I'm sure that the ones who declare their candidacy will do it out of ambition. It's their only way to gain access to the power they've lost and they won't give up it. So this plan suits to them. And we'll have that representative near enough to watch him, be him a Son of the Harpy or not," said the queen.

"And as he will be part of a prominent family, perhaps he will succeed in coming to a truce," pointed Missandei, shyly.

"We'll put around subtly that, if he wants to keep his place in the Council, he must achieve a truce, or he could be replaced by another more efficient," suggested Daario.

Daenerys nodded. "Well. We'll do it as you say. But, in case none of this works in the end, we need a backup plan."

Tyrion had in mind a quite bold backup plan. He did not know how she would take it, but he was not scared of saying what he thought when it must be said.

"If none of this ends the dirty war, there could be a solution that uses to be effective."

The queen held her breath for a moment, as if she were foreseeing that she would not like what she was about to hear.

"You could marry a nobleman. It's the best honour and the highest step any Meereenese will reach after a millennium without kings in this city. If one of them is a king, that will raise their category above the nobility of Yunkai, Astapor or any other city in Slaver's Bay. If that doesn't pacify them, then I won't have the least idea of what will do."

Everyone stared at him, perplexed. Daario was not pleased in the least, and Tyrion wondered with irony if he also would slice the future husband's throat, but the sellsword had no other choice than putting up with it. After all, he could not marry her and could not expect that she remained single if the state reasons demanded a royal wedding.

Daenerys sighed, resigned.

"You're right, Lord Tyrion. If it were appropriate, I'll consent to marry. If the spokesperson I choose is to my liking, it will be better I marry him instead of any other."

"Your wisdom honours you, Your Grace," praised Tyrion. He imagined what that sacrifice implied for a beautiful young and lively woman like her. In Westeros all noble young women had to resign themselves to imposed marriages. And often beyond Westeros as well. They rarely married for love and they accepted it since they sucked their mothers' milk. The songs involving princesses in love with handsome and brave knights who requited their love were made up so the noble girls had something they could dream of, as reality never was like in songs.
"We'll double the caution. They're cowards and won't dare to act in broad daylight, but we all must proceed with great care. My soldiers will patrol in groups. We'll tell the freedfolk to try not to go out at night alone or in small groups, and convey them the need to carry arms. If the murders of soldiers persist, I'll retire my Unsullied and sellswords from the night patrols and the Meereenese will have to care for themselves by their own. I'm not willing to lose any other member of my army in any dirty war," stated Daenerys. Tiredness was evident in the dark shadows under her pretty eyes. "This has been a hard night and tomorrow we'll celebrate the funeral for my faithful subjects. Go rest." She turned to Daario and Grey Worm. "Be very careful in your way back. I don't want anything to happen to you," pleaded her, with concern radiating from her words. She looked at Daario one last time and Tyrion saw the longing for the sellsword that was consuming her.

They bid farewell. In the corridors dawn already had replaced the veil of darkness and Tyrion told to himself that probably it would be impossible for him to sleep.

Sansa was bundled up in her woolen robe and was strolling from side to side of the bedroom when he got in. She turned to him.

"I was awaiting you laying on the bed, but I felt too much nervous. What's happened?"

Tyrion told her everything.

"Poor people," pitied her, sitting on the bed. He sat beside her. "Let's hope your plans work."

"Pray your gods to make it so," recommended him with a tired smile, caressing her hand.

"You know I don't pray any more," reminded her, smiling sadly.

"So you said to me that day when you refused to eat and asked for my permission to let you go to the godswood. I was an idiot to think that you went there to pray and you spat with your exquisite manners that you went there because it was the only place where no one spoke to you. You made me feel like the complete useless fool I was. I didn't know what to do to console you."

"I'm sorry for having said that to you, Tyrion. You were who least deserved it," apologized her retrospectively.

"I understood it, Sansa. And I also understood that my vow to care for you and protect you was a lie. How could I protect you from all harm as I wanted? My father, my sister and my nephew were in charge of preventing it. And I felt so powerless and frustrated... While it was only me, I could endure it. But you, Sansa... Being under my care, how could I feel like a true man, how not believing I was the Halfman everyone called me, if I wasn't even able to protect you from my own family?," reproached him to himself, lowering his eyes to the floor.

She made him turn his head to look at her.

"Don't blame yourself for what they did. I don't blame you."

"But someone also can be hurt by default, Sansa. For not seeking the way to prevent damage."

"You did the best you could in those circumstances. You stood up for me against Joffrey. You placed yourself as a shield more than once to divert his attention from me. And you made the effort to comfort me. You were worried about my health. And I won't forget how you caressed my hand to cheer me up when Joffrey made that horrible comedy of the War of the Five Kings be performed," remembered her.
"And I won't forget how you picked up the cup from the floor to give it to me. You spat the king with such an elegant gesture and turned a mortifying scene into a display of dignity. I felt so grateful, Sansa. In that moment I realized I loved you."

"Then no more talk. We survived all that and you have brought us here safe and sound. You make me the happiest I can be and you'll make possible that things improve in Meereen. I pray no more to gods that don't listen, but I have blind faith in you, and I know you'll do everything in your power. Now time will tell. But we'll get ahead."

"Oh, Sansa. How can it be that someone as beautiful as you is here with me? I fear to wake up and discover that all this has been a dream."

"Come here, my love. Do you want to convince yourself that I'm not a dream? Touch me. Feel me. And when you wake up in the morning, I'll be by your side."

She wiped the tears which were running down his cheeks. He kissed her with all his hunger for her and got lost in her body before falling asleep embracing her.

And, as she had promised, when he awoke she was still by his side.
Chapter 63

Meereen: Day 5

Mhyraz brought them breakfast later than usual, respecting their late sleep. The previous night had been tense and had caused an unpleasant turn in the queen's position in Meereen, and therefore in all of them's, but Tyrion after waking up felt fresh and optimistic, with renewed energies to cope with the challenges of that tricky and crafty city. He felt pity for the dead people, of course, and was sorry for what had happened to them. But Sansa had made him so happy, she had given herself to him with such tenderness, making he see how important he was for her and how much she needed him, that their love had given him strength to resist and fight.

Tyrion opened his eyes to the bright light which slipped through the curtains and stayed in bed watching Sansa's asleep face, enveloped in that peace that she had recovered almost completely once far from King's Landing. Maybe it was that his presence beside her calmed her down and she felt safe and loved, but she had stopped suffering so many nightmares. In their chambers in the Red Keep, he heard her groan and cry in her dreams, but he did not dare to get next to her. He laid on the couch and had handed her over the bed, and often he spent the nights awake thinking about the sad and lonely girl who slept some metres far from him. In the silence of the night he heard her breathe and was fully aware of the brush of the sheets. She almost always cried quietly before falling asleep out of exhaustion, trying to cover up so he did not notice it. But he, of course, noticed. And yearned so strongly for hugging her that even his skin hurt. He knew when she was asleep and when insomnia kept her awake. She turned in bed and sighed, and Tyrion in those moments had to gather all his willpower in order not to get up and head for the bed simply to tell her things that relaxed her and helped her get back her sleep. But she did not want anything he did or say. And the torture of the nights in which he could not do anything for her chased him. Just then was when his frustration with himself began. The feeling of his own uselessness. In the sept he had sworn to care for her, but he was not even capable of consoling her.

He also avoided and stayed away from Shae's attempts to attract him. Sometimes he found her in his bedroom and she tempted him to have sex, but he rejected her with any excuse. The truth was that, although she continued to matter to him, he had stopped desiring her. His love for her had changed irredeemably. Since his wedding to Sansa, he felt worried about lots of things. It was not that he loved his young wife. It was soon for that. It was that he felt upon him the weight of the responsibility he had acquired with her. The poor girl already had plenty of broken promises in her life and he was not going to contribute to increase the amount. He had promised her fidelity and would fulfill it, even though he had to remain celibate for who knew how much time, if it happened any time that his wife accepted him in bed. But by then he could not desire Shae, he could not bed any woman knowing that his young wife was suffering, and she was little more than a young girl, innocent and with her dreams shattered. Perhaps she did not care about what he did, but Tyrion did not want to hurt her or humiliate her being unfaithful with other women. He could not bear how low he would fall, or her look of contempt if she found out, or the certainty that he, her husband, was delivering her one more of so many blows the girl had to receive during the time she had stayed in the capital.

At bottom, he did not want to lose the scarce trust or the little respect she professed of him. He cared what she thought of him. And, if he expected their marriage to work any time, if he wanted to save some timid hopes for their future, he could not start their life together disrespecting her, what would have happened if he had gone on bedding Shae.

Once he found Shae laying on the bed, where Sansa slept every night. For some reason, that looked
like a desecration for him, an insult to his poor wife's dignity and innocence, and he got annoyed. Shae tried to provoke him, but he, indifferent, cut her short and she, hurt by his cold rejection, got infuriated, yelled and stormed out.

Tyrion was conscious that he harboured some feelings for Sansa, though in those times he would not have known how to distinguish their exact nature, or he refused to do it for fear of feeling more than he would like to admit. She wanted nothing from him, so he was totally reluctant to exhibit his heart falling in love with her, as he feared that could finally happen. And he resisted himself from passing through the torment of an unrequited love.

Bronn, how not, had seen through him immediately when he received the news of his master's forced wedding to the girl. He had sensed that Tyrion desired her, however he proclaimed that she was a young girl to hush his guilty conscience. But yes, it was true, it was the crude reality: he wanted her. From the moment he caressed the certainty of their wedding, he noticed more her beautiful face, her transparent blue eyes, her coralline lips, her bright red hair, her porcelain skin, her figure that with every passing day grew more voluptuous. He fought against himself and forced himself to lower his eyes with guilt, but not before having glanced at her with a hungry flash in his pupils. She was the most adorable girl he had met, a virgin and so helpless... And he wanted to make her happy. He wanted to be her knight in shining armour. He wanted her trust, her laughter, her sorrow, her sexual desire. He wanted to talk with her about everything. But then he mocked himself for his stupid dreams and threw himself into any wine bottle he found. Because he was a sensitive fool who would never learn.

And thereby he spent in King's Landing his newlywed nights, separated from her by several metres which were as leagues, longing for what he would never have.

At that time, Tyrion started to relieve his sexual urgencies alone. He had stopped bedding Shae, but the carnal desires that always had struck him since he was old enough to feel them pursued him relentlessly and several times a day he hid in the toilet and masturbated. Whenever he did it, instead of conjuring in his mind Shae's face and body, which he knew so well, he imagined a voluptuous, red haired girl who looked suspiciously like Sansa, and then he reached his climax with a furious intensity that left him feeling even guiltier. But he could not help it. Or was that, or he would explode any way.

And those sessions of furtive masturbation were prolonged week after week since the beginning of his marriage. But that was not enough. A short while later, at some night in which he remained awake on the couch listening to the quiet sounds in the bed, sure that she was sleeping, he had pulled out his manhood and had started to stroke himself slowly, without making a single noise, afraid that she noticed what he was doing. He learnt to give pleasure to himself very slowly, without emitting a single sound, restraining any moan. He could keep that way for long until he spilled his seed on his own hand. It aroused him greatly to do it that way, so slowly, in complete silence and some metres far from Sansa, knowing that she was not conscious of his powerful sexual needs. The excitement was overpowering. And only thereby he succeeded in keeping at bay his stormy and rebellious body and resigning for the moment to not being allowed for him to touch his wife.

But he did not have the slightest idea of how long that situation would be sustainable.

And short afterwards, all turned over and he found himself fleeing with Sansa and finally... She was his. And he was hers. Just like he had dreamed of devoting himself to the woman of his life if some rare pitiful god let him find her.

(Part of a longer chapter)
Chapter 64

Meereen: Day 5

He stayed in bed beside her, waiting for her to wake up by herself and remembering the first awkward times of their marriage. At present, Sansa continued to lack knowledge of his constant handlings in solitary with which he had to manage before their escape. He did not dare to confess them to her, for fear of what she could think of a full-blown man, driven mad with lust for a girl, his wife, who by then ignored him.

He already had no such strong need for those handlings. She fulfilled his sexual expectations much more than he had dreamed any woman could do. And that taking into account that until little time ago she was a maiden and hardly knew anything about sex. No one had led him to such heights where he got completely lost in that delight and he no longer knew where his own body started and finished, and he forgot even his own name, and everything except for Sansa and the burning fire that ignited inside him just thinking of her.

And there was nothing better in life, or more beautiful, than watching and feeling her delight, because then he felt complete, full, rewarded. He felt that only for that, life was worth living. But he had more, infinitely more than that. He had her.

Sansa quivered and embraced him lazily around his waist, and did some little noises with her throat. He grinned, amused. He worshipped her that way, in the moments before awakening, when she unconsciously sought shelter in his small but solid and strong body and she encircled him with a possessive arm, drawing him to her in the mists of her slumber. He worshipped her thereby because she turned to him unknowingly, her asleep body searching for him.

He wondered if she would fancy fucking that morning. Because he was dying to fuck. He was always dying to make it. The world would have to sink to make him tear his senses from her even for a few moments.

Sansa guessed when he was desperate to make it. And since their first time in the ship to Myr, she had never rejected him, never had showed disinterested. Not even when she had her moon cycle. It must be the blend of their mutual love, the deep connection they shared and also their intuition to know when it was the opportune moment. And moreover, he never forced or coerced her. She always, always, had her right to say no, or not to fancy it any moment. And surely due to the fact that she had complete freedom, something that most women lacked, she had become wonderfully responsive and willing. Deliciously sensitive to her own physical needs as well as to her man's. She gave herself without reservation, prudery or restrictions, with all the joy and torridity of her fifteen years and the love she felt for him. Her septa's strict puritan teachings regarding marital intimacy had remained totally outdated.

She had no other choice, with such a scarcely puritan husband as him, thought Tyrion with his mocking grin.

"Good morning, my love," greeted her. He loved her hoarse voice of newly awake.

"Good morning, gorgeous." They shared a kiss that, for their mutual delight, started to prolong and turn deeper. They moaned and that was their perdition. The sign that they were both ready.

Definitely, she wanted to fuck that morning.
Mhyraz reported that the funeral would be celebrated that afternoon in the Temple of Graces, adjacent to the Great Pyramid. The Mother had joined the Green Grace, who was the high priestess of the temple, setting the details for the funeral ceremony. It had been decreed a day of official mourning so everyone who wanted to could go to say goodbye to the unfortunates.

The Mother also was increasing the security measures. After the previous night slaughter, moving through the city was no more a simple trivial matter.

As soon as the boy was gone, Sansa looked at Tyrion with anxiety.

"You must be very careful whenever you go out for your tasks, my love. Take Pod as well, apart from the two Unsullied. I feel calmer if he goes with you," pleaded her.

He took her face with his hands.

"I'll do, darling. He will always come with me. I can't let my beautiful wife go mad for concern," said him with the tone he used when he wanted to take away the excess of emotional load in something he did not want Sansa to worry too much about.

"If it were for me, you wouldn't move away from this room," warned her with her insinuating as well as firm voice. Damn, I'm lost again, thought him, with the urgency pushing his trousers. "But as I can't prevent you from going out, you have to swear that you'll never do it without Pod or your two escorts," finished her, without letting him the option to reply.

"I swear, Sansa. I'll never go out without the three of them. You won't get rid of me, remember?"

"Too well. And now come here, as I'm not finished with you yet," blurted her, drawing him to herself and beginning to undress him.
Meereen: Day 5

In mid afternoon it would be celebrated the funeral for the three victims of the attack. It was expected a high attendance of freedfolk and the queen's entourage would consist of: Daario Naharis, who would march in front of her, Ser Barristan and Grey Worm on her sides, Missandei just behind, after them Tyrion with Sansa, Pod and Leena and, bringing up the rear, Kerro, who had just joined as a new royal counselor. Around all them would spread out a hundred Unsullied and a hundred Second Sons.

The nobility of Meereen would use the event to send the representatives who, once finished the ceremony, would accompany the entourage to the Great Pyramid and the queen would begin the process of selection. Daenerys besides would report them the measure regarding the noble children who would be chosen as the Crown guests. She imagined that the announcement would cause a commotion, but she did not care. Those were the conditions she offered, which she had seen herself forced to adopt due to treason. She would not accept any refusal. When she were going to expose that demand to the noble spokespeople, she would make very clear for them that, or they handed over the children voluntarily, or the patriarch of the family which opposed would be severely punished.

The route from the pyramid to the temple was short, but was crowded with freedfolk and some noblepeople in palanquins. Daenerys and her group would walk without cover, surrounded by the two hundred sentinels.

Since the street riot in King's Landing, Sansa was frightened of being the focus of attention in the middle of a crowd and, before going out of their chambers, she grasped Tyrion's hand to gather her courage. He squeezed it and encouraged her with a smile.

"Everything will be fine, darling," assured him. "Almost all those people are devoted to Daenerys and moreover the Sons of the Harpy won't act in daylight or with so many people together."

"I know. It's just I still get a little nervous with so many people looking."

"They aren't poor starving wretched from Fleabottom, my love. Those hated Joff, but these are freedfolk whose lives have improved and they respect the queen."

She nodded grinning to him and breathed deeply and, as always, the breathing exercises kept her nerves under control.

Tyrion was going to fulfill his promise of having Pod next to him every time he must go out. Sansa trusted unquestioningly the boy's loyalty and she felt more peaceful knowing Pod took care of his master as he had done for such a long time without having never failed to him.

Pod helped Ser Barristan in the children's training and he liked that task. The kids were willing, and, though not all of them possessed the qualities to become squires, soldiers or knights, they at least would have a good command of the rudiments of fighting and could defend themselves in case of an attack. In regard to the scarce children who lacked the proper conditions to be warriors, they would have the chance to choose other jobs more appropriate for their abilities. They would study at the school and would decide what job suited them, being allowed to enter as apprentices in any brotherhood.
When they met in the corridors to march in the royal retinue, Pod and Leena said to Tyrion and Sansa that they were planning to wed soon. Sansa was very pleased. Even though her personal experience with weddings had been awful, she looked forward to the fact that her friends could celebrate the wedding of their dreams.

"Do you have any idea of how it will be?," she asked, very interested. Tyrion sensed her cheerful excitement and smiled. At least she had forgotten momentarily her fear for crowds.

"We want it to be in the pyramid," explained Pod. "We don't mind what'll be the wedding rite. Here the Graces are the priestesses, so we'll ask one of them to officiate. Afterwards we'll eat along with our friends and we'll toast."

"It's going to be lovely," approved Sansa. She disliked ostentatious weddings, especially those to which she had to attend in King's Landing, including her own. Which, in truth, had not been even a hundredth part of extravagant as Joffrey's was. If the Lannisters had believed they had offended her with that detail, they were wrong. What for did she want a ridiculous wedding wasting a lot of money in times of scarcity, serving an absurd amount of plates of which most were left over, a huge pigeon pie that was the height of fowlness and vulgarity, and performing embarrassing shows? And the worst was the ritual of bedding. Sincerely, Sansa was sure that she would have a nervous breakdown if she had to be carried by a bunch of wicked and lustful men who would fondle and strip her in their way to the bedroom, while the women did the same with her husband. No, she would have never dreamt of such a horrible wedding. It was more like a nightmare.

She remembered how Tyrion had saved them from the damned bedding in their own wedding. During the terrible scene, in which Sansa had been about to faint when Tyrion provoked Joffrey's wrath when he threatened the king with the knife, she was sure, for a terrifying instant, that she was going to be widowed as soon as Joffrey commanded his foul-mouthed uncle to be executed, and that immediately after that her own head would follow his. But Tywin intervened and her drunk but not stupid husband barely mended the situation and in the end he got away with it. There was no bedding and she and Tyrion at least kept the scant dignity they had left. If they had left any dignity in that damned snake pit.

She worshipped the heart tree rite. The calm in the godswood, without priests, with barely a handful of attendants, the ancient sentences of mutual devotion and the trees whispering with their quiet millenary wisdom. If one listened carefully, it seemed that they spoke in murmurs with the ancestors' voices. Later, a warm and relaxed family meal, without intrigues or stabs in the back.

"You want me to help you with your dress, Leena? I can make you the gown you wish," offered Sansa.

"Really? You'd do it for me?" Leena was beside herself with joy.

"Of course, Leena. It'd be a great honour for me. I'd like very much that you wear a gorgeous gown, as you deserve. You have to describe to me how you want it to be."

Both girls immersed themselves in the conversation about the nuptial attire and their men looked at each other with an expression resignedly amused. The girls would have a long way to go.

"They love talking about clothes. It has always amazed me that someone can speak so much about simple pieces of fabric," said Tyrion.

"That topic is a mystery for me," confessed Pod. "I understand lots more about fights and battles."

"And I prefer my books of accounts," stated Tyrion.
Both of them laughed conspiratorially.

(Part of a longer chapter)
Chapter 66

Meereen: Day 5

They got inside the temple and positioned in their places behind the queen, who was standing in front of the shrouded corpses that laid down directly on the floor. The Green Grace officiated in the central altar. The sentinels made a close circle around the altar, separating the royal retinue from the rest of attendants. The noble representatives had just joined the entourage. The temple was crowded to its last corner and those who had not any room left for them stayed outdoors.

The High Priestess raised her arms and silence fell. She was an old woman with impressive emerald-green eyes, who must have been a beauty in her youth. She covered her grey hair with her green silk veil, nearly the same tone of her eyes, and her tunic framed a still slender body.

Her voice was clear and steady, without the typical trembling of age. She uttered the long speech in High Valyrian, so Sansa and Pod did not understand a single word, but they did not need to. All funeral speeches were alike. Death equalized everyone. Valar morghulis.

Once the ceremony was ended, the freedpeople's bodies were carried on relatives' shoulders, and the Unsullied's body on two of his mates' shoulders, and the whole procession headed for an area in the outskirts of Meereen, where the ground was consecrated by the priestesses to take the dead in, from where their souls would depart to the divine abodes.

Tyrion watched the tense expression of the relatives and friends of the murdered freedpeople, and he understood that they were restraining barely their thirst for revenge. If the attacks against freedpeople persisted, it would be an enormous challenge to try to contain people's rage, and Tyrion doubted that even the queen would be able to soothe it.

Daenerys that morning had received in audience the dead's relatives and she had promised them

she would stop the murders. And that she would do what was in her hands to find the responsible people and bring them to justice.

A very complicated mission, thought Tyrion, skeptical. But at least the queen was not lying regarding that she would do what was in her power. He knew Daenerys hardly had slept that morning, if she had slept at all. Her healthy aspect of an eighteen-year-old youngster could deceive anyone who did not know her, but Tyrion noticed that she needed at least a night of proper rest.

Meereen was consuming her energies and that had just begun.

At dusk, Tyrion left Sansa in Pod's and Leena's company and went to the meeting with the noble representatives. They were fifteen, one for each family of the pyramids. The Pahl clan presented a woman, as all Pahl Great Masters had died in war.

The queen was sitting on her raised bench in the audience hall and she gazed at the candidates with her mask of composure. Ser Barristan and Grey Worm stood guard on her sides, Missandei was sitting at her right, Tyrion at her left and Kerro at Tyrion's left. Daario Naharis intercepted the access at the bottom of the staircase, and some Unsullied and Second Sons were scattered around the hall.

They were ushered into the hall one by one and Daenerys asked all sorts of questions and listened
carefully to their answers. Every time a candidate finished his or her intervention and went out, Daenerys consulted her counselors and these expressed their opinions. Tyrion at the moment had not been acceptably impressed by anyone. Some of them were sumptuously hypocritical, others had a thirst for blood that, as much as they tried to pretend, Tyrion had caught instantly. Especially the Pahl woman was full of bitterness, though she made the effort to say fake praising words to the queen. She looked like the Harpy herself, thought Tyrion, sarcastic.

When it was Hizdahr zo Loraq's turn, he narrated sadly that his father had opposed to kill the hundred and sixty-three slave children with whom the Great Masters had tried to dissuade the Breaker of Chains, placing their little bodies with an arm pointing to the city. A dead child for every mile between Yunkai and Meereen. Daenerys's punishment had been terrible: she ordered the crucifixion of one hundred and sixty three Great Masters. One of them was the Loraq patriarch, Hizdhar's father, despite the man was contrary to the children's slaughter. Or that was what his son asserted. In truth his tone did not sound fake like everyone else's and he expressed himself surprisingly well. He said that he was mourning his father and understood that wars inevitably charged a high price, but he admitted that his father, though had been a good master and was innocent of the atrocity committed to the little slaves, in the past had slaves in his possession, as everyone else in Meereen. He did not mistreat them and they almost were some more members of the family. But if it was time to pay for slavery, Hizdhar would accept his punishment and he expected to serve faithfully to the Mother of Dragons from then on.

Tyrion had to admit that the man spoke very well and did not bother Daenerys with hypocritical flattery, but neither showed himself excessively obsequious or fervent for the honour of the queen's royal magnanimity. Moreover, he was a man in his summit, around thirty years old, tall and attractive, in the Ghiscari way of curly black hair, dark almond-shaped eyes and bronze-coloured skin.

After him the rest of candidates were shaded. Those who entered last had not much to contribute. Tyrion knew right away who would be chosen by the queen. There was no need to be very quick-witted. Hizdhar, at least apparently, was with no doubt the most suitable candidate.

She and her six counselors deliberated and debated pros and cons. Finally, for no one's surprise, the Loraq nobleman was the chosen candidate and he was told the news. The rest of the candidates were strongly thanked for their involvement and Daenerys promised to keep a cordial contact with them. She took advantage of the chance of having all them together to drop the announcement of the guests she would admit in the Great Pyramid, and she guaranteed them that she would take care of the children as if they were her own sons and daughters. By the way, she insinuated that the city would enjoy a healthy peace if the Sons of the Harpy were dismantled and she was confident that everyone would cooperate as good citizens.

A very cunning ploy, thought Tyrion. From now on they'll think more carefully before supporting the Sons of the Harpy. Daenerys'll have their sons, daughters, nephews, nieces and grandchildren as hostages. Although she's not going to kill or hurt them, the Masters ignore what she can be capable of. As I once told Sansa, death is too drastic, but fear of death can keep people at bay.

After midnight, Tyrion went back beside Sansa and acquainted her. They ate their cold dinner, because when he arrived late Sansa awaited to have dinner together, though he had pleaded with her not to do it, but she, stubborn, insisted on accompanying him at dinner, were it when it were.

"Let's hope something can be achieved with all this, and that Loraq doesn't reveal himself as a vermin in sheep's clothing," wished Sansa.

"This is the game of thrones, Sansa," said him. "And I'm ready to play it well."
Chapter 67

Meereen: Day 5 – 6

When they got into bed they were too tired and fell asleep directly, but in the early hours of the morning he awoke aroused. His manhood was hard and throbbing and, as he was not so rude as to awake Sansa in the middle of the night to give him pleasure, he started to pleasure himself, as he did in his first weeks living with Sansa. He had not felt compelled to do it in a long time, but his need was strong and he did not want to bother her. While he was doing it, Sansa undoubtedly sensed it in her sleep and she woke up. She gazed at him, with wide eyes, and he went on touching himself and looked at her with hungry and wishful eyes.

"My lord wants to play?" She crawled to him over the bed, provocatively, with a cat-like look and her breasts insinuating themselves under the neckline of her nightgown.

"Your lord always wants to play."

He could not tear his eyes from that vision she was. He shivered in advance.

"Go on touching yourself. I want to see how you do it," commanded her.

"With all my pleasure. I'm all yours," obeyed him with his lecherous grin and the look that stripped her.

He was masturbating slowly, as he liked to do it, delaying his climax as much as he could. He kept his eyes on Sansa, and she watched his hand moving along his manhood. She then caressed his thigh and he moaned.

"What would you like me to do just now?" asked her, wicked.

"Go on caressing me. A little upwards," requested him.

She slid her hand up his thigh until grazing the basement of his manhood with her fingers.

"That way, darling. Touch me there."

"Anything else?"

"Kiss me."

Sansa bent and kissed him on the mouth, introducing her tongue, which he received avidly with his. He glided his other hand through her hair and they continued to kiss with their open mouths, moaning. She replaced his hand with hers around his manhood and moved it up and down, squeezing that soft, hot and hard delicacy that was pulsing under her hand. He gave in to her initiative, sneaked his hands under the neckline of her nightgown and grabbed her breasts. Sansa moved away from his mouth and licked him from his neck down, while he took her head with both hands, with his fingers through the soft red hair. She descended more and more and he held his breath when she kissed his wet tip and afterwards she licked all his length with her tongue.

"Yes, darling. You're doing very well," panted him.

She smiled at him and went on playing with his manhood, driving him crazy.
"What do you want me to do? Tell me," ordered her.

"Suck it. Till the end."

"Your wish is my command, my lord."

He thought he could die of pure delight when he felt his manhood inside of Sansa's mouth.

"Oh, Sansa. Go on. You do it so well. You're my sex goddess," encouraged him, rapturous, with the wild pleasure reflecting on his transfigured face.

"That sounds good. You like it this way?" And she introduced his manhood more.

"Yes! I love it."

Sansa sped up a little.

"Ah! That's it. Do it like this. Don't stop."

He held her head with both hands and she caressed him everywhere with hers.

"You're amazing, Sansa. You know? I love you."

She accelerated again. He could not hold on any longer. He was invaded by the tension previous to his climax, which exploded suddenly throughout his body.

"Yes, Sansa!", shouted him, and he spilled himself completely into her mouth, moaning her name with every discharge.

She did not stop until she cleaned him.

She laid beside him, smiling, and he was looking at her as if she really was a sex goddess who had went down to take him to her abodes of perpetual pleasure.

"I love you too, Tyrion."

They kissed again.

"Do you know how you make me feel, Sansa? Do you have even the slightest idea?," said him, moved, taking her face in his hands with shivering devotion.

"I know how you make me feel. And you make me feel much happier than must be allowed," confessed her, smiling.

"Then it's the same I feel," confirmed him, smiling as well. "And now... It's your turn. Tell me what you want me to do," offered him, with that hoarse and intimate tone which got her wet.

"Suck my nipples and don't stop until I ask you to suck something else."

Tyrion reacted again and was growing hard by minutes.

(Part of a longer chapter)
Chapter 68

Meereen: Day 5 – 6

"As my lady commands." He undressed her completely and, with her laying down on the mattress, he employed his tongue on the rosy and sensitive nipples, traced circles, bit them softly, sucked and caressed with his fingers. She grasped strands of his hair, as she always liked to do, to hold his head upon her. She threw her head back and arched her body to get as near him as she could, and moaned every time the voracious tongue caused her a wave of pleasure which went down from her overstimulated breast to her lower belly.

"Oh, Tyrion," moaned her.

"Tell me what you want, Sansa," murmured him on her skin.

"I want your mouth between my legs. I want you to devour all of me. I want you to make me cry out your name," declared her without hesitation.

"I'll be glad to do it. I haven't devoured anything so tasty in all my life." He knew she felt excited feeling the vibration of his deep voice on her delicate nipple.

"Do it to me, my love. I'm dying for you."

"Right away, darling," conceded him, leaving a trail of kisses over her belly, her pubis and finally...

"Yes, Tyrion! Do it slowly. Very slowly. That's it. Don't make me finish very soon," pleaded her.

He did it as she wanted. Very slowly. So slowly that it was an agony. He enjoyed that hot delicacy and avoided to stimulate her clit directly.

"Do you want anything else, Sansa?," asked him against her soaked folds, looking her in the eye. Her expression inflamed him.

"Go on. Yes, Tyrion. It's wonderful. How can it be so wonderful?" She was rocking her hips and he held them.

"Sex with you is the best of life, Sansa. You're the most beautiful woman I've ever known. I'm crazy for you," said him on her wet flesh.

"Fuck me, Tyrion. Finish inside of me. I know you want to. I want you to," ordered her almost breathless.

"Oh, Sansa." His manhood was about to explode. He introduced it in her. She was so soaked it entered without the slightest effort. They moaned at the same time.

"I won't be able to last long, darling. I'm so aroused for you..."

"Make it very slowly. Yes, that way. Rub my clit. I love when you touch it."

He pushed as slowly as he could inside of her, but nevertheless he sensed that his explosion would come very soon.

"Sansa, I'm going to make you reach your pleasure. I feel that I'll peak in short and I want you to reach it in the first place. I enjoy it much more when I feel your pleasure before mine."
"Do it, Tyrion. Make me yell."

He stimulated her clit with his fingers, just as she liked it, while he went on pushing into her and filling her insides. She felt herself fly in full measure and the outbreak went across her.

"Tyrion!," she yelled desperately, pressing him against her, making him hers forever.

"That's it, darling. Give me it all," whispered him, quivering. He reached his own limit and the intense pleasure shook him wholly, turning over all his being and his overflowing heart.

"Oh, yes, Sansa! You're so hot." He remained laying down on her, too exhausted by the strength of his desire. And he wanted to stay that way forever.

"Tyrion... Do you think that many couples enjoy sex as much as we do? Do you believe that they make such pleasurable things?" asked her with interest, stroking his dishevelled and wet hair.

"I doubt that many of them have that choice, darling. Most married people don't love at each other and, to accomplish such degree of intimacy and complicity in sex, there must be trust at least, respect and a strong mutual attraction. They'll restrict themselves to copulate like dogs or horses to make children, but scant men worry about their women's pleasure. They fuck them to get their own pleasure, plant children in their bellies and that's the end of the matter."

"I've heard that the dothraki do it that way, taking the women they fancy and making it even in view of everyone, and they usually share them and lend them to other men."

"Daenerys won her khal in bed. She taught him that there are many other ways to obtain pleasure. And that it's loads better when oneself worries more for the partner's delight than for oneself's," explained him, with his head between her ample breasts.

"We're lucky, my love. For all this."

"Letho told me that I'm a lucky dwarf," joked him, resting his chin upon her diaphragm and his cheek on the curve of a breast.

"And I'm a lucky woman," said her, smiling.

"I suppose that we should try to sleep, shouldn't we? Tomorrow another busy day is awaiting us and unfortunately we can't have much more fun in bed, as it would be ideal. When I'm with you this way, you erase any other thing and I only see you. I forget about everything else," confessed him, touched.

"I also would want to be always this way, my love. Here you're all mine. Here I haven't to share you with anything or anyone."

"But there is a positive consequence of the fact that other things get us out of the bed, Sansa. And it's that when I come back to you I've missed you so that the restrained desire makes me fuck you with all my want in the moment in which I have you in my arms at last. What doesn't mean that I don't fuck you with the same eagerness at any moment," detailed him, amused.

"Do you feel aroused thinking about me when you're elsewhere, though you're busy with any task?"

"I'm aroused for you practically the entire day, Sansa. I hardly have a rest. You married a lustful beast, remember? My father called me that once. All right, the truth is that he called me drunken and lustful beast. At least I've stopped being a drunken beast," jested him, ironic. "But anyway, I
have a reputation to maintain," needled him, pinching a nipple softly.

She jerked up.

"Tyrion, if you do that we're not going to sleep at all," threatened her, smiling.

He pinched her once more, harder. "I suppose that if we make it quickly we'll be able to sleep a little afterwards," proposed him, raising a mischievous eyebrow.

"All right, my lustful beast. But if tomorrow you fall asleep in the corners don't blame me for all."

"Blame me all you want, darling," whispered him, hard again and half mad by her bare skin under his body.

In the morning, while they were eating breakfast, Tyrion brought the topic of Pod and Leena's wedding. He knew Sansa would like to talk about it.

"Our wedding was awful and you have to thank me for that mostly, I know, but due to that I want to make up for it. Would you like that one day we have a proper wedding?," asked him, taking her hand above the table.

"Do you refer to renew our vows?," inquired her, surprised.

"Yes, Sansa. You did not celebrate the wedding of your dreams, and I wish you get it." His green eyes were full of love for her. "Describe to me how do you want it to be," requested him.

"I thought you men hated weddings," replied Sansa, smiling.

"And I hate them. But not ours. The one we are going to celebrate and in which you'll be the happiest and most beautiful bride and I will be the luckiest groom in the world," said him with adoration. "Come on, describe it to me."

She squeezed his hand.

"I want it to be in the godswood of Winterfell, before the heart tree. I'll wear a simple white dress and there will be present our loved ones. We'll utter the ancient words of the First Men's rite and the sacred weirdwood, with its carved face, will be a witness of our match. My ancestors will whisper in the leaves of the trees and will bless us. Later, there will be a noisy feast with chatting, laughter and music, and at last we'll make love for the whole night."

"Ummm, it sounds great. I feel attracted specifically to the last part," insinuated Tyrion.

She threw at him a little piece of bread that hit him squarely on the nose.

"Excellent shot, darling," praised him, picking up the bit from the table and popping it into his mouth. "Remind me that I never teach you to throw knives."

She let out a cackle that found its lively echo in the clean air of the morning.
Meereen: Day 10

The queen conceded audiences to petitioners on three alternate days a week, since the first hour in the morning to lunchtime. Missandei stayed sitting to her right at all times, and the rest of counselors alternated due to their daily duties, from which they could not be separated for long. But Daenerys ensured that Ser Barristan, Grey Worm or Daario always were present, to count at least on one of her best warriors by her side. Tyrion was summoned at the very least to two of the three weekly audiences, and he dedicated the remaining mornings to his duties as general supervisor. Hizdhar zo Loraq also appeared in one or two sessions.

The petitioners were numerous and most of the troubles were due to disputes over ownership of possessions, complaints of former masters to whom their ex-slaves had despoiled during war, and shepherds who claimed that her black dragon, Drogon, had burnt some of their sheep to feed on.

But that day the queen was presented with a formidable dilemma that shook her to the deepest. It happened when the queue of petitioners had ended and only remained the last one.

He was a freedman from the brotherhood of shepherds who was carrying a bundle, which he placed at the foot of the stairs.

"Another burnt sheep?", asked Daenerys, resigned. But she became startled when she looked at the man's dark skinned face, covered with tears.

"My three-year-old daughter. Her name was Hazzea. The dragon came down and engulfed her in flames." He choked and hushed.

Tyrion was sitting to the queen's left and could see how horror hit her.

Drogon has become ungovernable and entirely wild. He's a bigger problem than we thought.

The shepherd unfurled the bundle on the floor and some small darkened bones were scattered. They looked, indeed, like a child's. The skull was human. Tyrion felt pity for the poor little girl who had found such a horrible death. He gathered that dying burnt alive was one of the worst torments.

Daenerys lost her voice for some seconds, watching as if hypnotized the pile of bones. Her mask of composure had shattered.

"I'm deeply sorry for your loss and you'll be compensated. I know nothing will return Hazzea to you, but I'll request the Graces to pray for her soul in the temple and every month you'll continue to receive the portion of food corresponding to the little child, which will be for the rest of your children. And if you need anything else that it's in my power to be conceded to you, don't hesitate to ask for it," offered Daenerys, saddened.

The unfortunate shepherd made a bow.

"I thank you, Mother." He collected the depressing bundle and left.

The queen stood, stretching discreetly her numb muscles after having been seated for six hours. Tyrion did the same. His legs were sore.
As they got out of the hall with Missandei and Grey Worm, Daenerys let loose the sorrow that was overwhelming her.

"I don't know what I'm going to do with Drogon. He grows up so fast that he needs to hunt plenty of meat. And the worst is that seemingly he doesn't distinguish between animal and human meat."

"It can be done nothing for now, Your Grace," expressed Tyrion with frankness. "Until you learn to control him, Drogon will wander at will and the complaints for lost beasts won't stop. What can be done is to recommend all the population of the camps and neighbouring villages to extreme vigilance and, if they see the dragon coming, seek a shelter quickly. And they must prevent the children from going far away and staying alone outdoors."

"That we'll do, Lord Tyrion. We can't prevent Drogon from flying anywhere he wants, but we can alert people. At least we'll be able to save human lives."

"That's the point, Your Grace," approved Tyrion.

"I need to consult you a matter privately," requested her. "Would you mind coming to my private hall? I won't steal you very much time."

"Of course, Your Grace."

Missandei went to the private hall with them. The discreet young woman was Daenerys's shadow.

"Missande already knows what's it about, but you weren't present. It's Hizdhar."

"Is he causing trouble, Your Grace?" Hizdhar had already appeared in one audience, to which Tyrion did not attend because it was not his turn.

"Not exactly, but he is placing me in a compromised situation. He has advised me to reopen the fighting arenas which I closed down just when I took possession of Meereen. He has explained to me that the fighting arenas are a very ancient tradition and if I reinstate them, the native population of Meereen could show themselves much more inclined to keep the peace treaty we have achieved since Hizdhar's appointment as royal counselor." She twirled her wine cup between her hands.

"You closed them to prevent the slave warriors' slaughters to go on being a public show," confirmed Tyrion.

"Yes. But Hizdhar says that from now on the warriors who will fight in the arena would be free men who choose to fight for gold and glory. He proposes to collect a reasonable price from the spectators who attend and moreover, the men who present themselves to fight would pay a little tax for the right to use the fighting pits. If they are victorious, their winnings will make up with profit to the money they have to pay for the tax."

This Hizdhar is clever. It's not a bad idea. The Crown coffers need incomes to be able to support the population during winter, thought Tyrion.

(Part of a longer chapter)
Chapter 70

Meereen: Day 10

"It's not bad thought, Your Grace. The fighting pits would mean a sizeable source of income for the Crown. No man would be forced to fight, but they would do it as a free choice. But still remains an important issue: it's a sanguinary show. Personally, attending to see men killing one another it's not an entertainment I'd choose for my leisure."

"Neither I. I have to think of it carefully but, as much as it displeases me, at bottom I'm aware that Hizdhar is right."

"What opinion do you have of him, Your Grace? The Sons of the Harpy haven't shown their presence since they killed your Unsullied soldier and the two freedpeople. But perhaps it's due to the security and caution measures that have been adopted throughout the city, which don't let the killers any chance to act again."

"I'm also pondering those questions, Lord Tyrion. It's soon to come to conclusions, but if I have something clear is that I don't trust Hizdhar, although I admit he's an intelligent man. Therefore he can be more dangerous and questionable. Who says he's not the leader, or one more among the Sons of the Harpy?"

"He could perfectly be. Or maybe not. We'll have to go on keeping a close eye on him. What about his movements? Is there any evidence of the places he uses to visit when he goes out of his house or of the Great Pyramid?"

"I have my spies. But they haven't detected anything particularly suspicious. Though these Meereenese surely have their methods to deceive us before our own noses. It hadn't been heard a single word about the Sons of the Harpy until they acted that night, and that taking into account that I possess my good sources of information scattered over there."

Tyrion tilted his head.

"Varys's little birds? Don't tell me he has lent some to you." Tyrion was a bit impressed, though not surprised, for the wide extension of the Spider's methods of infiltration.

Daenerys smiled.

"An excellent spy system, we must give him that credit. I could have owed to him being alive, as well as being dead. He seems to be the reason I was not killed in my craddle, and afterwards he kept the Usurper abreast of my movements. And now he's holding me out a hand again. But as I told you, he's greatly useful for me."

"He'll help you as long as you continue to be the most suitable candidate to the Iron Throne," said Tyrion.

"I have the full intention to keep being, Lord Tyrion," affirmed her, with her determined smile. "We'll reflect on the question of the fighting arenas. I must give Hizdhar an answer in the next Council meeting and I want to ponder it in detail."

"I'll think of it carefully, Your Grace."

"Thank you, Lord Tyrion. Now retire. Give Lady Sansa my regards and tell her that one of these
days I'd like her to pay me a visit. And she could bring Leena too. Simply to chat and hang out. Sometimes even the queens need their moments of recreation,” said her, smiling with tiredness.

"You're made of flesh and blood. You must look for some moments of rest and entertainment, or ruling will consume you," recommended him.

"Thanks for your concern for my health, Lord Tyrion. You're right. After all, I'm only eighteen. I have to live a little, though it only can be in rare short whiles."

"A correct decision. You'll be young no more, I assure you. And the passing of the years usually is not very grateful, Your Grace."

He made a bow and went to his chambers to have lunch with Sansa.

"Poor thing," pitied Sansa when Tyrion related to her about the death of the shepherd's little daughter, Hazzea. "The queen must have felt terribly guilty."

"Imagine that. But we can't do more for now. Only keeping alerted the surrounding settlements, so they can search for a refuge if they see Drogon flying over them."

"Do you think he's growing so big and fierce because he's in freedom?," asked her, interested.

"Drogon always has been the biggest and fiercest of the three of them. But the fact of remaining free is contributing to his growth and to turn him more ungovernable. The only solution is that Daenerys remembers progressively the words of control."

"And if she can't remember them?"

"I'm sure she will, in due course. In some moments of crisis, she has recalled words that have made her dragons react and which have rescued her from extreme situations. Perhaps that's what helps her to remember, extreme situations."

"Then, it has to happen something bad so her memory improves?," worried Sansa.

"I have the impression it's that, but maybe I'm wrong. Perhaps she recalls them when least expected, who knows," said Tyrion to soothe her. "The blood of ancient Valyria is almost extinguished and being the last Targaryen is a formidable challenge. But she's stronger than she looks. Let's have a little faith."

"You're right. She's not an ordinary queen."

"She bears too much upon her shoulders. I've recommended her to look for moments of leisure, because if she persists on that rhythm she'll consume. A young woman like her must enjoy life as well. She'd like to spend time with you and Leena. Missandei has been her only girl friend, and it'll suit her to have some more. Do you think it's all right, Sansa?"

"Of course I do, Tyrion. I'm glad to contribute to make her life more bearable."

He kissed her hand.

"She's going to count on the best company," praised him, smiling to her proudly.

Sansa returned the compliment. "She's already counting on the best company."

They looked at each other with tenderness.
"Ah, Sansa, I almost forgot. Whenever you look at me that way my head gets blank." He smiled to her, naughty. "Daenerys is pondering to open again the fighting arenas of Meereen. Before the slaves' liberation, in the fighting pits fought slave warriors for the amusement of the Meereenese citizens, and the queen forbid it when she conquered the city. But now Hizdhar zo Loraq has made a suggestion that must not be dismissed beforehand. He proposes to reopen the pits with combats of free warriors who fight voluntarily, collecting from the spectators a cheap price for their attendance and also a little tax from whom use the pits for trainings and combats. That would mean income for the Crown and entertainment for the people. The problem, obviously, is that it's a bloody show. What do you think of all this, darling?"

It flattered her that he involved her in all the decisions and that he consulted her the matters of the Council he was authorized to share with her. Which by then were all of them, because Daenerys allowed him to consult to his wife the discussed matters, as long as she also swore to respect confidentiality strictly, what of course Sansa fulfilled at all costs. What she and her husband debated in their rooms, stayed there.

"I detest the mere existence of those fighting pits," stated Sansa roundly. "But if the queen thinks they can be the lesser of several evils, and something necessary, then I don't see why she shouldn't consent their reopening. As long as the men are ready to fight and die on their own initiative and not by masters who force them, everyone is free to choose. They choose to face death for money and fame, and people choose if they want to attend to watch it."

"Exactly, Sansa. You've summed it up perfectly." Tyrion caressed her hand.

"If we have to be beside the queen enduring those performances, be it. I'll hate them, but there will be no other choice that putting up with it," resigned Sansa, with a sigh.

"You're very brave, darling. I'll also hate them. Enjoying oneself by watching different methods of torture was Joffrey's favourite pastime, not mine. It's already spilled enough blood in the world and I'd rather avoiding it in my leisure. There are other hobbies which I fancy infinitely more," said him, suggestive, sliding his fingers over Sansa's arm.

She stared at those loved fingers that always touched her with absolute skill, feeling suddenly wet.

"Me too, my love," said her, with the familiar tingle in her stomach and the heat in her lower belly. "Let's go to bed. We still have time to enjoy a little more our favourite pastime."

He took her hand and let her guide him to his preferred place.

Her body.
They were lying in their favourite posture, with Tyrion facing up and she sideways next to his left side, her head resting on his shoulder and an arm on his chest. He was stroking her back.

Most afternoons, Tyrion had paperwork to do, as the registers, the inventories and the accounting must be brought up to date and it was a labourious work. But that afternoon he had nothing to do, because the previous day he had left everything done and, as that morning he had attended the queen's audience and did not make his usual visits to the city and the camps, he had no new pieces of information to order and file. So he enjoyed with Sansa under the sheets, which was what he most loved to do in his life.

After enjoying the wonderful and inexhaustible sex with her, what he liked most were those moments when, satisfied and relaxed, they shared all sorts of confidences, memories and anecdotes and bared their souls before the other. They normally talked about trivial topics and laughed together, but other times they gave vent to their wounds, or brought to light important themes related to Daenerys and the difficulties of her reign. Tyrion listened to Sansa's opinions because he was deeply interested in them, and moreover they helped him to know her better and, on the other hand, she could come up with something he had overlooked.

"Do you want to know what Margaery said to me after you went to notify me that I had to marry you?," she was telling to him in that occasion. "I was so excited regarding Ser Loras, imagining my splendid wedding in Highgarden, and suddenly I had to land once more on the crude reality."

"I'm very sorry for the enormous disappointment I caused to you, Sansa. I know that in those times didn't exist for you any possible comparison between the handsome Knight of Flowers and me," recalled him, with his ironic smile. "But I decided it would be better that it was me who broke the news, because I wanted to be honest with you from the beginning."

"I admit it was the last straw of my disappointments. In that moment I didn't value your gesture of honesty, but I did, later, when I started to truly respect you."

"Well, darling... What did Margaery say to you?," asked him, stirred by the curiosity towards what the cunning Tyrell woman had told Sansa in regard to him.

"We were strolling across the gardens of the Red Keep and I was devastated. She was trying to cheer me up and talked very highly of you. She told me that you could surprise me, because you were very experienced and that would be an advantage for me, as women are complicated and difficult to please. Therefore, most women die or turn old without having hardly tasted the pleasures. Because they never find the chance or the proper person. I, who scarcely had a blurred idea of which she referred to, I could not imagine myself sharing intimacy with you, and much less enjoying it... I was so naïve... All in all, she listed the benefits of having you as my husband, among which were your experience with women, your attempts to be honest and kind and that our children would be lords and ladies of Casterly Rock and Winterfell. And she added that she found you particularly handsome, especially with your scar," confessed her, smiling.

"Margaery is pure ambition. All she does is aimed to make her the queen of Westeros, and she's a skilled manipulator. She handled Joffrey at will. She also manipulated you. She made it softly, with her sweet smiles and her friendly words, but almost all she does has a definite goal. However, I don't doubt that she harboured sincere feelings for you; she's not a monster, and she had to be
made of stone or be a bitch like my sister to not esteeming you. Margaery's not made of stone, but neither was she the great friend she made you believe she was. In spite of all, I agree with what she told you about me," conceded him, cocky. "And I'm glad she exposed my qualities before you. It was a good gesture on her part and, as it seems, generous, taking into account that the Tyrells were being deprived of the North."

"She was aware that I wasn't to blame. And she showed solidarity to me. She said that women like us, who can't choose, have to take advantage of the best of our circumstances."

"And have you done it, darling?," asked him, with his wicked expression. "Have you taken advantage of your circumstances?"

"I think I have a lot more to take advantage of," replied her, caressing his belly sensually. "I'm not finished with you yet," murmured her upon his lips and his grown beard, which tickled her.

"Then use me as much as you fancy, darling. I'm all yours." Tyrion introduced his fingers in her hair and drew her to his insatiable mouth, in the middle of the throbbing of the desire that sank the whole world around them.

(Part of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 10

They took a bath together, soaped to each other and enjoyed the pleasure of the shared bath. When they finished, he dried and disentangled Sansa's hair with his exquisite patience. It was a ritual they had adopted after bathing. She worshipped feeling his warm hands on her scalp and her hair, and he enjoyed caressing the silky locks and making them shine. He was proud of that light copper-coloured mane, so characteristic of the Tullys of Riverrun. Catelyn, Sansa's mother, had displayed equally magnificent hair, a little darker than her daughter's, but also very flamboyant. In regard to Lysa Arryn, Catelyn's deranged sister, she had beautiful hair as well, but that was the only beautiful feature that was left in her.

The entire afternoons for them alone were a genuine gift and in those occasions they barely went out of their chambers. Anyway, where could they go? Tyrion did not want to risk exposing Sansa too much outdoors. He had promised her he would take her with him in some of the times he did his route of work, but that was before the Sons of the Harpy perpetrated the attack, and Tyrion was absolutely certain that the secret organization had not stopped stalking. So he did not dare to go out with her beyond the access door of the Great Pyramid. They sometimes paid visits to Pod and Leena, and Daenerys allowed them access to the gardens which were on the floor where her private rooms were as well. Sansa liked strolling through them, breathing the fresh air and watching the goldfish in the pool.

But Tyrion knew she would like to accompany him some morning when he went to consult Kerro, Sarik, Koleos and the others, and she felt curious about the camps. He would have to give her that satisfaction, and when he did it, he would reinforce security. He would request the queen to let him take another couple of Unsullied and he would make sure they would go in the hour of more hustle.

When, after the bath, Mhyraz brought dinner, Tyrion requested him to stay a little longer with them.

"How are going the lessons of common language?," asked him. Sansa had started to give them to the orphans in the mornings, with the help of Mhyraz and Dara.

"They are going very well, master. All my friends like to learn the Mother's language."

"I'm sure of that, Mhyraz. And Lady Sansa is a good teacher, isn't she?" Them both looked at her and she blushed.

"Oh, yes, master. We all love her. The mistress treats us very well and always says nice things to us."

"You're very lucky," assured Tyrion, blinking an eye to the boy. "I wish I had such a beautiful and good teacher." He shot Sansa a brief wicked glimpse. "Do you know that new children will come to live in the Great Pyramid?"

"But they are not orphans like us. They come from the rich families of Meereen," objected the boy, with a frown. "Why are they going to live here if they already have their own houses?"

"Because the Mother wants to educate them as she's doing with you," clarified Tyrion, understanding Mhyraz's mistrust. The kid feared that he and his orphan friends would be displaced.
Children used to have a rigid sense of justice and possessive and territorial jealousy. "She wants that tomorrow they are good citizens of Meereen who don't permit the existence of slavery." And he added: "Don't worry, Mhyraz. You'll remain the same as always. No one is going to steal your place."

The boy seemed to calm down with those conciliatory words.

"You can go. As always, thank you very much for your excellent services. Good night."

"Good night, master and mistress." He made a bow and went away, carrying the dinner utensils on the tray.

They got ready for bed and Tyrion, as every night, enjoyed himself looking at Sansa stealthily while she changed clothes.

"Do you know something about captain Gilean, Tyrion?" Sansa suddenly remembered that his small fleet had set sail several days ago to Bhorash and Tolos.

"It's soon, but when he steps on land in Bhorash he'll send a message by raven. Let's trust that the journey is going serenely.

"Let's hope it. The prosperity of Meereen will depend on him mostly. And regarding that, the Dornish ships must not take long to arrive, don't they?"

"The last raven which arrived a week ago, sent by the captain of the Dornish fleet, came from the Stone Steps. They should be circling Valyria, maybe they have nearly left it behind if there hasn't happened any incident," estimated Tyrion.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 10

They got under the covers and placed on their favourite posture.

"Who will be the envoy who will hold the post in the Council? The captain of the fleet?"

"Yes," affirmed Tyrion. "Doran has confirmed it. He trusts fully captain Byron."

"But if he has to manage the patrol fleet, when will he have time to attend the meetings?"

"He'll delegate in his subordinate captains and he'll supervise from land."

Sansa kept quiet for some moments and after that, she asked: "You know anything about Myrcella?"

Tyrion smiled tenderly, remembering his charming niece, only resembling her mother in her appearance. He himself had settled her wedding to Trystane Martell and the poor girl had wept out of distress the day of her departure to Dorne. That was the same day of the riot in King's Landing which was in the very verge of costing Sansa a multiple rape and probably death.

"She's doing perfectly well. It seems that she's happy. Trystane and her are madly in love."

"Oh, I'm so glad, Tyrion. Myrcella is not in the slightest like Cersei. I liked her."

"She's a good girl, as Tommen. They are not intended to palace intrigues. I love them very much. They are among the few members of my consanguineous family, along with Jaime and few more, whom I love."

"You must miss them a lot. Especially your brother," said Sansa with her hand resting on his chest.

"Yes. A lot." His eyes were fixed on some distant point, beyond the ceiling. "Have I told you any time that once Jaime and I put horse crap in the stable-boys' shoes?"

"What a pair of scoundrels you were," scolded her, unable to remain serious.

"They spent several weeks smelling worse than the stables, until they got new shoes. But what we did in the kitchens was even better," added Tyrion, smiling to the memory of his childhood mischiefs.

"I don't want to hear it," protested Sansa, covering her ears.

"We placed a sack of flour upon the ajar door of the kitchens, and when one of the wenches opened it, all the contents fell onto her and the air filled with a white dust. Our father spat out one of his frightening speeches about the honour of our surname and punished us to carry the buckets of water from the well to the kitchens for a whole week. I can assure you that those buckets were almost as big as I am."

"You deserved it," blurted out Sansa, tugging his beard. "And you deserved even more. Poor servants."

"But the servants weren't the only target of my pranks. My sister was another as well, nearly as often, so you see, I didn't differentiate," clarified him, sardonic. "Even though sometimes I went to
Sansa stopped smiling and remained silent, and Tyrion imagined that what she must be thinking would not be easy to tackle. If was that what was crossing her mind.

*She probably discovered in King's Landing that, as everyone knows, my twin brother and sister are lovers. It's not something very pleasant to talk about.*

He noticed that Sansa wanted to ask something, but she did not dare. He decided that, if it was a topic they had to cope with any time, it was better to do it squarely. His family was a source of uneasiness and he did not want to cause her any discomfort, but if she asked, he would not avoid the answers.

"Come on, darling. What do you want to ask me?," encouraged him. "Nothing you ask will annoy me, really."

She moistened her lips with her tongue and Tyrion immediately felt his muscles getting tense and his manhood throbbing for eagerness to bury inside of her. *Everything she does makes me hard, even her little unaware gestures.* He held back, knowing that she was distracted with other thoughts.

"Tyrion... It's true that... Your brother and sister...?" She was not capable of ending the sentence. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't ask it. It's not my business," she reproached to herself. "Don't answer if you don't want to."

"It's all right, Sansa. You can ask whatever you want, I've told you that. Things are the way they are and keeping them shut up doesn't change them." He caressed her back. "Yes, Sansa. It's true."

She processed the information with difficulty.

"And your nephews and niece are...?"

"Bastards, yes. Lannisters through and through."

Her eyes widened, but she quickly compelled herself to recover her composure.

"After all, Daenerys too is brother and sister's daughter, as the majority of Targaryens. I imagine that if the dragon kings and queens believed they had the right to skip ethic laws, my brother and sister believed they had the same right," explained Tyrion.

"It's only that..." She hesitated. "It' very shocking for me that a brother and a sister... desire at each other."

"There can be seen very strange things in the world, darling. We lost our mother very early and Tywin wasn't the most affectionate and close of fathers. Perhaps that doesn't justify it, but we didn't grow up in a home like yours, Sansa. Mine wasn't a happy family."

She looked at him with a sudden guilt reflected on her pupils, afraid of having talked too much. "I'm so sorry, my love. I didn't have the intention to... criticize."

He took her face in his hands.

"Don't apologize for anything, Sansa. It's natural you wonder about those things. I'm still amazed that I've kept sane having been raised in Casterly Rock with Tywin and Cersei," he said with his teasing tone, trying to downplay the issue.
"And I'm amazed of how I can be so infatuated with you, Tyrion Lannister," insinuated her by his ear.

_Gods. This girl is my perdition._

"Did I tell you that I am the most irresistible of the family? Jaime is the handsome one, but it's me who has won the heart of the most beautiful girl in the Seven Kingdoms," needled him.

"Really? And what makes you so sure?"

"The fact that I have her in my arms in these precise moments. And in a few minutes she's going to cry out my name."

She burst out laughing, blushing with desire, while his alluring hands were running over her ardent skin.
Chapter 74

Meereen: Day 11

The next morning, Tyrion was going to the city and the camps and asked Sansa if she fancied accompanying him. She nodded.

"I want to see how you work and the people you're dealing with. I'm interested in everything you do, my love," said her, while they were having breakfast.

He decided to tease her a little, amused. "That's because you're so young and you're crazy for me. Let's see in twenty years," predicted him, mocking.

"Oh, you fool. I'll love you even though you become an old grouch who enjoys needling his poor wife."

"I'll be a lucky old man," said him, with a wide grin.

"Yes, a very lucky one," corroborated her.

He left the humorous tone.

"Much luckier than I deserve," asserted him with absolute sincerity, taking her hand.

"Oh, Tyrion." Her big blue eyes won him over. "I love you."

"And I love you too, darling."

After some seconds, they broke their intense eye contact and focused again on breakfast.

"Who are you going to visit today?"

"The usual. Kerro and Koleos, to check the development of the works and the procedures for the school, and Sarik to acquaint me about the daily production of the brotherhoods and the progress of the market. All that will take a long while, as I have to note pieces and pieces of information, a task quite boring but essential. Afterwards I have the intention to visit the camps and give my greetings to Jorah and, by the way, to Daario and Grey Worm, if they are over there and not very busy, what is quite unlikely regarding Grey Worm." And he added, with a confidential tone: "Ultimately Daario spends a lot of time in the pyramid." He was hinting at what them both were imagining undoubtedly.

"You think the queen and he are...?" She left in the air the rest of the sentence.

"Yes. They're lovers," ended him. "We saw it coming."

"But they can't wed," objected her.

"And they know it. Marriage doesn't suit their plans."

"Then, they do that simply for pleasure?"

"I reckon that's the goal, yes. I believe that at least Daenerys feels something quite strong for him, and as to the sellsword's true intentions, he's not precisely very subtle with his methods and only a fool would refuse the tasty fruit that is falling into his mouth. It's very clear that he's not a fool."
"But, if she's with him... Will she consent to wed another if she has to?"

"She'll surely do it, Sansa. And Daario'll have to acquiesce to it."

"It would be quite a... bizarre situation, wouldn't it?"

"Nothing that involves kings or queens is boring, of course," concluded him, smiling.

"I hope he doesn't break her heart. Given what you've told me, she might be in love."

"Their romance can't have a happy ending. She'll suffer," anticipated Tyrion, convinced of that. "As to him, if he comes to love her, I neither envy him."

They finished breakfast and Mhyraz returned a short while later to collect the things.

"Mhyraz, send a request to the queen that if she is so kind to assign me two more Unsullied today to escort us, because Lady Sansa is going to accompany me, and I suppose that Leena will go with Pod as well."

"Right now, master." The boy departed.

Dara was combing Sansa's hair. She had made for herself a pair of warmer dresses. Tyrion missed the others, more low-cut, which Daenerys had given to her. But the temperature was dropping and the summer clothes would be kept away in a wardrobe, the gods knew for how many years.

He put on clothes made of a thicker fabric as well and fixed his long blond hair and his blond beard, which he had not trimmed in weeks. Sansa liked them that way and he, before all else, did his utmost to please her.

When they were ready, Tyrion, as every morning, said to her the same compliment that, it did not matter how many times he said it, it was always sincere.

"You're very beautiful, Sansa."

She bent and kissed him, as always.

"Thank you, my love. You too are the most attractive of men for me."

He had come to believe it by hearing it every day and confirming in her eyes that she did not lie to him.

Mhyraz got back announcing that the Mother had sent them the two requested Unsullied. They found the four soldiers awaiting at the door. They went to fetch Pod and Leena and left the Great Pyramid to another sunny and busy morning on the streets of Meereen. The girls were chatting cheerfully and Tyrion and Pod walked behind them. Two soldiers marched before all of them, and the other two walked behind the men. Tyrion told to himself that, after all, that had been a good idea. Sansa needed to go out a little from her enclosure.

(Part of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 11

It had been a good decision that Leena was up for the trip, because that way Sansa would have someone with whom entertaining if she got bored while Tyrion talked with the freedmen and wrote down his unintelligible scribbles. He and Pod introduced their women and everyone looked at them, impressed.

_They're wondering where a dwarf and a shy boy have found these beauties_, noticed Tyrion, swelling with pride and amusement due to the envy those men could not hide.

The girls greeted them with all their courtesy and the men suddenly only seemed able to stammer. Tyrion and Pod watched those scenes, smiling, and looked at each other as if saying: _Those are our girls. At this rate the men will slobber onto the paving stones._

Both of the girls showed themselves interested for the exchange of information, at least much more than Tyrion had expected on such young women who barely had stepped on the streets. But Sansa truly cared about his work. Another reason, among the high amount of them, for which he was grateful to her. He looked at her full of pride.

After several hours of transactions, in which the girls kept their composes better than fine, Tyrion announced that they would go to the camps and Sansa and Leena showed enthusiastic. Both girls wanted to explore them.

They went across the city heading for the fields.

"Leena is very happy, Pod," praised his master. The girls were walking in the lead and chatted incessantly. Leena had become much more talkative.

"I don't wish anything else, my lord," said him, modest.

"Well, you've achieved it. That girl has transformed herself and she idolizes you."

"As Lady Sansa with you. I remember how unhappy she was in King's Landing, and now she's always smiling."

"Leena too. By the way, she must read very well at this point. Sansa and she have went on with their lessons and Leena is very smart."

"She already reads nearly better than me, my lord," admitted Pod, proud. "And she can write simple phrases as well."

"I'm very glad for you both. What about the children's training?"

"They make progress day after day. Some of them might be great warriors. Anyway, Ser Barristan thinks that all of them should serve as apprentices in the brotherhoods until they really decide which job they want to go in for, so everyone will choose a brotherhood and they'll start very soon to practise in them."

"It's a good system. The kids get ready for war and at the same time they learn another profession that they choose. That way they'll be much more motivated, whatever they do. How many people can choose their profession?" Tyrion let go his train of thought. "There won't ever be again soldiers
like the Unsullied, but they have paid a too much high price in exchange for forming part of the world's military elite, something which, on the other hand, they didn't choose. It's strange, but I suppose that most of them prefer their current situation, though they lack their male attributes and true names. Many have kept the names of vermins and bugs that had been assigned to them the day in which they were freed by the queen. Grey Worm explained that they did it in order to remember that day when they chose to be the best soldiers in the world for the Breaker of Chains. Genuine loyalty obtains much more than fear. That's something my father never got to understand, and neither my sister. You're an example of it. You're the best squire anyone can count on, and all out of loyalty. You know that any moment you're free to quit serving to me."

Pod smiled. "And letting you manage without me?"

Tyrion returned the smile. "You are very right, Pod. What would I do without you?"

The girls looked impressed at the enormous camps that spread over where the view could cover, on the riverbanks of the Skahazadhan. The different sections could be clearly distinguished: the Unsullied's, the Second Sons' and the dothraki's and freedfolk's.

"There are more than fifteen thousand people here," explained Tyrion. "One of the queen's great challenges is to house all the freedfolk inside the city. With the planning we are developing, I think we'll fulfill it."

Sansa got near him and took his hand. Grey Worm was, as usual, in the training fields and Tyrion decided not to interrupt him, as he had not anything really important to talk with him. Daario also was training in his section. Tyrion guessed, smiling for himself, that the sellsword must have spent the night in the pyramid and would not have slept much. Sansa and he exchanged a look of complicity. If it was not an open secret the fact that Daario was the queen's lover, it would not take it long to be.

As Jorah, who Tyrion wanted to see mainly, was training in the same training field as the sellsword captain, the latter saw them and walked to them.

"How are you, captain?," greeted Tyrion. The others bent and Daario addressed the girls a dazzling smile, and they blushed and looked at each other as the teenagers they were. Tyrion did not miss a single gesture. A slight itch of jealousy assailed him, but he cast it aside.

"Life here is full of gorgeous women. One can't ask for better," answered Daario with all his intention. The girls giggled between themselves, flattered.

"We're lucky men," said Tyrion dryly, and changed the topic. "Tonight there will be a Council meeting," he pointed.

"Yes. Unluckily, it's going to attend that nobleman who always wears a stick impaled in his ass. I never remember his name. These Ghiscari names can't be recalled even by their fucking mother," spat the sellsword, with an obvious disdain.

"His name is Hizdhar. Have you reflected on the main matter we will discuss?"

"Yes. I hate all that comes from that perfumed bloke, but in his favour it must be said that he isn't as stupid as he seems."

"Well. You're more handsome when you show yourself reasonable," jested Tyrion. "We're going to see Jorah. Have a good day, sellsword captain."

"And you, little friend. Although you don't need I wish you that. Anyone who has a woman like
yours has been granted a good day." He blinked a gallant eye to Sansa and returned to his practice.

*Be happy with your queen and leave my Sansa alone,* reproached him mentally, slightly annoyed. *Thank goodness I like him, or...*

Sansa sensed the reason of his covered annoyance and took his hand again. She knew he felt unsure of himself when he feared that handsome men rivaled him for her, so Sansa did all she could to convey him that there was no possible rival for him.

Tyrion looked her in the eye and saw in them the familiar expression that gave him back his peace. His face lit with his smile and she matched up with hers.

Jorah saw them coming and stopped what he was doing. He wiped the sweat and tried to sort himself out a little before joining the group.

They wished a good morning and bent.

"How are things going in the city, Tyrion?"

He explained the progress in the queen's projects and informed him about Hizdhar zo Loraq's admission into the Council, and the system of public audiences in alternate days.

*How much time he will take to find out about Daenerys and Daario?*

"Have you discovered something else regarding the Sons of the Harpy?"

"Not until today. They probably are hidden, awaiting. The security measures of the city prevent them from acting for now, but I doubt they have given up their dirty war so soon. The queen maintains the vigilance."

"Extreme caution. Protect her," pleaded Jorah, worried.

"We're as interested as you in the fact that she goes ahead. We'll do everything we can."

Jorah nodded, sealing with him the unspoken agreement.

Tyrion searched for a topic of conversation with which he could prolong the visit. He liked talking with the knight and the man needed distractions.

"You know what I'm recalling just now? The Tourney of Lannisport. I was present among the spectators. I was the Master of Drains in Casterly Rock, a great honour my father conceded to me," he conjured up acridly. "I witnessed all the jousts. You were the great figure of the moment; everywhere your bravery in the Greyjoy Rebellion was commended. I was curious to see the Lord of the Bear Island everyone talked about. The truth was that I had nothing better to do. My father already had made sure of mortifying me enough and robbing my youthful dreams. Keeping clear the drains of Casterly Rock wasn't a very stimulating occupation, so I decided I had nothing to lose attending the Tourney."

"It was a show stimulating enough for you?"

"I didn't believe there was a single soul who were able to defeat Jaime. And you did."

"A hard-nut-to-crack sort of opponent, your brother. He made me have a shitty time."

"I can believe it," assured Tyrion. "You charged faultlessly in every joust. You lived your period of glory. But success is paid dearly for later, doesn't it? Gods use to be envious," said Tyrion, with his
usual irony.

"Very dearly. Just from then on my life went rolling downhill. Gods gave me my own stupidity and Lynesse Hightower to make sure of that. But there's something I don't regret."

"Of course. They also gave you Daenerys."

"I would live all that again in order to be here."

"Of course you would." Tyrion looked at him, understanding.

*I too would live again every moment of my life to be here with Sansa.*

"See you, Jorah."

"See you, Tyrion."

Lunchtime was near and the group went back to Meereen while Jorah watched their departure with a melancholy gaze.
Tyrion devoted the afternoon to make accounts and make a clean copy of his scribbles, while Sansa and Leena dedicated to needlework in the bedroom. The preparations for Pod and Leena's wedding were in full swing and the girls were designing their own gowns and the attires their partners would wear. Tyrion found much easier to focus on his task when Sansa was absorbed in something with Leena and therefore there was no place for temptation, as it would not be very polite or decorous to lie Sansa down on the bed in front of the other girl and make to her all he was longing to do. So he preferred that Sansa was accompanied during the afternoons in which he stayed in the adjacent hall with his papers and accounts.

Leena left early, much before Mhyraz brought dinner. The nights when there were Council meetings, Tyrion and Sansa adopted the custom to eat supper earlier, because they never knew until what hour the sessions could prolong and Tyrion felt bad that Sansa delayed eating until he returned, and that could happen in the middle of the early morning.

They still had a long while until Mhyraz appeared. Leena, an intuitive girl, had granted them their time for themselves because she knew they loved one another so much that she noticed effortlessly when she was superfluous. Tyrion thanked her in his inner self for her respect toward others' need for intimacy. Not everyone was so tactful to catch when he or she was superfluous in a place.

Sansa immediately turned to him, also eager in advance. She had very pleasant meetings with Leena, but what came afterwards was incomparably better, when she noticed the powerful need in her husband's look and body and he pleaded with her silently for all she gave him with fervour. That day the need was more urgent because they had not made it since the previous night. Without a word, Sansa kneeled before him, embraced his neck and drew him toward her mouth, while she grabbed locks of his long curly hair. He moaned, defeated by desire, and slid his fingers behind her head, through her silky copper-coloured hair, to hold her and devour her mouth with relish. But his hands could not remain idle, and he slipped them over the long neck and the shoulders, until hefting her breasts above the fabrics which covered them. He worshipped those firm and perfectly round breasts, those nipples which hardened under the touch of his hands, his lips and his tongue. He wanted to feel them on his face and without ceremony he opened the front of her dress, almost in a jerk, and lowered her bodice. The turgidities jumped out of their restraint and he moaned before such a beautiful sight. Without loss of time, he submerged his face between them and moved them together, rubbing incessantly the nipples. He heard her racing heart under her ribs and felt the vibration of her moans, while Sansa surrendered completely to his caresses and hugged him strongly against her, throwing her head back and arching her body.

They fell onto the thick carpet, he above her, and they blended in another kiss that left them breathless. It was as if it was not sufficient with that closeness and they needed to be melted totally into each other in order to find relief for their tremendous urge. They devoured one another desperately their mouths and tongues and soaked themselves with saliva. Tyrion descended over her neck, sucking and biting with enough strength to leave bruises, unaware of that. But she did not care. On the contrary, she felt completely rapturous by the unleashed fury of his desire. When he gave in entirely, without restrictions, to passion and assaulted her with that wild and irrepressible intensity, her libido shot up sky high and, subdued to that burning lust, she followed him step by step through the rise to a blinding top where she seemed to become detached from her own body and flew, as her physical boundaries could not contain the devastating pleasure which crushed her
and that always led him to his own agony of freedom.

She opened to him as he never dreamt any woman could open to a man, to his ferocious rams inside of her, to his gentle fingers which never forgot how to touch her in the most exquisite way. She opened to the words of lust and love which blurted in a torrent from his mouth, elated, transported inside the deepest and most intimate of her. She opened to the wonder that was that man extraordinarily intelligent, generous, strong and brave, who loved her and satisfied her as he had dreamed all his life to satisfy the woman who were his, completely his.

They reached their summit, she before him as always, and she loved him even more for that, because he was so considerate that he could not enjoy himself fully until he made sure she enjoyed herself as much as she could.

Afterwards, them both were gasping on the carpet, sweetly worn out and a bit surprised because they normally did not raise to that extent of desperation and rapture. Perhaps it was due to the many hours without making it, or perhaps it was that that evening some strange force had possessed them. But they were very, very happy for that.

"Sansa, I think this has been the most incredible we have done until now. The best of all my life," declared him, breathing laboriously.

"Of mine too." She smiled lazily, with him on her body, his blond head resting upon her breast. She loved to caress his curls.

"And I thought that it had to be impossible to rise more," said him, with delight in his voice.

"You see, my love. We never stop surprising at each other. We are sure that we have tried everything, and just then another door opens to an unexpected pleasure."

"I know it hasn't bothered you, but I'm sorry if I've been a little rude. I'm afraid I've left you some bruises. But you drive me so mad that I want to eat you alive," apologized him, slightly ashamed.

But no so much as to regret what we have done, he thought, mischievous.

"I think tomorrow I'm going to be sore all through," protested her, grinning.

"Who is the oldie now? Remember the bet. It holds up. You must train. This has been only the beginning," challenged him.

"Ha, ha. Look who's talking. I recall that you complained because I was going to kill you little by little," refuted her.

"Actually, I don't complain. I love that you kill me little by little."

"Maybe I'll take your word. But not now. You have to get dressed to attend the Council meeting, my love."

That came to him as a shock.

"Damn. I'll have to request the queen to forbid by law the interruptions of glorious sex sessions."

"Then there would not be a single soul who got out from bed, and... "How would the city manage? There are lots of matters to deal with," opposed Sansa, amused.

"To hell all the matters. There's only one that it's truly worth everything," protested Tyrion, grazing the reddish hair of her pubis with his fingers.
With a sigh of resignation, he got up and got dressed reluctantly, not daring to turn and look at her while she was getting dressed as well, because he knew that if he turned, the queen that night would have to claim by force his presence in the Council.

(Part of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 11

He ignored if it was a coincidence or the fact that the chemistry between his wife and him was so strong, but he always managed to attend the meetings just after a crushing sexual encounter, and that allowed him to feel happy and optimistic, with his heart and his body singing with joy. In that state of euphoria, no bad news could spoil his day, unless it was something as serious as the fact that the world were sinking or stuff like that.

He arrived as usual, nor the first or the last. Daenerys, Missandei and Ser Barristan welcomed him.

"Have you had a good day, Lord Tyrion?," asked the queen politely.

Scandalously good. So good that I have been about to send you all to hell for this night, thought him, holding back his mocking smile.

"Very fruitful, Your Grace. The works progress and the brotherhoods produce reasonably. The predictions are positive, at least for now."

"I'm glad to hear it. I hope that soon we'll have news about my merchant captain. He must be nearly arriving at Bhorash."

"Surely he'll arrive tomorrow at the latest. The crow won't take long, Your Grace," reaffirmed him.

"And Lady Sansa? How is she?"

Recovering from the last wild fuck we have had until a few minutes ago, Your Grace.

"Very excited. You must know she's teaching several times a week common language lessons to the orphans and she loves it. This morning she wanted to accompany me in my work and she showed acutely interested. Numbers are not her thing, but she's good at dealing with people. I observed that the men whom I talk with show themselves more receptive with her around," explained him, smiling.

Daenerys looked at him with a humorous gleam in her pupils. But her expression changed quickly.

"Did you go to the camps?" She looked nervous, and Tyrion was sure that it was due to Daario, not Jorah. It rather looked like the sellsword was visiting the queen's bed, as the blush of her pale cheeks was not caused by an old friend with whom she only shared a bond of fraternity.

"Yes, Your Grace. I made a visit to captain Naharis and Ser Jorah."

Her look was cautious, but it did not deceive him. She must know very well that he had put two and two together and deduced that the sellsword's long stays in the pyramid, especially late at night, had an obvious reason.

"How is Ser Jorah?" The queen avoided her lover's name.

"In excellent fitness. He trains a lot. We were recalling old times in Westeros."

She kept quiet what with no doubt she was about to say. The door opened and Daario, Grey Worm, Kerro and Hizdhar zo Loraq went in.
All them exchanged greetings and the queen got to the point.

"It’s urgent we debate a question that has been set out by our most recent member of the Council, Hizdhar zo Loraq. I want to listen to your sincerest opinions. Remember that the truth doesn't offend me; what offends me is that it is hidden from me. But in the first place let's begin with the laid out fact. Hizdhar, if you don't mind, repeat your request in front of all the members."

The man cleared his throat.

"The fighting arenas have been a millenary tradition in Meereen. It's true that the men who have fought in them have always been slaves who fought for their masters' honour and caprice, with the aim of offering distractions to the free population. But it's an almost sacred tradition that has provided the city with greatness, and the Meereenese people don't accept peacefully to be deprived of their customs. The Mother of Dragons wisely decided to close the arenas to impede that more slaves were forced by their masters to kill one another in bloody shows. But the Meereenese have taken it the wrong way. I offer a solution to that dilemma. He did a pause. "To reopen the arenas for free men who fight voluntarily for gold and fame, collecting from the spectators a cheap price for their attendance, and from the fighters for making use of the arenas. It would be a lucrative source of income for the coffers of Meereen, facing winter."

Silence prolonged barely a pair of seconds, until Ser Barristan's intervention.

"You know my opinion on those kinds of shows, Your Grace," he said, looking at Hizdhar with mistrust.

"In Westeros you as well organize tourneys and combats where men often die for the crowd's entertainment," rebuted Hizdhar.

"The crowd don't attend to see men killing among themselves. They go for the thrill of competition," contraposed Ser Barristan.

"Are you sure of that, Ser Barristan the Bold? That's what you say to yourself to feel better?"

*He has a point, thought Tyrion. It's not nonsense what he states. People is passionate about watching displays of blood and death, though they want to disguise that impulse with euphemisms.*

Ser Barristan did not reply again, but held the Meereenese nobleman's gaze with hostility.

"Thank you, Ser Barristan," thanked the queen. "Anyone else who wants to speak?"

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
"I was a slave of the fighting arenas," admitted Daario. "My mother was a whore and when I was twelve, she sold me. My master possessed arena slavers and I was trained. I won combat after combat and made my master earn so much money that he awarded me my freedom. I've been so many times in the arenas that they're for me as familiar as my hands. I was a slave, but I was really good in what I did and my skill gave me fame and, finally, freedom. I wouldn't change anything of that. I felt I had been born for the arenas, the combats and the crowd's bellows." He looked at Daenerys and Tyrion caught a flash of desire in the sellsword's blue eyes. "I don't like boastful richmen who believe themselves more of men because their slaves do their grunt work," he blurted out, throwing a disdainful look at Hizdhar. "But I like the fighting arenas. I grew up in them."

"Thank you, captain Daario," said Daenerys, blushing again. "Anyone else?"

Tyrion cleared his throat and said:

"Valiant captain Letho of Lorath, who is a captain Gilean's friend, carried us in his ship from Volantis to Tolos. He was the son of a former slave of the arenas of Meereen, called Limor, who won his freedom the same way as Daario. Nor Daario, nor Limor or so many others chose that way of living, but they were lucky to count on a great talent in that for what others used them. They fought for their lives, it's true, but they also fought for their dignity, if that virtue is compatible with slavery. And yes, it's true, they weren't free to choose, but from now on those who fight in the arenas will be. And the population of Meereen will be on their part free to decide if they want to attend the show or not. It's no longer about forcing some poor chained wretched to die; it's about people in their right to decide what they want to do. And if those men want to pay for their moment of glory in the arena, and the spectators are willing to pay to watch it, I don't see any problem in it."

"Thank you, Lord Tyrion. Who else has something to add?"

Grey Worm took the floor.

"Mother, you'll decide with wisdom and one is here to serve you in your decisions. One is worried before all else for your safety and, if you reopen the arenas, the Unsullied will protect you with our own lives."

Daenerys showed herself touched by her officer's devotion.

"I know you'll do, Grey Worm. And I'm eternally grateful for your invaluable services. I wouldn't have come so far without you," praised her. "I trust you and the Second Sons to keep Meereen as a safe city." She turned to Hizdhar. "And I count on your collaboration, my lord, to keep a long-lasting peace." She looked at Missandei and Kerro, who had not declared themselves yet. "What is your opinion?"

"We need the earnings, Mother," pointed Kerro, pragmatic. "There is much to do and lots of houses to remodel and rebuild. We're adding more floors to the constructions and have started the buildings for the jobs of the brotherhoods in the Square of Graces. All that needs materials and support. The arenas will provide with profits which we can't disregard. Winter is already showing its cold claws."

"Excellent exposition, Kerro. And you, my loyal Missandei? Do you wish to add something?"
The young woman raised her eyes and looked at them, awkward.

"Meereen is being supplied for winter and the arenas can mean the difference between life and death for many people. I don't like blood and death as a show, but I'll attend with delight if you decide to restart the tradition, to stay by your side, Mother. If some men are willing to die voluntarily and thanks to that many lives can be spared, then go to it." Her beautiful voice sounded softly. It was like balm for the ears.

The queen stared at them one by one, as it was her custom.

"It's decided, then. The fighting arenas will open their doors. Hizdhar, you are responsible for the organization of those events. Tomorrow afternoon or so you'll discuss with Lord Tyrion, my general supervisor, the issues related to the spectators' price of admission and the fighting taxes. Announce the population that I'll attend to witness some of the shows, as a gesture of goodwill. And now, retire. I've decided that those who have to go back to the camps after the Council meetings, spend the night here and depart at first hour in the morning, for your safety. Streets are more threatening at these hours, and there could be eyes spying your movements and awaiting to attack you in the solitude and the shadows. Do you consider this measure appropriate?"

"The Mother disposes and one obeys," declared Grey Worm without hesitation.

The others nodded as well. Daario smiled.

_The Mother's caring concern suits very well our sellsword friend_, thought Tyrion, ironic. _Thus he doesn't need any pretext to sleep in the pyramid, and more specifically under Daenerys's sheets._

"All right then. Retire and sleep well. Tomorrow the audience will count on the presence of Daario and Kerro, apart of course from my loyal Missandei. Hizdhar, begin with the procedures as soon as possible. I'll send notification of the next meeting. I expect to be able to deal very soon with the rest of the pending matters."

Everyone made a bow and wished the Mother good night.

Sansa was awaiting sleepless. Tyrion reported her about all that everybody had said and the queen's final conclusions, and Sansa nodded, as she was expecting that result. On their way to bed, they started to undress and made love sweetly until falling asleep in their warm embrace.
In the morning, after breakfast, Tyrion bid Sansa farewell with a kiss and went away to his usual queries through the city. Sansa on her part would not remain idle either, as she was working in her lessons of common language, assisted by Leena, Mhyraz and Dara.

Tyrion was going to start with a much more complicated task who would require a lot of hours of dedication. It consisted in calculating monthly the money assignments, dividing them into categories: soldiers' support and feeding, artisans' support, materials for the brotherhoods, the cost of feeding the brotherhoods and their families, additional cost of feeding the people who did not belong to any brotherhood (orphan children, old people and disabled with no family), and of course the support and feeding of the queen and her counselors, except for Hizdhar, who was rich, and Ser Barristan, Grey Worm and Daario, whom already earned a salary in the category of soldiers. And apart from all that it was necessary to stipulate extra money for the incidentals. Tyrion as a start would make an estimation with the numbers he already had, and little by little he would square accounts. It was an extremely delicate task, as the money contributions could not be wasted or fall short. With time and experience it would be easier for him, but the beginnings entailed a formidable challenge. Tyrion was not a man to be scared off a good challenge; on the contrary, difficulties encouraged him to try to overcome them.

He arranged that the monetary allocations were given at the beginning of every month to the spokespersons of all sections of civilian population and the officers of the armies, and they would be responsible for distributing them among the varied groups. He himself with the assistance of Kerro, Grey Worm and Daario would take charge of that task and they would spend the first morning of the month dividing up the money bags. That day the spokespersons would be heavily guarded to impede assaults and robberies. Tyrion would take strict control of every spokesperson's name to avoid possible identity thefts and adopt measures in case of the commission of any fraud or robbery.

On their part, the incomes would come from the market, as well as from the sale of the products abroad, the rich's taxes, and the fighting arenas.

It would be a slow process to start, but he expected it would be working in a few months. It should be taken a thorough control and Tyrion was determined that it was the most efficient possible.

After another fruitful morning in the city, he returned to the pyramid, but as there was still some time left for lunch and Sansa would be busy with her lessons, it came to his mind to go to the parade ground where Ser Barristan used to train the children with Pod's occasional assistance.

He had a chat pending with the former kingsguard and he wanted to take advantage of that chance, as the old knight was a good man and Tyrion wished to settle the unresolved issue between them: their cold past relationship in King's Landing. Thousands of miles far away and with a queen different from the monarchs Ser Barristan was accustomed to serve, the disagreements they could have had got diluted.

Tyrion went out to the parade ground, which was a part of the grounds that surrounded the basement of the Great Pyramid and were protected from the outside by a wall whose height was about three floors of the pyramid.

Ser Barristan noted his presence and Pod went to take charge of the trainings.
"Good morning, Lord Tyrion. What brings you here?" His tone was cautious, though kinder than the day Tyrion arrived at Meereen.

"The wish to have a conversation with you, as we didn't in King's Landing. I know you didn't have me in high esteem, and the truth is that you didn't lack reasons. I didn't offer quite a decorous image, I admit it. I drank, went whoring and told the truths no one wanted to hear, especially my father. I didn't lead a decent life, and was hidden in my own navel. I wasn't a lord of any estate, nor a knight, and my father would never hand me over Casterly Rock; women only allowed me to be with them for money; and the most important I did before becoming Hand of the King was to practise as the drain plunger of our fabulous family property."

"I can't hide that I didn't like you and that was because we didn't become to know one another sufficiently and I judged you carelessly. King's Landing had that effect; it brought out the worst in us. During my last years in the Red Keep I served mediocre kings and my oath as a kingsguard turned into little more than a mockery of fate. It can't be said that I got out the best of myself in those times. We are even, Lord Tyrion."

"We are even," accepted him, with his friendly smile. "Daenerys has given us all an aim, the hope for something completely new."

"I believe in her with all my heart. At last, in my old age, I feel that I'm really useful for something."

"You have been the best knight in Westeros. Even better than my brother, and admitting that fact is big words."

"A wasted knight. At least half my life has been a joke, nothing to do with those exaggerated stories people tell by the firelight. For every feat I have led, there have been many more insignificant or frankly shameful actions."

"That's the reality hidden behind fame, Ser Barristan. Fame makes us look twice as tall, strong and brave than we really are. Except for me, of course," jested Tyrion with sarcasm. "In my case, it makes me look twice a dwarf, weak and coward. It made my father shit gold. And you killed giants and all the beautiful ladies fell at your feet."

Ser Barristan gave a hint of a smile.

"The tallest adversary I killed wasn't more than two metres tall, I think, and since I was appointed kingsguard at twenty-three years old and the only betrothed I ever had wedded another, there haven't been any more women in my life."

Tyrion emitted an ironic whistle.

"That's admirable. A man honourable enough to keep his celibate vow is exceptionally rare to find. I'd never have been a kingsguard, a black brother or a septon. Chastity never has been one of my virtues. Too much temptations. Too much women."

"My vows haven't made me impervious to female beauty, Lord Tyrion. I've loved too."

(Part of a longer chapter)
"You would be made of stone if you hadn't loved, Ser Barristan. The only stone men I have knowledge of are those who have terminal greyscale. And even them were human beings once." Tyrion did a pause. "Well, I still have serious doubts concerning that my father could have a stone replacing a heart," he added, acid. "But even him loved. My mother. I wish I had known her to see what kind of celestial creature she was. She gained Tywin Lannister's devotion. If it weren't for the certainty of her death, as my father was in charge every day of blaming me for it, I could have come to believe that she was a goddess who came down from the divine abodes, instead of a woman made of flesh and blood."

Ser Barristan looked at him with compassion.

"Your mother was beautiful. With the Lannister's golden blond hair which shone by the light. She was tall and slender, with a sweet expression on her face. Her eyes were emerald green, very big," recalled the knight. Tyrion listened to him avidly, as the topic of Joanna Lannister always had been a taboo around him.

"It's said that Aerys professed indecent tendencies for her and everyone must have heard the rumours concerning that they were lovers when my mother was a Rhaella's lady companion."

"They have never been proved or confirmed, Lord Tyrion. If it makes you feel better, I'll say that I've never believed them. Your mother was not of that kind. I don't discard that Aerys got a craving for her; he didn't love his wife and was unfaithful to her during their whole married life. Joanna's beauty attracted men, and Aerys mustn't be an exception. But I'm sure she didn't love any man apart from your father. And if she some time had... something with Aerys, must be because he forced her. He wasn't known for his gentleness with ladies," remembered Ser Barristan, vehemently resentful. After a silence, he added: "She loved you, Lord Tyrion. A true mother loves her children, and she did."

Tyrion was surprised at how moved he was. For the first time he was talking about his mother without feeling like a monster. And it was very consoling to hear the story from a honest witness who had known her in person, someone outside the family, not stained with resentment toward the involuntary author of Joanna's death.

*She wouldn't have seen me as a monster. She would've loved me the same as if I were so good-looking as Jaime.*

He wanted to believe that.

"Thank you, Ser Barristan. You're a good man," said him, with total sincerity. "Despite what you think of yourself."

The old man looked at him with friendliness.

"The same for you, Lord Tyrion. There are men who are more than they look. You're one of them."

"This body obviously can't contain all I am," joked Tyrion. "You honour thoroughly your nickname and your reputation, and I affirm it in the best sense. A scarce privilege." He bent as a farewell. "You've gladden my morning. Have a good day, Ser."
"Same here, Lord Tyrion."

The knight went back to the parade ground and Tyrion headed for his chambers. If he already had a light mood after his conversation with Ser Barristan, the fact of joining Sansa after his busy morning improved his good mood.

Sansa was sewing by the window, as she used to do ultimately, as much for making winter garments as for Pod and Leena's wedding. It was patently obvious that she had the intention of providing the winter wardrobes of at least half the inhabitants of the pyramid. Judging by the pile of fabrics and sewing tools, it gave that impression.

"Hello, my love," greeted her, raising her eyes from the labour.

"Hello, darling," answered him, giving her a kiss. "You're determined to keep half the pyramid warm," commented him, with amused pride.

"I like this. Sewing makes me feel more at home, especially when I'm here alone. It helps me to remember Winterfell."

He sat next to her and caressed her cheek.

"You were a good pupil. The clothes you make are gorgeous. Your septa would be proud of you."

Sansa smiled at some distant memory.

"Arya, on the other hand, was a mess. She hated everything which had something to do with a lady's training. What she loved were boys' activities. We couldn't be more different from each other." Her face became sad. "It hasn't been heard anything else of her. The most probable is that she's dead, like almost all my brothers."

Tyrion took her hand.

"Yes, it's the most probable. A girl can't survive alone," said him, without trying to lie to her, with the softest voice he could manage. "I liked very much your brother Jon," commented him, to try to get her distracted from the memory of her lost sister. "We travelled to the Wall together and we got along. The Bastard of Winterfell and the Imp. We made quite a fine pair."

Sansa smiled despite herself. "A clever lad, honourable and very capable, with the blood of the North in his veins. You have never wondered who his mother was?"

She lowered her eyes, uncomfortable. "I learnt to avoid that topic. It hurt my mother. And I... showed my support to her and I was always cool to him. Now he's the only brother I have left, at least that is known, and he's half the world far away." She looked through the window with sadness. "Arya and he were inseparable. They shared a great affinity. She was who more resembled him."

He didn't want her to become sad. Suddenly he remembered that he had brought something in his pocket, a small present he had purchased in the market that morning. He held her hand and placed it on her palm. She looked, surprised.

"Oh, Tyrion! Golden thread! And silver! Where have you acquired them? They must not be cheap," protested her without much energy.

"I'm the Mother's general supervisor and I'm very well known in certain brotherhoods. That has its advantages," said him, blinking an eye to her.
Sansa gave him a kiss which hardened him more than he already was. They broke away, with bated breath.

"They are lovely, my love. With these threads I'll be able to embroider ornaments on Leena's wedding dress."

"And also on the dress you'll wear in her wedding. You'll be a cute guest. The prettiest guest that has ever been seen in any wedding."

"Oh, shut up, bootlicking," scolded her, pleased.

"Bootlicking has never been one of my qualities, darling. You know I never say what I don't think," corrected him.

She surrounded him with her arms.

"Mhyraz won't be long to come with lunch," commented her, fixing her gaze on his green eyes.

"No, he won't be long," answered him, breathlessly. She was still seated on the chair. He slid his hands down her hips, took her thighs and made her encircle his waist with her legs. He pressed his hard manhood, constricted by the trousers, against her mound, covered as well.

Some knocks sounded on the door. It was Mhyraz.

Tyrion tore away from Sansa, annoyed and painfully hardened against his pants and, while they were tidying up their tell-tale aspect, he cursed in his insides the unwholesome habit of punctuality.

He consoled himself thinking about the delicious dessert which would come after lunch.
Chapter 81

Meereen: Day 12

As soon as Mhyraz retired with the tray of dirty utensils, Tyrion took Sansa's hand and led her to
the bed, where they had another session of crushing sex. They had not done it since the previous
night and his skin and manhood almost hurt after so many hours without sinking in her. It was not
until he released in her divine goddess' body that he found relief for that sexual tension which did
not let him focus on anything if she was nearby.

Dessert, certainly, has been delicious, thought him, relaxed and in high spirits for the paperwork of
the afternoon. He had discovered that if they made it just after lunch he felt much more
predisposed and gleeful to tackle the tiresome task. Moreover, Leena would come in short and the
girls would engage in needlework, and he preferred it that way.

He was dealing with numbers, calculations and previsions, organizing the bits of information. The
girls were chatting with low voices in order not to disturb him and the afternoon passed serenely.

One could not ask for more. Tyrion was completely happy with his life, and he knew Sansa was
happy as well. He was no lord of any territory or possessed any castle, at least not while he were a
fugitive who could not return to Westeros without Daenerys's support, but deep down he had not
quit Casterly Rock. Whatever Tywin said, he was the heir and, if one day he could claim his
inheritance, he would. He would do it for Sansa and the sons and daughters they would have. He
did not care if he ran out of the rest of the Westerlands and the title of Warden of the West, if
Daenerys settled it so in her new system, but Casterly Rock would be his. And if Sansa wanted
Winterfell, he would fight to give it back to her. But for now, he felt full. She was the best that had
happened to him, they were in relative security, under the queen's protection, they had a roof under
which sheltering themselves, food on their dishes, clothes to wear and dignified occupations.

No, they could not ask for more. He would not mind being like that for the rest of his life. Some
time later, sons and daughters would come, who were what they lacked for the moment, and they
would be complete.

A shiver of joy went over him when he thought about his children. He wondered, smiling for
himself, if they would be Lannister blondes, Tully red-haired or Stark brunettes, and if their eyes
would be green, blue, grey or a blend of those colours.

But a sudden fear assaulted him.

And if any of them is a dwarf like me? They would love him or her as much as the others, but
Tyrion knew too well how harsh the world could be with dwarves. Of course he and Sansa would
give him or her all their affection and would try to teach him or her to be strong, but they could not
protect the child from everything, and he or she would have to fight his or her own battles in an
environment which too often was dreadfully cruel and unfair. They would try to teach him or her to
stand up against life's affronts with courage.

He sometimes also felt the claws of a deeper terror, which he hardly dared to name, and which he
tried to cast aside quickly.

He had torn apart his mother when he was born.

But on the other hand, in Casterly Rock since his childhood he had heard the servants tell that
Joanna did not endure well her pregnancies and had trouble to give birth. It had taken to her three
days to give birth to Jaime and Cersei and it took her a long time to recover. And the next labour
killed her. Perhaps it had happened even though the baby had not been a dwarf. His mother's health
had weakened after the twins' birth.

Catelyn Stark had five children without the slightest trouble. It was public knowledge that she gave
birth quickly and barely a couple of days later she was already standing on her feet. The most likely
was that Sansa had inherited her strong constitution. He did not remember the girl being physically
ill since he knew her, although her sufferings in King's Landing had been enough to make anyone
languish and be consumed. Her indisposition in the ship to Pentos did not count, because it was
natural that the girl got seasickness on her first time in the sea.

He tried to take comfort and calm down with those reasonings, but anyway the latent fear was
there, at the bottom of his thoughts, from where he did not want to dig it up.

All women took those risks. But it was better not to think of that. Not tempting the bad luck by
calling it, as Sansa said. He was of the kind who looked things straight in the face, but that was
something at which he preferred no to look.

After breathing in some times, as he had taught her, he became peaceful and recovered his
optimism.

They would get ahead, as they had sworn to each other, before the sun and the stars, and before
gods and men.

As that night there was no Council meeting, they stayed under the sheets, making love and
afterwards lying down in their favourite posture of confidences.

"Sometimes I think I harass you too much with sex, darling," said him, with a fake guilty
expression. *I could not feel less guilty for anything.*

"I also harass you. Or do you think it's not difficult for me to restrain myself sometimes when I
wish to fuck with you and we can't do it in that moment? I want you as much as you want me,
Tyrion." She tugged his beard softly, and she did that every time she wanted to provoke him.

"It's only that I'm still getting used to the idea that you find me attractive, Sansa."

She took his face in her hands.

"Sometimes you're very blind, my love. It's not that I find you attractive. It's that I *adore* you. For
me there is no man more handsome than you. I love each fiber and inch of your being. I love your
eyes, your hair, your mouth, your hands, your strong arms, your hot body. I love what is between
your legs and the pleasure it gives me. I love your mindset, your sense of humour, and how
unbelievably happy you make me by simply staying next to me. Don't you see it yet? *I love you.*"

He was looking at her, feeling like he was about to cry with joy, lost in the blue transparency of her
irises.

"I'll never get tired of hearing it from you," said him, with a knot in his throat. And after that, to
recover a little from his intense emotion, he included his usual sense of humour. "In fact, I quite
liked the part in which you mention what I have between my legs. The truth is that I've confirmed
in our numerous sex sessions that you, for sure, idolize it. I think it should be proud of its success."

She squeezed it tightly with her hand and he moaned, disarmed, as every time she touched him.
"How much proud do you think it is at this moment?," asked her maliciously, stroking it up and down.

"Totally proud. So proud that in short it's going to show it to you effusively," said Tyrion with his hoarse and sensual voice.

"I think it should take down a peg or two. It's becoming a spoiled cock." Sansa let it go suddenly and moved away, with a challenging expression.

(Part of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 12 - 13

He half-closed his eyes, like a predator which calculated the way to leap over its prey. Whenever they played those games in which she resisted to provoke him and drive him crazy, his arousal shot up.

He slowly moved closer to her, without breaking the eye contact. She grabbed the pillow and jumped away from the bed, laughing while she got ready to elude him.

"Come and get me," challenged her.

"You know that when I catch you it will be much worse. What I have between my legs is going to insert you until you beg for mercy and apologize before it for your insolence," threatened him, getting nearer her inexorably.

"First catch me."

Tyrion, fast like a bolt, hurled himself from bed and she started to run across the room, laughing uncontrollably. He grasped her legs and both of them fell on the carpet, laughing loudly. Tyrion immobilized her, straddling her and pressing her wrists against the floor.

Desire devoured them, spurred by the game.

"Beg me," ordered him.

"No," rebelled her.

"Beg me to fuck you."

"No."

"Then what I have between my legs is going to punish you." Without letting go her hands, he ascended over her until placing his manhood almost upon her face.

"Suck it." He rubbed her face with all his length. "You're craving for it."

She fought back a little more, with her great desire reflected on her eyes.

Tyrion went on rubbing it over her face, provocative.

"You want to feel it against your tongue. You want me to fill your mouth with it and to cry out your name while I spill myself onto your gorgeous face. You want to feel its devotion to you, you want to make it say that it's nothing without you."

She could not resist any more and licked it.

"That's it, darling. You know it loves you. You know it'll be yours forever."

He got it into her mouth and she sucked and moved her tongue in circles.

He moaned in ectasy.
"Yes, my love. You do it so well. Go on sucking." He propelled himself inside of Sansa, who was almost gagging.

He sped up.

"This is your punishment. It'll finish on your face for having challenged it."

She could not speak, with her mouth filled.

And then he removed it, held it with his hand and spilled himself upon her face, moaning her name. Sansa wiped his seed off her, looking at his eyes and smiling, satisfied.

He got away from her.

"You've been an evil girl. I'll have to punish you more. Open your legs."

Tyrion placed himself between her legs and introduced his tongue between her soaked folds, and squeezed her breasts with both hands.

Sansa moaned. He knew that his tongue drove her mad. He moved it in a torturing way, slowly, as if he had the whole night to explore her.

"Say again that you love my cock."

"I love it," said her, transported by her delight.

"Say again that you love me."

"I love you, Tyrion." She was sighing.

"Say that you adore fucking with me."

"I adore it. Go on, my love. I'm going to finish now."

"Finish. Give me it all, darling."

She convulsed. She pushed him against her, shouting, grabbing as always his long blond hair. He felt very much excited whenever she did that while he was pleasuring her with his mouth.

"Do you think the punishment has been severe enough, darling?"

"A lot. It has been a genuine agony."

"It looked like it. You shouted very loudly. It's possible that someone in this city has not heard it, especially if it is a deaf person." He smiled, mocking.

They went back to bed and made themselves comfortable. They kept silent, recovering. But after that Sansa started another conversation.

"Sometimes, in the middle of silence, the roars of the dragons which are chained below can be heard. If you go to see them any time, be very careful, my love."

"I'm curious for seeing them, but I value infinitely more staying in this world with you. I don't fancy turning into a roast dwarf."

"Would you like to ride a dragon, Tyrion?"
"When I was twelve I wouldn't have hesitated. Of course that as a child I dreamt of riding one. Now that I know how they really are, I'm not so sure. I don't feel very inclined to fly by the whim of an untameable beast which might throw me off its back any moment or roast me alive with a flame. I don't deny that the thrill of flying is appealing... To rise up above everything, feeling free in the heights, with the wind against the face... That was what dazzled a dwarf boy like me, who never would grip a sword. However, for me they continue to be fascinating creatures. They are the most dangerous weapons, as they can destroy everything they find. The Targaryens conquered and ruled Westeros thanks to their dragons and, when these extinguished, the royal house declined until today, with only a Targaryen remaining. The potential of those beasts is enormous, if one knows how to use it."

"The queen still ignores how to use it. And, meanwhile, the dragons are going out of hand," said Sansa, worried. "But we've promised to keep the faith. She'll find the way."

"She'll do," corroborated him.

Sansa brought up another doubt.

"And what if she decides to stay in Meereen? She won't go until she has mended all the pending issues in this city. And that could never happen. There's a lot to solve here. And for each trouble that is solved, some more come up."

He considered that.

"It could be. And if it were like that... Would you be willing to remain in Meereen for the rest of your life?"

"Yes," answered her instantly. "If you're with me. I don't need any more." She rested her hand on his cheek, upon his thick beard.

"Nor I, darling. If Meereen is going to be our house from now on, so be it. You're my true home."

They stared at each other quietly. As they fell asleep in their nightly tight embrace, Tyrion thought on how much his life had simplified. All he did revolved around Sansa and the better world he had the intention to build for her. He wanted no more than to live loving her and everything else was a consequence of his love.

He had her. Westeros, the Iron Throne and Casterly Rock could go to the seven hells if they fancied it.

But his inner voice whispered that Meereen was only a stop along the way.

Wherever he went, Sansa was the only matter that was really important.

The next day, different events altered the peaceful routine in the pyramid.

At mid morning Hizdhar arrived with the boys and girls from the noble families. They were thirty, two per family, as it had been agreed. Daenerys welcomed them and they, intimidated, barely dared to move, until the queen explained to them that the Great Pyramid would be their new home for a long time and invited them to seek their accommodation. She listed their responsibilities from that day on. They would not remain idle, lazing around, but they would have the same responsibilities and tasks as the rest of the children and they too would attend the school which soon was going to be opened. She informed them that there everyone gained rewards working and contributing to the collective wellbeing, and their privileges of birth would be useless. The kids
stared at her with incredulity, as if told that they were going to fly to the moon.

*They have lived on the top of the pyramids. They're used to look from above,* reflected Tyrion.

Daenerys introduced them to the orphans. A tense silence fell between the freedchildren and the noble children until they greeted among themselves a bit awkwardly. Afterwards the Mother commended the orphans to guide their new brothers and sisters and to show them the chambers where they would live.

When the children retired, Daenerys announced that that night there would be a Council meeting. Some ravens with news had arrived and she wanted all her counselors to be present.

Tyrion informed Sansa and got ready for his visits through the city. That day there were not common language lessons due to the arrival of the queen's *guests* and Sansa decided to go on with her needlework. He gave her a kiss and went outside with Pod and his two escorts.

*One of the ravens must come from Bhorash. Gillean surely is there already. The other one might come from the Dornish patrols, but it's still early for them to have reached an inhabited port. They have left before them a stretch towards Tolos. Perhaps the raven has been sent by Varys from King's Landing or Doran Martell from Dorne.*

With those speculations floating in his mind, he walked across the bustling city to meet his usual coworkers.
Chapter 83

Meereen: Day 13

At nightfall, Sansa and he made love, had dinner early and Tyrion went to the Council meeting with his usual good mood. If all the rulers' counselors had a sexual life so happy as his, perhaps the world would be a little better.

Daenerys tackled the matters directly, as it was her style.

"Today the thirty guest children from the prominent families of Meereen have come to the pyramid. Hizdhar has mediated to ease tensions and has prevented the families' resistance, at least not an evident opposition. I'm sure that they hate me even more for this, but it's a preventive measure which can prevent from reaching certain ends. The affection for their children and the fear for their safety will kept the noble people at bay. If they love their sons, daughters, grandchildren, cousins, nephews and nieces, they'll be careful not to commit any blunder or collaborate with the Sons of the Harpy. Or that's what I expect." She hushed for some seconds. "From now on the children live here and receive the same treatment as the orphan freedchildren."

She looked at everyone, who nodded.

"Lord Tyrion, among his responsibilities as general supervisor, it's carrying out a praiseworthy work, making detailed records of the volume of production of the brotherhoods, calculating costs, expenses and incomes and administering the money of the Crown with good sense. The previsions are positive and it's expected that with the merchant captain's sales, the incomes of the market and the fighting arenas the Crown can count on savings to cope with winter."

The others addressed Tyrion bends of the head, grins or, in Daario's case, a wink.

"And speaking of my merchant captain, today a crow from Bhorash has arrived. Gilean tells that the journey has been calm and the fishermen have already returned to their houses. He expects to make business deals with some of his acquaintances and it's very possible that he is already obtaining profits. He'll stay three days in Bhorash and will set sail to Tolos, from where he will send another letter reporting his advances."

She did another pause, as every time she ended a subject. "I trust that the Dornish fleet almost must have left Valyria behind, and until it arrives at Tolos we'll probably won't receive more news. Let's plead that good luck accompanies its travel and it's successful to reach Meereen in full. Fifty ships departed, and it will be difficult that all of them overcome the difficulties, but let's be faithful."

Doran really has a high interest in this pact. Fifty ships aren't a trifle, thought Tyrion.

"It has arrived to me as well a message from Doran Martell. He tells that his brother Oberyn has killed Gregor Clegane The Mountain, Tywin's henchman who assassinated my sister-in-law Elia Martell and my niece and nephew Rhaenys and Aegon, and thus Oberyn has obtained revenge for the Martells and the Targaryens. Prince Oberyn stayed in King's Landing after the bastard king's wedding and challenged the great dog Clegane. Doran relates that that monster expired in dreadful pain, caused by the poison with which the prince coats his spear." In Daenerys's eyes shone an expression of harsh satisfaction. "Doran also says that Cersei is trying to break the matrimonial alliance between Myrcella and Trystane, because she doesn't trust the Martells and is afraid for her daughter. But Myrcella herself has been who has disagreed completely with the breakup of the engagement and has refused to go back to King's Landing."
"Good for you, niece. Show your claws and don't let your mother ruin your life. Tyrion was glad for the girl. And the farther she was from her mother, the better.

"The recent boy king Tommen is about to wed Margaery Tyrell. She will handle the puppy at whim and it won't take long for an open war between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. They'll soon start ripping each other's throats out and meanwhile Westeros won't cease its bleeding. Varys goes on as Master of Whispers; Mace Tyrell is now the Master of Coin; And Kevan Lannister has argued with his niece and has gone back to Casterly Rock. Moreover, it seems that, taking advantage of the serious crisis that is ravaging the Seven Kingdoms, the Faith of the Seven is raising a wave of fanatics known as sparrow., among whom Lancel Lannister, Kevan's son, is another member. The situation, certainly, looks very bad. My kingdoms are in the hands of weak and incompetent people."

"It will be breeding ground for you, Your Grace," said Hizdhar. "The nation will clamour for you. If you campaign in Westeros and draw the subjects to your cause, they'll receive you with open doors."

That's where Varys intervenes. He can pave the way, exchanging ravens with the proper people, Tyrion said to himself.

"It's not going to be that easy, but I'm determined to make myself known in Westeros, take that for granted," declared Daenerys. "At last, there has been battle in Castle Black. The Free Folk have attacked in their eagerness to cross to the South, and the black brothers have opposed a fierce resistance led by Lady Sansa's bastard brother, Jon Snow. However it seems that he sympathizes with the Free Folk as he has lived some time among them, and he defends that they also have the right to count on protection against the White Walkers. That Jon Snow seems a good person. I wish I could meet him."

Tyrion intervened.

"Lady Sansa could tell you about him at great length if you're interested. On my part I had the chance to meet him when I traveled to Winterfell with Robert's retinue and could associate with him in our shared way to the Wall, when I decided to pay a visit in order to see how the border of the civilized world was," said Tyrion, emphasizing the irony of that word.

 Actually, what I wanted was to piss on the top of the Wall and perhaps verify if it was true the rumour that when one pisses on the border of the world three hundred yards high, the piss freezes in the cock.

"You and your wife could have lunch with me tomorrow. I'd like to talk about your half brother-in-law. He looks like an interesting personage, regarding the reports I have about him."

"Of course, Your Grace. I'm sure my wife will be delighted to talk about her brother, who she misses. He's probably her only alive brother."

"Perfect. Tomorrow we'll lunch in my private hall, but I'll try not to steal too much time to you. I know you have plenty of work to do."

"Don't worry about that. I have the registers up to date and tomorrow there won't be new ones because it will be my turn to be in the public audience and I won't go to the city."

"Very well. Now it's the turn of the captains of my armies to inform me about the progress of their activities."
Meereen: Day 13

Surely Daario keeps her well informed about the Sons of the Harpy's movements, if there is some
news. Anyway, if there's something to find out, it won't elude Varys's little birds, unless those
Harpy's sons of bitches are trickier than we think, as it might be. We're the foreigners here and we
don't know them even a half than we believe we do.

"The city is well guarded and there haven't been serious incidents, Mother," explained Grey Worm.
"We have intervened in drunken brawls, street fights and attempted robberies, but no more matters
worthy of being highlighted. In the camps we train at least eight hours a day and we're always
ready for any urgency."

Tyrion had seen how they trained. Eight hours at such rhythm and, when any other mortal would
have tired out, they simply looked like people who had gone for a walk.

Daario took the floor.

"I have nothing to add to Grey Worm's exposition, save that the Second Sons' leisure activities
differ from the Unsullied's." His rascally smile danced on his mouth.

Everyone knew that the sellswords spent more than a half of their free time hours in taverns and
brothels. Daario was one of the scarce exceptions. He boasted that he had never paid for sex,
because he only bedded women who wanted to do it for pleasure, not for money. And he was not
an usual drinker, either. He declared that life was enjoyed better with a clear mind and he did not
need alcohol to conceal or forget or try to be someone he was not.

A peculiar guy this Daario. He lacks complexes and doesn't bother himself with moral dilemmas.
Nothing steals his sleep, except for the bed activities that don't imply sleeping.

"And to finish with, how are the transactions for the school progressing?," the queen asked Kerro.

"The count is being made little by little, but already almost all the brotherhood groups have
provided with their numbers. In short I'll report you the results, Mother. But I can foresee that there
will be around three hundred and fifty children altogether between five and twelve years old and
several teachers of each brotherhood group are volunteering."

"do you reckon that the lessons might be started? You know that in the pyramid you have at your
disposal the spaces and the materials."

"In a fortnight at the latest. Just when the count is ended."

"The children and the teachers will go out together from the camp and will come to the pyramid
twice times a week, since an hour after sunrise until an hour before lunch. They'll have free the last
tow days of the week to dedicate those mornings to other tasks. When the lessons finish everyone
will gather to go back together. Every time they come and go, they will be guarded by the soldiers
I'll assign to them, I don't want anyone to stay behind, because it's dangerous to remain alone.
Make sure that all the families have it very clear. They must be punctual, because if the children
are late they won't come and I won't permit recurrent absences unless the kids are ill or something
happens by force majeure that prevents them from attending. The school is going to be imperative
and no one will snatch from them their right to be taught, not even their parents."
"Yes, Mother. We have it into account and thank you for the great chance for our children." Kerro dedicated a bow to her.

"It's getting late. For today we have finished. I'm grateful to you once more for your valuable contributions and I'll send notice for the next meeting. Tomorrow it'll be Ser Barristan's and Lord Tyrion's turn to be present in the public audience."

"I'll be there, Your Grace." Tyrion made another bow and turned around along with all those present to leave the hall.

As every time that there was news to debate in the Council, Sansa was awaiting awake. Apart from the curiosity she felt for whatever had happened that had required the full Council's presence, Tyrion knew that, though she would not express it out loud often, she kept the hope that Varys's little birds had found out that some of his brothers or her sister were alive. Robb was the only one whose death was genuinely proved, but in regard to the others, there were not certainties. In the Red Keep she had been told that Theon Greyjoy had burnt and hanged Bran and Rickon on the walls of Winterfell, but something told her that perhaps Theon had not dared to go so far with her brothers. Though he was a hostage of Winterfell, the Greyjoy lad had developed an affection for the Stark boys, or that was what Sansa believed. It was impossible to live together with an honourable and loving family for nine years without developing feelings towards them, unless one lacked a heart. And Theon might be many things, he could be arrogant, a traitor, a coward and a killer, but Sansa was convinced that deep down he was not the monster he wanted to appear.

And Arya's body had not been found, either. Her trail had vanished beyond the Red Keep. She might have died in any alleyway like any other beggar and no one would have noticed. But while Sansa were not told that she was dead, she refused to accept it.

Tyrion did not give her false hope, but he did not stole it from her, either. Nearly all the probabilities pointed to the worst, but... Who could know the truth? The world was terrible, but it was full of surprises as well. Who could know if one day some of the Stark boys or girl would appear in any place? The Starks were a tough race; they descended directly from the First Men, who were harsh people, strong as rock, steel in their inside. Sansa herself, though she had much of the Tullys in her being, could not deny her First Men's blood. She was a really tough girl. He could prove it.

He related to her all the matters discussed in the meeting. It pleased her that Daenerys had required them to have lunch together the next day.

"She's very interested in your brother Jon. She's going to ask you for everything you know about him."

"I wasn't very attached to him and we weren't intimate, but I can remember lots of details of our daily life."

"I think that Daenerys is planning to send her support to the Night's Watch," confessed Tyrion. "I reckon that her plans consist of exchanging messages with your brother or, at least, with the next Lord Commander who is appointed, if she likes the one who is chosen. I doubt Ser Alliser Thorne is her type," said him, with his ironic smile."He's the acting Commander while the new one isn't chosen yet. But the essential is that she doesn't underestimate the importance of the Night's Watch, as most of the kings and Southerners who don't get out of their own navels do. I have the impression that Jon is going to be her bridge to have treatment with the Watch and offer them support. It's an intelligent strategy. A good king or queen doesn't throw to underestimate or cast aside possible allies at the first hurdle."
"But the Night's Watch doesn't take sides," said Sansa.

"No, but it's better a Watch that respects you than one that doesn't. Unity is strength and I'm afraid that the North is going to need unity and strength for what is to come."

"The White Walkers. Most people goes on believing that they are old wives' tales."

"Let's see if they change their minds when the White Walkers knock on their doors," predicted Tyrion. And as things are, they'll knock. Unless something is done to stop it."

Sansa shuddered with horror.

"We are so blind, aren't we?," said her, thoughtful. "We believe that some walls keep us safe. And no one is safe anywhere."

He took her face in his hands.

"As my heart goes on beating, you'll be safe." The oath he had made her in the Great Sept of Baelor before the Seven, and which later he had repeated to her several times, kept steady, intact, in his green eyes.

And she did not doubt it for a single moment.
Chapter 85

Meereen: Day 14

Tyrion went to the audience hall fresh and rested, though the days of audience he got up earlier than the other days. But since he shared the bed with Sansa the quality of his sleep had improved noticeably and he used to sleep right through, with scarce nightmares. The almost chronic insomnia that in the past assaulted him night after night had disappeared, and he sensed the improvement, not only in his mood and the lucidity of his brain, but also in his health. He felt stronger than ever, more capable, with more energy for everything. To that contributed as well the fact that he had stopped drinking excessively. He limited himself to the cup of wine with which he accompanied lunch and dinner, and that was almost all the alcohol he consumed.

But undoubtedly was his requited love for Sansa what instilled in him the joy of life which made his eyes shine and his blood run through his veins like an avid and insatiable torrent.

Sleeping embraced to her enveloped him with peace and the ghosts went away, defeated. Moreover, almost always in the early morning, if they were not very tired, they made love at least once, when sometimes they awoke in the middle of silence and they gave themselves to each other, sometimes sweetly, other times with a wild yearning, but always with absolute rapture and passion.

And if they did not make it in the early morning, they made it with the first lights of dawn, before Mhyraz's arrival.

Tyrion was walking with a smile on his face, thinking of the things they had done while a faint light filtered through the windows. When they made it in the early morning or at sunrise they did not light the candles and the suggestive darkness gave them an added excitement, especially when there was no moon and the blackness was impenetrable. They then sharpened the rest of their senses and focused fully on the feel of the skin, on the sounds they emitted, on the smells and flavours. Tyrion could trace a sensorial map of Sansa's body based in the textures of her different areas, in her scents and varied degrees of sweetness or saltiness which his tongue detected in every inch of her. He knew by heart her entire body and nevertheless each time was as if he discovered it for the first time again, because every chance to possess her and for her to posses him was unique, unrepeatable, inimitable.

When Tyrion loved a woman, he could not have eyes for any other. The rest of women stopped existing. It was not that he did not notice them or that he did not find them pretty or attractive, being such an alert man; what happened was that they did not interest him and he did not desire them, because all his interest and desire threw themselves into his woman, who awaited him to open for him a new universe of happiness and pleasures that he never got tired of exploring.

In that he was like Jaime. His brother had not fixed his eyes on another who were not Cersei, and Tyrion knew she was the only woman he had bedded in all his life. And Tyrion, when he met one with whom he settled a bond stronger than sex and her interest toward his money, became as well absolutely loyal and he was wholly unable to be unfaithful.

There were men that, even though they loved their wives or partners, needed other women's bodies, but it was not Tyrion's case. In the subject of monogamy he was purely Lannister. For Tywin there was no other woman than Joanna, or for Jaime another who was not Cersei. True that after his long captivity with the Starks the relationship between his twin brother and sister had cooled visibly, but Tyrion would put his hand in the fire regarding that Jaime would not touch another while his heart went on beating, at least a bit, for Cersei.
If Tyrion had fucked so many women it was because there was no love in those encounters, only a brief agreement in which he paid and they pleased him and even some of them, the most skilled, succeeded in feigning convincingly that making it with him was the best that had happened to them. He made every effort to please them too, despite he did not have to do it, but he felt he owed them that. What happened was that with whores it was very difficult to know when they were feigning and when they were not. For women it was easy to fake completion, as for men that was not possible. And as he only fucked each one once or twice at most, he did not come to know them as much as to discern if they had really enjoyed it. But he did not care much either. What he was totally sure of, was that they enjoyed the purse of gold he gave them before leaving.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 86

Meereen: Day 14

Something good he had obtained with all those casual encounters was that he learned gradually which was what women used to like in bed, and he got eventually better in those techniques. Although whores tended, with reason, to finish it quickly, some of them showed a tendency to preliminary games in which the hands, the lips and the tongue were the protagonists. Female breasts had an extraordinary sensitivity, as well as the neck, the earlobes, the belly, the inside of the thighs, the buttocks and, above all, the clitoris. He experienced varied ways to stimulate it and, though each woman was different, he realized that all of them turned crazy when their clitoris was rubbed with the fingers or licked with the tongue, but not directly upon the tiny tip similar to a very small cock, because it was bothering for them, but over the folds that concealed it. In barely a pair of minutes they reached their peak, or that was what they made him believe. But surely not everyone had put on an act in those moments. Some of them would have let themselves go.

A few of them had said to him, with a puzzled look, that no man had made them enjoy it like that before. Tyrion was not very predisposed to believe them, especially because most of them had been trained to make each client believe that it had been special, what Tyrion doubted, as they bedded at least around ten men every night. But it was perfectly certain that nearly all the clients went to their own way and the women they paid were only holes where plunging their cocks.

And thus was as he progressively gathered so much experience to offer to the woman of his life, if she appeared some time, what he doubted more and more with every passing year.

Shae made him recover his hope. He fell in love again. He did not expect that to happen to him again after Tysha.

He had not told Sansa about Tysha yet.

Her memory still was painful for him.

You should have realized that she was a whore. Shae had reproached it to him the night in which Bronn found her in the Lannister camp and Tyrion had revealed to them the issue of his first wife. But... How was he going to realize that Tysha was a whore? He was a young lad who lacked experience with women because he had not been with anyone.

Tysha had brown and slightly curly hair, brown eyes and a fair and healthy looking skin. Her figure was thin and she had small breasts. With the perspective of years and experience, Tyrion actually cataloged her as a modestly pretty girl, with an ordinary charm. But at sixteen and as the virgin boy he was, Tysha looked like the most beautiful of girls for him. When he saw her bursting in the path, chased by those two blokes, and Jaime got ahead to cope with both bastards, Tyrion looked at her, stunned with shock, and only some seconds later he noticed that she was half naked, with her clothes ripped up. His eyes traveled involuntarily over the bare skin, but he quickly recovered, remembered his manners, and covered her with his cloak. She wept bending onto his shoulder and he had no idea of what to do to console her. He encircled her with his arms instinctively and patted her back softly. Tysha was not tall, but even short women were taller than him.

Jaime went back after having shooed away the two assailants and Tyrion, wishing to do something for her, invited her to supper in the first inn they found. They ate aplenty, the wine flowed, laughter emerged easily, and soon after that Tyrion had rented a room and them both fell on the bed... He was absolutely inexperienced and barely a minute after she guided him to her insides, he spilled
himself, overcome by the new sensations. Tysha was gentle and did not mock the small mess that was his first time inside of a woman.

They made it more times, and Tysha was sweet and patient. She was a very young whore and she must have begun in that profession a short time ago but, as Tyrion remembered bitterly, she did not love him. She did it for pure convenience. Everything was part of Jaime's farce consisting on hiring her to take his virginity.

What Jaime did not expect was that he and the girl, stinky drunk, searched for a septon even more drunk than them to wed them. Tyrion was not a good-looking young man, but he was rich, and Tysha had no scruples to catch a naïve boy who could maintain her. She must have done the calculations and decided that it was much better to marry a wealthy and infatuated dwarf than to tolerate dozens of men of all condition between her legs.

And thus started Tyrion's first marriage, which lasted two weeks. He rented a small house and thought he could stay there with Tysha forever. That was the happiest fortnight in Tyrion's life until then. He would not experience such happy times again until the first night in which Sansa, on their way to Myr, gave herself to him and declared her love for him.

But his married joy ended in a sudden and dreadful way. Tywin got infuriated, he forced the septon under threat to annul the marriage and compelled an ashamed Jaime to tell the truth to his brother.

An abyss opened under Tyrion's feet.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 87

Meereen: Day 14

He could not do anything when his father called for the guards and commanded them to *hire the whore's services* one by one. They must be more than twenty. He did not remember if she had screamed or cried, or if she had accepted her punishment quietly, because his mind was buzzing and he was not able to look, or react. He was paralyzed. He wanted to die.

Above all he wanted to *kill* Tywin. There was one thing he could feel in his paralysis, and it was hatred.

He could not remember either in which moment Tysha had left taking with her the silver coins Tywin had paid her for the *services provided* to each guard.

Since then, Tyrion started to drink to try to forget Tysha's face.

He began to look for whores to try to find something of her.

Suddenly sad, he shook his head.

*I failed Tysha. Even though all was a lie and she didn't love me, she was my wife and I should've protected her from Tywin.*

*I won't fail Sansa.*

He was not sixteen any more and Tywin was not there to go on ruining his life. And Tyrion would have killed him a hundred times before letting him make Sansa suffer again or even graze her after sentencing her for Joffrey's death, knowing that she was not guilty.

He breathed in to calm himself. Tywin was dead, and he lived in Meereen with Sansa. They loved each other madly. Tyrion got back his joy when he recalled what they had done just after awakening.

He, groping around, had grabbed the jar of honey which used to be on the sideboard, and had spread the sticky substance onto Sansa's breasts, belly and crotch. She had burst in cackles and protested laughing when she felt the coldness and viscosity on her skin, but her laughter turned into moans when he started to lick everything without leaving behind a single trace of the honey. He tasted the sweetnes mixed with the saltiness of the intimate folds, until Sansa cried out his name and pressed him against her, grasping his hair.

Later she smeared him from up to down and applied a generous amount on his manhood. Laughing, she sucked it until receiving his seed into her mouth, whose flavour contrasted with the honey that still covered her lips. After finishing, she licked them with delight while she was swallowing the sweet and salty blend. And that greatly sensual and erotic gesture almost had caused Tyrion a heart attack.

He could think of plenty more things they could do in the privacy of the bedroom...

He had to wait some minutes at the door of the hall to settle down before going through the threshold, because the protruding erection which made a bulge in his trousers must be visible from the furthest corner of the hall.
He greeted the present people formally and sat on his bench by Daenerys's left. Missandei was in her usual place on the right, and Ser Barristan stood guard behind. He was glad that it was not Hizdhar's turn. The Meereenese nobleman was not stupid, but Tyrion did not like him. Too much stuffy. He could not agree more with Daario. He looked like he had a stick into his ass.

The matters were the usual: disputes between freedpeople and Meereenese citizens, though sometimes the conflicts flared up among freedpeople who quarreled for sheep or utensils, and among natives from the city who did not agree about what thing belonged to whom. On the queue also there were runaway slaves, some of whom had gone through very long distances, and who wished to ask the Mother for refuge. She handed them over to Kerro to seek them a place to stay and gave instructions to some Unsullied to guide them to the camps.

The most flamboyant was the arrival of an emissary with a peace agreement from Yunkai. The Yellow City accepted to make peace with the Silver Queen if she left the Yunkish alone.

*If Daenerys turns a blind eye to Yunkai about going back to the old system, will they turn a blind eye to us? Then, what they say is that they will do their own thing and we'll do ours, and thus there will be a truce. What more can we do for now? We can't afford war.*

Tyrion thought about the poor wretched who the Wise Masters were making into slaves after so much Daenerys had fought to stop it. But she had enough trouble ruling Meereen. She could not add to her troubles taking control of Yunkai. They were independent fortified cities.

The only solution was that the slaves themselves stood up against the masters, as they had done when the queen arrived at the gates of the city and infiltrated some of her best soldiers in a brilliant tactic with which she conquered Yunkai without sacrificing a single warrior of her invaluable army.

The tactic consisted in making the slaves aware that they themselves could obtain their freedom. More than two hundred thousand could defeat their masters, whom they outnumbered broadly.

*If it worked once, it can work again.*

He talked to the queen by the ear in a low voice, conveying her his reflections, and she nodded.

"It's true, Lord Tyrion. We can't afford an open war with Yunkai. But it's interesting what you've commented. We'll discuss it later privately to decide how to proceed. For now I'll accept the peace agreement."

She addressed the Yunkish emissary and accepted the terms. Tyrion saw the contempt in her beautiful light-green eyes and he knew, satisfied, that the question did not stop there and she would not bow down before the Wise Masters.

Near lunchtime and once assisted the last petitioner, Tyrion accompanied the queen to the private hall.
"It's important that we talk now about the issue of Yunkai," said Daenerys when they took a seat in the private room. "Lady Sansa and you will come in a short while to have lunch with me, I know, but I want to take advantage of your presence in the audience and of what you have thought about the return to slavery in our neighbour city."

Tyrion went directly to the point.

"It's evident that we can't face an open war with Yunkai. You can't sacrifice any of your men, and we don't have money for the war expenses. A war is highly costly and with what we have we barely will manage during winter. Moreover, fortified cities only can be conquered by two ways: by means of long sieges, something we can't afford either and which would be of no use in this case; or with cleverness, like that you used to incite the slaves to rebel. The latter option is the most suitable. The Wise Masters continue to be in a precarious situation; if their slaves stand up against them, as others did before, the masters won't be able to do anything to stop it."

The queen stared at him with that respectful look of complicity which had settled between them. Their minds spun in tune.

"The oppressed people need that someone remembers them what they are able to do. The trampled use to forget that they can be powerful if they unite against those whom trample them," meditated Daenerys. "The new slaves need to remember." A smile beautified even more her white face.

Tyrion corresponded to the smile.

"Yes, Your Grace. And the Wise Masters don't have to find out that someone has made the slaves remember. They won't know if they have been incited or if they have stood up on their own initiative. No one will have proof to accuse you publicly of having encouraged the new slaves to rebel."

Her smile dropped.

"A lot of people will die again. Many won't live to enjoy freedom."

He looked at her with pity reflected in his piercing eyes.

"It's a price everyone who wishes freedom is willing to pay. Or it's that choice, or it's that the situation continues to be as it is. Will you allow that Yunkai turns back to its old customs, leaving thousands of slaves at the mercy of the Wise Masters? I know that the Yellow City is no more in your jurisdiction, but you're the Breaker of Chains. You changed the situation. You gave hope to the oppressed and will make the decision you consider rightful. But you know that rightful decisions don't use to be the easiest. Often they are the most difficult to adopt."

"I'm aware, Lord Tyrion. I know it very well. My nightmares remind me of it every night. I constantly think that if I look back, I'm lost."

Tyrion's gaze softened.

"We all have our ghosts, Your Grace. They always pursue us. Sometimes they're sleeping, and other times they wake up. But they don't leave us ever."
You're too young to have so many ghosts behind you, dear Daenerys. But it's your price and you'll pay it until the day of your death. Like the rest of us.

They kept a friendly and understanding silence.

"When lunch is ready I'll send you notification. I'm sorry you have so few minutes to be alone with your wife." She addressed him an apologizing smile.

He looked at her once more before going out, with a mischievous flash in his eyes.

"I'll have to make up for my poor Lady Sansa."

Daenerys was in the verge of laughing, but she held back.

Sansa awaited him sewing, as she did most of the time in which she was not busy with her husband or when other occupations did not require her. She cast her labour aside and stood up when Tyrion entered their chambers.

"Hi, darling."

"Hi, my love." She bent and he kissed her. "How was the audience?"

He informed her.

"More slaves in Yunkai." Commented Sansa, saddened. "As soon as the queen turned her back, they have come back at it again."

"Yes. The only way out for them is to continue the rebellion. They'll have to fight constantly for their freedom. The old customs are too much stuck and getting rid of them is going to last several generations, maybe many. But the seed has germinated and it's beginning to bear fruit."

They held hands and seated.

"Daenerys will call for us very soon. How was your morning, darling?" asked him, to play for time. Unluckily, he could not lay her down onto the bed or the carpet for a quick session. The announcement would arrive at any moment.

You really are becoming a dirty old man, he reprimanded to himself without the slightest feeling of guilt, smiling to himself.

"Very fruitful. The common language lessons are very advanced. The children learn fast and they can fluently say lots of words and sentences. And after the lessons, while I was awaiting your return, I proceeded to sew Leena's dress. It's almost finished. I need only to embroider the ornaments with the threads you gave me."

"It will be gorgeous. There's no one who sews better than you." His eyes were as caressing as the fingers that were grazing Sansa's hand.

She blushed with the praise.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"In the Red Keep I came to think that Septa Mordane's teachings were stupid. Being a lady only had served me to stay trapped there without doing anything to help my mother and my brother, and the rest of my family. I thought I was a useless and silly being that was only useful to be laughed at by the others," confessed her, with a resigned half smile.

"Your training as a lady helped you to survive, Sansa. Do you remember the proverb your septa taught you? *Courtesy is a lady's armour.* She was right, darling. And look at yourself now. You insist in believing that what you learnt was useless?," asked him, taking her face in his hands, his favourite gesture.

"Not any more, Tyrion. I've never felt more fulfilled. In the beginning, when we arrived at Meereen, I was convinced that I had nothing to offer the queen. And now I have the lessons and needlework. I realized that I could do something with the children and I've discovered how to contribute to make winter more endurable. People need warm clothing. And lovely clothing too. Everybody likes to wear clothes that look good on them."

"Of course they do, darling. You're doing a lot for this city. I'll never let you forget it. I won't get tired of praising you for how incredible you are."

They kissed deeply, what prolonged until Mhyraz knocked the door and announced that the Mother was awaiting them for lunch.

Daenerys greeted Sansa affably and the three of them took a seat by the table, where lunch had just been brought. Tyrion himself, gallant, served the Dornish wine in the ladies' cups and filled their dishes with lamb stew.

They ate in silence for some minutes, until the queen started the conversation, addressing Sansa.

"Your husband has informed you that I'm greatly interested in talking with you about your brother Jon Snow. I've received reports about him and his performance in the Night's Watch. He's a brave black brother and has excellent qualities for leadership. He has led the most recent battle in Castle Black against hundreds of attackers from the Free Folk, and he has succeeded in resisting fiercely with scarcely a handful of men. I'd like you to tell me all you know about him, from the beginning."

Sansa focused her look on the stew for some moments, ordering her ideas, and started her story.

"My father took him when he came back from King Robert's Rebellion. He had been away for more than a year, and when he had departed he had just married my mother. My brother Robb was born nine months later from his departure, and Jon was about the same age as Robb. My father never confessed my mother who was the woman with whom he engendered the child. She was deeply hurt by his betrayal. It was true that when he went away they hardly knew each other still, but that did not help my mother to accept the infidelity. She couldn't love the bastard baby, and I know she felt bad for that, because the kid was not to blame. *How can a baby be to blame for anything?*, thought Tyrion with resentment.
Sansa went on.

"My father brought him up like the rest of us, but I took my mother's side and I was not one of his close friends. He was a serious and quiet boy, but clever and he learnt very fast. He stood out very soon in chivalry skills, along with Robb. He had a bit of a sullen character, surely due to his condition, but he was kind and good-hearted. He kept a special relationship with my sister Arya, as they were very alike and they told everything to each other. He often gave her little gifts he himself made, and before my father, Arya and me left for King's Landing, Jon ordered our blacksmith, Mikken, to forge a small sword fit for her size. Arya named it Needle and never separated from it. She worshipped her sword so much that in the Red Keep my father hired for her a dance teacher, who actually was a Bravosi swordsman, so he taught my sister to fight." She hushed for some seconds, ate some bites of lamb and went on.

"Though my father showed him the same affection as he showed the rest of us, Jon knew that he'd never be a Stark. He had been raised in Winterfell, but it wasn't his house. There was no place for him anywhere, as there is not for bastards. Dorne is the only one of the Seven Kingdoms that doesn't discriminate against the people born out of wedlock, as you must know. But in the rest of Westeros, his position was degraded. They have no right to inherit and they only can aspire to what they win through harsh fight, like the people who are not highborn. Often, I observed on his face a longing look, loaded with sad envy. For a boy, it's very hard to be aware of the fact that he's out of place. My father did what was in his hands to make Jon feel as one more member of the family, but the world took over to remember him what he was. My mother did. I know she didn't act fairly. She didn't do what she should have done. She was a great mother for her children, but with Jon she kept a distance."

Sansa did a pause to drink a sip from her cup.

"However, Jon didn't hate her. He always fed the secret wish that she came to love him, but of course that didn't happen. And since we were very little we had heard stories of our valiant uncle Benjen, who was a black brother. Jon admired him greatly and I suppose that little by little he developed the decision of joining the Night's Watch. He knew he couldn't stay in Winterfell and he had no other place to go. So he told my father that he would leave for the Wall. I imagine that my father would have wished for him a better destiny, but he didn't oppose, because... What other thing could he do? Becoming a squire or knight of any minor house vassal of House Stark? Becoming a free rider or sellsword? Nothing of that attracted him. Moreover, I know he didn't want to have children. He suffered every day because of being a bastard, and he didn't want to sentence his children to suffer the same. He wasn't fond of visiting prostitutes. I know it because one day I heard him arguing with Theon Greyjoy about that. This one teased Jon for rejecting girls, and Jon replied that he was not going to sentence any boy or girl to live through what he was living."

Daenerys intervened.

"A very sensible young man. And yes, it's very sad for a boy or a girl not to find his or her place in the world. I didn't find it either, and I understand him. But go on, please."

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 90

Meereen: Day 14

"One day, just before King Robert came to Winterfell, my father was informed that a black brother had deserted the Wall and was wandering through the lands, gone insane. As Warden of the North, my father's duty was to dictate sentence and execute the traitor. He said that who dictates sentence must grab the sword to carry it out, and not to make others grab the sword in his stead."

"A very fair measure. Continue."

"The black brother insisted on that he had seen the White Walkers, and it was just then when everything started to twist. When started the chain of events that resulted in my family's ruin and the war which has devastated Westeros." Sansa did another pause. "My male brothers witnessed the execution and, when everybody was going back, they found a dead female direwolf, which had just given birth to a litter of six puppies. My brothers took the puppies home and each one of us adopted a little wolf. Mine's name was Lady, and I trained her to be quiet and patient. Robb named his as Grey Wind, Arya's one was Nymeria, Bran's one was called Summer and Rickon's one, Shaggydog. Separated from the other puppies, appeared another one, smaller than the rest, albino, with his hair wholly white and red eyes. Jon adopted him and named him Ghost. The event with the direwolves seemed an omen, as it was curious how the litter coincided in number with us: four males and two females, and one of them was different and had been marginalized. Like Jon. Since then, Ghost never has gone far from him. Wolves are extremely faithful creatures." Sansa made a gesture of pain. "But Arya lost her Nymeria and I lost my Lady because of Joffrey and Cersei. And when Robb was killed at The Twins, the head of his wolf was sewn onto the beheaded neck of my brother," said her, with a trembling voice. She breathed deeply and Tyrion caressed her hand. "Jon has a sense of honour so noticeable as my father had, and he has devoted himself to the Night's Watch. He has always taken his commitments to the end, and I know he'll live the rest of his life as a black brother, until the day his guard ends with his death, as the oath of the Watch recites."

Sansa kept silent, and Tyrion took the turn.

"The night of the day when our retinue arrived at Winterfell, a feast was celebrated in Robert's honour, but I didn't much fancy attending, as I never liked feasts in which I had to endure a king even more drunk and whoremonger than myself, or my embittered sister, or my idiot nephew or the other people whom would look at me as if I were a circus freak, as the majority don't use to be very discreet when they see curiosities like me. So I passed nearly all the time outside, drinking alone. I crossed paths with Jon and talked with him, because I've always had a soft spot for bastards, cripples, broken things and despised people with whom I identify myself. He felt offended when I said to him that he was the bastard of Winterfell, but I made him know that I wasn't any better, because a dwarf is the same as a bastard in his father's eyes, and I advised him. I told him to use his condition as an armour, and thus no one could use it to harm him. I liked him and I wanted to teach him some lessons of reality. The boy had very good aptitudes, but he was still a bit green. Soon afterwards we headed for the Wall and he realized that the Night's Watch is almost entirely a bunch of thieves, killers and rapists who have chosen to wear the black to elude mutilation or execution for their crimes. Honourable volunteers like his uncle Benjen or himself are increasingly scarce in the Wall. When we arrived, Jon was furious. I understood him. He had left the only home he had known to join for life an institution which had stopped being what it had been. Most of the recruited boys and men were totally inexperienced in fighting and Ser Alliser Thorne was in charge for training them. He's not precisely a kind officer. I tried to help Jon with the troubles of his beginnings, and I got him to understand that being lucky enough to have been raised in a castle
didn't place him above the other boys, who didn't have the same opportunities as him. And he fit in. If I hadn't intervened to give him a helping hand, the others would've smashed him in the first day. But quickly emerged his good qualities and he understood that it's achieved much more with friends and allies than with enemies." Tyrion did a pause in his long narration and drank.

He then resumed it.

"I stayed in the Wall several days and listened to the Lord Commander Mormont, Ser Jorah's father, and to the maester Aemon Targaryen, your uncle, list the numerous problems of the Watch, its shortages and the dangers that lurked in the north of the Wall. They pleaded with me to convey the king their request for help. But in the South, the Wall is too far away and no one pays attention to it."

"I'll have to offset that negligence," inserted Daenerys. "But go on."

"Jon and I said goodbye regretfully, as we had stricken up a friendship. I wrote to him once and he answered explaining that he already had made the vow and he had loyal friends, but he was experiencing very bad times, with Ned Stark's death and the war of the North against the Lannisters in full height. I thought I read between lines that he was tempted to desert to join his brother Robb's armies, but he finally thought better." He finished and took another bite of the dessert.

"Soon the election for the new Lord Commander will be carried out," pointed Daenerys. "Who do you think will get elected?"

"It's difficult to reckon. Ser Alliser is not very popular but he isn't a coward and is devoted to the Watch. And there are other veterans who could file their nomination."

The queen gazed at her plate.

"Let's hope they make the most proper choice. In this times, it's not sufficient that the Lord Commander is a brave figure; many valiants have ended prematurely in the grave and they have swept others along with them. The Commander, besides, must keep a lucid mind and think about what is best for everyone's survival," expounded her.

"I'm afraid that the only one who gathers those conditions doesn't have it easy to be the chosen, if he files his nomination. And he's too modest to do it," said Tyrion.

"Perhaps he needs a little and subtle push," hinted the queen, with an enigmatic smile. "I've started to pull the strings for it."

*She wants Jon to be the chosen one. It would be great news. There couldn't be a better Lord Commander,* reflected Tyrion.

Sansa looked at them, surprised.

"Do you want Jon to be the new Lord Commander, Your Grace?," asked her.

"I can't intervene in the voting, but yes, Lady Sansa. I'd like it."

Sansa's expression was one of pride.

"The Watch would gain a lot with him as commander," affirmed her. "In that he is like my husband. When he takes a responsibility, he fulfills it the best he can until the end." She addressed Tyrion a look full of tenderness and caressed his hand.
He hinted his naughty smile.

"The truth is that we are very alike. Except for the detail that I have more sense of humour and don't feel very inclined to celibate."

Sansa kicked him slightly beneath the table, amused.

"It has been a very fruitful conversation. I thank you a lot for your information. By the way, Lord Tyrion... How is going the economic matter of the fighting arenas? Have you discussed with Hizdhar the subject of the price of admission and the taxes?"

"Yes, Your Grace. We have settled that the spectators will pay a copper coin and the fighters a silver one. The Daznak's arena, the largest of Meereen and where the most important events will be celebrated, is fit for fifty thousand people. Taking into account that the grandstands are totally filled, fifty thousand people are equivalent to good earnings. The winner's price will consist of two hundred gold coins. There still will be remaining around three hundred, which will be for the Crown coffers. And those are only the numbers of the Daznak's arena. The others also will contribute at least with forty or fifty gold coins per event."

"A copper for each spectator and a silver for each fighter is a very reasonable price. And the prize is so high as to tempt the fighters," accepted Daenerys. "Thank you for your presence. I won't steal you more time. Have a happy afternoon, or what is left of it."

"Same here, Your Grace," said them both with one voice and, holding hands, they went to their chambers.
Chapter 91

Meereen: Day 14

When they got into their chambers, Tyrion was turning a vague idea over and over in his mind. It was simply a flash of intuition like the ones he used to have when the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fit suddenly, as if they had always been before his nose and he did not notice the connection among them until that specific moment. He was distracted and Sansa was startled that he had not got near her yet to start another sexual encounter, and indeed she was sure that when they left Daenerys's private hall he was more than willing. But he must have realized something which was absorbing his thoughts and Sansa hoped it was not anything bad.

"What's happening, my love?," inquired her, intrigued.

He cast her a reassuring smile.

"Don't worry, darling. It's only that it has just come to my mind quite a hare-brained hypothesis and, the more I think of it, the more sensible it is for me."

"About what?"

"About your brother Jon."

"Is it something you can tell me?"

"Of course, darling. You have all the right to know what it is about, in case it is true. But I plead with you to not revealing any of this to anyone, not even Leena or Daenerys or anyone else, for now."

"Of course, Tyrion. We have already agreed that the confidential topics we discuss here, stay here. And I always fulfill it."

"I know, Sansa. All right... I think I know who Jon's mother was."

"What? How do you know?," asked her, astonished.

"I have put two and two together with the information I have."

She watched him with the admiration spilling from her blue eyes.

"I've never known anyone as smart as you, Tyrion. How can you guess so many things? You're almost always right."

He felt deeply pleased by her praise.

"Simple observation, darling. It's a question of keeping open one's eyes and mind."

"You surprise me every day. You're amazing, my love. Your mind goes ahead further than most people's. Even though I try hard to keep open my mind and eyes as you say, I don't catch even the tenth part of the things you catch."

"I don't deny that nature has provided me generously in that aspect, and in some more aspects," boasted him, with his tone of fake smugness. "But I'm too a bit of an old hand, Sansa. I'm Tywin's son, whether I like it or not."
She hinted her insinuating and persuasive smile and moistened her lips, and he automatically felt hard against his pants.

*Little trickster. She does it intentionally to disarm me and torture me with desire,* thought him, aroused.

"Well, my prodigy man... Are you going to tell me what is it about?"

He was already breathing faster and his eyes traveled unavoidably to her lips, later they stopped on the breasts that the bodice made jut out above the lowcut of her dress, and they went down over the rest of her body, ardent, caressing.

She, as always, was hit by the force of his desire and the flame lit in her belly. Everything else erased from her mind. She knelt and Tyrion shortened in an instant the distance which separated them. He kissed her with ferocious frenzy, and his insistent tongue sought hers and licked her lips. Sansa moaned on his mouth and he held her head tightly with both hands to devour and bite her. She grasped him because if she let go, she would fall, as she felt her legs like butter. He caused to her that crushing effect, her great desire for him provoked her such trembling and weakness in her legs that the only thing she could do in those moments was to give in and grip his solid and warm body, and get lost in his skin, his lips and his tongue. He bit her lips almost fiercely and she felt carried away by his fever. Afterwards Tyrion devoted to her throat, her neck and her earlobes. Sansa had some faded marks from previous sessions and he smiled thinking in the new ones he would leave on her. He did not hurt her really, as the truth was that she was so absorbed by her sensations that she did not notice when he sucked a little stronger. Her skin was so white and delicate that it was very easy to leave bruises on it. But the fact of wearing the marks of passion aroused her. They were the patent proof which showed that he was hers, and she was his completely.

"Oh, Sansa," moaned him upon the wet skin of her neck, and sliding down her breast. "You're so soft, so beautiful... I never get tired of fucking you."

"Neither I, my love. You're my man. You're mine," moaned her, pressing his head against her in the possessive gesture he liked so much.

"You're mine," stated him against her breasts, while he slipped down the dress and freed them. "Totally mine. I want to spend my life getting pleasure inside of you."

Them both were lying down on the carpet and he was stripping her almost violently, wanting to feel her gorgeous breasts against his face.

"I'm yours," whispered her.

"I'm yours," repeated him.

Suddenly Tyrion remembered one of the ideas he had several hours earlier about the things he wanted to do to Sansa. He stood up, shooting her an absolutely lustful look and going to the chest of drawers.

"Where are you going?," protested her. And immediately her eyes shone realizing that he was making work his powerful imagination. She shivered foreseeing the sexual game with which he would surprise her.

He picked up some long scraps of cloth of her needlework which she had put away and blindfolded her with one.
"Come to the bed," ordered him to her, demanding.

He helped her to get up and took her hand to lead her. She lied down and he took a wrist and tied it to an iron bar of the headboard, and he did the same with the other wrist. Sansa felt more inflamed than he remembered in all her life.

"Now you won't be able to see anything or use your hands, darling. You're at my mercy. You belong to me. I'll do with you what I fancy. I love you, Sansa."

All her body trembled when she heard his low and hoarse voice.

"Oh, Tyrion. You get me so hot..."

"You know I'm nothing without you, don't you? And I belong to you too. And I want to possess you every hour, to make you mine forever. And be yours for all eternity." He was knelt beside her, caressing her from up to down, from her forehead to her pubis, sliding down over her legs, and going up again. When his hand slipped over her mouth, she licked it and he introduced two fingers between her lips. She sucked them and he imagined it was his cock, gliding between those lips that so many times had kissed and encircled the most intimate of him.

*Calm down a little, or you’ll spill yourself now, even before she has touched you.*

He was about to explode out of desire and he wanted to prolong and prolong that delight. He was not any more the green boy who succumbed quickly into Tysha. Now he was an adult almost twice the age he was by then and had learnt to control his passions to adjust them to his sexual partner's. Women were of slower and progressive ignition, and lighting them completely required a lot of patience and practice. He also knew how to drive Sansa to the limit in barely a couple of minutes, when they made it quickly. But in that moment he was not going to rush anything. He wanted to share the pleasure with her for hours if necessary and he had to control himself.

*(Part of a longer chapter)*
Chapter 92

Meereen: Day 14

Sansa could not see anything, blindfolded. That allowed him to increase the element of surprise, as she could not anticipate what he would do in the next moment.

He massaged sensually her breasts and stimulated her nipples with his thumbs. Tyrion adored when she arched her body instinctively to get nearer him, and when she threw her head back. Her hands, gripped onto the iron bars, fought with no result.

"You'd like to touch me, don't you, darling? You want to push me against you, but you can't," whispered him by her ear, mischievous. "Now you depend on me and on what I fancy doing to you. Get ready, because you've not experienced anything like this in all your life."

She licked her lips eagerly and he stared at them.

"That mouth of yours brings me mad, did you know, Sansa? Mad, and I have to do something with it or I'll become really mad."

He stopped massaging her nipples and placed his fingers upon her lips. He traced their outlines and felt the tip of her tongue grazing his fingertips. He descended onto her and bit her lower lip, hard but not so as to cause pain to her. He played with her lip until leaving it swollen with the intense contact.

She was moaning softly.

Later Tyrion enjoyed himself gazing at her breasts, without touching them. She almost held her breath, expectant, awaiting his next movement.

"Do you know what I'm looking at this very moment, Sansa?"

"You're looking at my breasts," guessed her.

"How do you know?" He was surprised by her ability to sense to which part of her body he addressed his eyes.

"For the heat I feel on the area you're gazing at."

He thought that human instinct perhaps caught without difficulty the intense energy that sprang up from the bodies during sexual intercourse, and it was able to guess without the sense of vision. Both of them shared such chemistry that they could feel one another without touching.

He picked up the jug of water placed on the bedside table. He plunged his fingers into it and then let the fresh droplets fall onto her breasts. They sparkled like pearls upon the bare skin. Sansa shuddered when she sensed the coolness and her nipples lifted. Tyrion spread the water slowly with his palms and slid them in circles, pressing.

She arched her body again.

"I know what you want, darling, but I'm not going to give it to you yet. You'll have to suffer a little more, awaiting."
He drenched his hands again and slid them over her belly and the soft hair that started below her navel to turn into a curly auburn bush on her pubis.

He stopped, moved to the headboard and loosened her wrists.

"Turn around. Lay backwards."

She obeyed and he tied again her wrists to the iron bars. She rested her cheek onto the pillow and smiled.

In that moment he had a beautiful view of her back and her round butt.

He moved her mane to one side, clearing the neck. He kissed and licked her nape and went down to her shoulders. Slowly, he covered with kisses and caresses the shoulder blades and the line of her spine. He descended, without leaving untouched a single inch of skin of the back and the sides. She was ticklish in her sides and laughed and shook when he put his lips and hands onto those areas.

He reached the lower back and licked the cute pair of dimples placed almost on the beginning of her buttocks. He loved to look at them when she was naked turning her back to him and she walked through the room, and those dimples moved seductively above the curved protuberances of her butt.

He then went down with his mouth and his hands over the buttocks and pressed his face against them. He separated them a bit and touched between them with a finger.

Sansa gave a little cry.

"You like me to touch you this way, from behind, do you?"

She nodded.

Tyrion wet a finger in the water and touched the entrance of her anus.

She moaned. That sensation was new.

He slowly introduced his finger, careful not to hurt her.

"Does it hurt you, Sansa?"

"No, but it's a... strange sensation."

"You're still a virgin behind. But soon you'll be no more, darling. Did you know people can fuck from behind too?"

She denied.

"You still have some things to learn, Sansa. You want to learn them?"

"Yes, Tyrion. Teach me."

He smiled with pure lechery.

"I like it. Your dedication. Your excellent disposition to do with me all I want to do."

"Do all to me," said her clearly.
A shiver of joy went through him.

"With delight, Sansa."

He moved his finger into her, opening delicately the new channel.

"Are you going to fuck me over there, Tyrion?," asked her, with a tone of slight anxiety.

"Do you want me to do it?" He gave her, as always, the option to choose where she wanted to go to. His gentleness always disarmed her and was enough for her to wish to go a step forward every time.

"Yes, Tyrion. Do it."

"Are you scared?" His low voice was full of tenderness.

"No, my love. I know you won't hurt me. I trust you."

"Oh, Sansa. I love you."

"I love you too."

"I'm going to penetrate you. Relax your muscles and remember I'll never hurt you."

He moistened his manhood with the water and placed it at her back entrance. He pushed a bit and entered a few inches, very slowly, to give her time to adapt herself around him.

She felt the stretching of her inner muscles and bit her lip.

"Do you want me to stop, darling?"

"No, Tyrion. Go on."

He pushed again and started to move, introducing himself deeper every time. She tensed a little and he guided his fingers to her clitoris to give pleasure to her.

Sansa grasped the iron bars and moaned.

"That's it, darling, moan for me."

He kept rubbing her clít, just on the spot that drove her crazy, while he propelled slowly inside of her.

"Sansa, you're divine. Do you know the pleasure you give me?"

"I know the pleasure you give me, Tyrion," said her, with a faltering voice.

He accelerated the swinging of his fingers on her clít, just how it drove her to perdition.

"Tyrion!," shouted her, reaching her climax.

"Yes, Sansa, give it to me." He continued to move his fingers until her waves eased. He then focused fully on his manhood inside of her. He stabbed it to the bottom several times and, when he sensed his eruption ascending, he removed it and spilled himself over her buttocks and her lower back.

"Sansa!," moaned him hoarsely with every spasm.
They collapsed heavily onto the mattress. He loosened her wrists and removed the blindfold, and she laid on her side, drawing him to her.

He embraced her waist and rested his face on her breast, recovering the rhythm of his breathing.

They were sweaty, with the hair wet, but they did not care. He adored her any way.

"We'll have to take a bath before dinner, my love," suggested her, smiling.

"I love having a bath. But I confess I don't know if I'll have energy left to fuck you in the water. What we've just done has been so wonderful that I'm worn out."

"Oldie. The bet is pending," needled her.

The issue of the bet was already a recurrent joke between them.

"I never forget the bet, Sansa. I assure you there isn't a single day in which I don't remember it."

"You'd better."

They laughed lazily and then Tyrion got up reluctantly, put on his trousers and shirt and tidied up his hair to request Mhyraz a bath.
Chapter 93

Meereen: Day 14

"Are you going to tell me at once your hypothesis about Jon?," blurted out her, when they were immersed in the hot water, so relaxed that they did not want to get out of their bath.

They had made it again into the water, but she was who had done almost all the effort that time, as she straddled him, moved and stimulated herself until them both reached completion. He did not have to do anything, only let himself go inside of her.

"All right, darling. I'll tell you. I think you deserve it," jested him.

"Come on. Let it fly."

"I must admit that when you really want something, you make your best effort. I'll have to play hard to get more often."

Sansa tugged his hair.

"Tell me NOW," demanded her, grasping handfuls of his locks and threatening with pulling tighter.

"All right, all right, my wolf. I'd like to keep at least half my hair, if it suits you." He cleared his throat ironically and felt another slight pull on his scalp. "I'm coming to the point. What an impatient girl you're, darling. Let's see. What do you know about your aunt Lyanna?"

She opened her eyes wide, taken aback.

"I've talked to you about her before."

"Try to remember all you can. All your father told you about her and the rumours you've heard around you."

She remained thoughtful, gathering her memories.

"She had brown hair and grey eyes. My father said that she was the most good-looking of all them. Her spirit was a little wild. She loved the open air, horse-riding, she even knew how to shoot with a bow. My grandfather Rickard used to scold her because she always came back from the woods of Winterfell with her dresses stained and ripped, and my grandmother Lyarra used to get exasperated because she was quite indomitable and made little account of her septa's teachings. Nevertheless, she learnt ladylike skills and she knew how to be charming when the situation required it, but in the first chance she ran away to the woods or to the parade ground. Arya inherited that same spirit, but my sister was even more indomitable than my aunt." Sansa smiled at the images of her mind. "My father loved very much his only sister. She was his favourite and he couldn't mention her without feeling deeply touched."

"As you know, my grandfather established grand matrimonial alliances. He agreed to the wedding between my uncle Brandon and my mother, and between Lyanna and Robert, thus securing the strong bonds with the Riverlands and the Stormlands. House Stark was living a sweet height. Everything pointed at a brilliant future," said her, ironic. "Robert was beside himself with joy. He was my father's best friend and he was in love with my aunt. He couldn't ask for a better luck. But, as you commented to me short ago, it was very probable that she did not correspond him in the same way. In what my father said I understood that she didn't feel the same enthusiasm toward her betrothed. And soon after that happened what the whole kingdom knows."
"Haven't you wondered if your aunt got pregnant with Rhaegar's child? It was very alike. How much time did she stay with him when they fled? The sufficient to carry a pregnancy off. If he kept her hidden, no one else had to notice it."

A light lit suddenly in Sansa's mind.

"Jon is my aunt's and Rhaegar Targaryen's son?" Her expression was one of incredulity.

"It could be. She probably died giving birth and your father adopted the child, passing him off as his son. Ned also remained a long time far from home. He surely swore to his sister that he wouldn't tell the truth to protect his nephew from Robert's rage."

Sansa was processing the enormity of that hypothesis.

"Tell me the truth, Sansa. Regarding you father's nature, can you imagine him gadding about with a barmaid, a kitchen wench, a peasant or a whore? Do you believe him really capable of having been unfaithful to your mother? Look, Sansa... I couldn't have been unfaithful to you, not even in the beginnings of our marriage, even though we didn't feel this for each other yet. I couldn't betray you. And that taking into account that I'm not like Ned Stark, but in that I understand him perfectly. He wanted his marriage to work, as I wished the same for mine." He took her hand with devotion. "But the oath taken with Lyanna tied him and, though he had to lie to Catelyn and cause her that pain, he couldn't break it. So, in order to respect his sister's last will and save the baby's life, he made up the story of his infidelity. It was the only tale that could be believable."

The water was already nearly cold and they got out of the bathtub. He enveloped her in the towel and they dried themselves by the brazier.

"I can't confirm that it's true, and it could be that your father indeed had his moment of weakness with an unknown woman, and afterwards he wanted to make up for his offense by adopting his son. But let's not discard that Jon might be your cousin. And Daenerys's nephew. It's a very delicate matter and we must keep it a secret until it's proved somehow. We mustn't instill the queen with false hope in regard to the fact that her dear brother Rhaegar could have an alive son."

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 94

Meereen: Day 14

"Of course. We must be completely sure. But... Do you think there's someone who can know the truth? Who else, apart from my father, could be a direct or indirect witness? That happened nearly twenty years ago."

"Maybe we'll never discover the truth, darling. Perhaps neither Jon himself."

Tyrion started to dry her hair patiently.

"Anyway, Jon has Stark blood. That has always been undeniable. Luckily for him, he inherited my father's features, not Rhaegar's, if he's his son," reflected Sansa. "If he had silver hair and light-green eyes, no oath or lie would have protected him from Robert."

"Obviously not. His brown hair and his dark eyes have been his guarantee of survival." He was disentangling her locks one by one and she felt completely relaxed with his hands on her hair. "Sansa... How would you like to name our children?," asked him suddenly, without being able to help it.

She turned to look at him, surprised. Her eyes filled with tenderness.

"I haven't thought of it yet. But I'm sure I don't want to name them with repeated names that have been in our families for many generations. They deserve something new, something exclusively theirs, as theirs will be the chance to live their own lives."

He stared at her quietly, full of admiration for her.

Sansa remembered.

"There's a name I've always liked, and it's similar to your mother's name and my aunt's, but at the same time it's one-of-a-kind. Anna. If we have a girl, I think we'll name her Anna. You like it?"

"I love it, Sansa. It's gorgeous. Simple and easy to remember. Anna it is, then," accepted Tyrion, smiling with delight. "And if it's a boy?"

"Leon. I like Leon. With the accent on the e. I don't know why, but it looks like a good name for a boy. And it sounds good with his Lannister surname." She smiled at him.

"Anna and Leon Lannister. It sounds great. But you'll have to think of more names, because maybe we'll have at least half a dozen children," suggested him, with his lecherous grin.

"Don't you think that I might have something to argue regarding that point? It's me who is going to be pregnant. Do you want me to spend half my life with a belly like an elephant's?"

"Ummm, that sounds wonderful. Do you reckon how arousing it is to envision you naked with a big belly?," whispered him in her ear. "I think I'll keep you pregnant constantly. Especially because I'm crazy about the process of planting babies into that lovely, wet and hot belly of yours."

She let out a cackle. On her cheeks she had that lovely blush which reddened her face whenever he said naughty things.
"Oh, you're impossible, Tyrion. What am I doing to do with you?"

"I'm thinking of a couple of things you could do with me." He raised his eyebrow, mischievous.

Sansa threw him a cushion and it hit his face.

"Are you sure your good aim wouldn't be useful to Daenerys? You have improved it spectacularly since you wedded me."

"Well, perhaps I'll ask Mhyraz to teach me to shoot with the slingshot," replied her.

That gave Tyrion an idea.

"Do you know you're right? I may suggest Ser Barristan to let Mhyraz teach his mates to shoot with the slingshot. It's an efficient weapon and any child could use it to defend themselves against bad people."

"Mhyraz will be even prouder," said Sansa.

"Yes. And if he teaches the guests as well, he won't feel he's beneath them. The noble children need some lessons of humbleness."

"How do you reckon they'll be integrating in the pyramid?"

"It seems that they're not causing much trouble. Daenerys has a good hand and she knows how to put each one in place. She's taking some of them down a peg or two."

"It's going to be difficult for them to cast aside their privileges. How much time might they live here?"

"The time Daenerys considers necessary to keep the noble people at bay. It could take years."

"And if she decides that we must march on Westeros?"

"Then they won't be of more use and she'll let them go. Unless they by their own will wish to go with us to Westeros and their families allow them too. Anyway, when they're of age she won't hold them prisoners against their will."

He already had made her mane shine and they were sitting on the bed. They kept silent for some moments.

"Tyrion... What would you like first, a boy or a girl? Everybody wants to have a male first-born."

He caressed her hand.

"I don't care, Sansa. Any son or daughter from your belly will be a blessing for me. Anyway, we don't even know if we'll have any legacy to give them, apart from our spiritual wealth."

"I'd like to get pregnant in a year at the latest, either way. I don't mind if we're here or in Westeros. It'll be wonderful to enlarge the family. I'm yearning for turning you into a father." She rested her hand on his cheek, upon his manly blond beard.

"Gladly, darling. A year sounds good. I'll love you to turn me into a father, and me to turn you into a mother," whispered him, with his eyes lit with need. "But meanwhile, we have a year to train in the process of making babies. It's not bad."
"No, it's not bad at all."

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 14

The children knocked to take away the bathing items and Mhyraz brought dinner. Tyrion remembered what he wanted to say to him.

"Listen, Mhyraz... I have another proposal for you. If you don't like it, you don't have to accept, all right?"

"All right, master."

"I've thought you could teach the other children of the pyramid to shoot with the slingshot. To the boys and the girls. It would be a good defense method for everyone. If you're interested, speak with Ser Barristan to set up a place for you. Do you agree?"

The boy's eyes gleamed.

"Yes, master."

"Then we have a deal. Firstly you'll have to teach your mates to make slings."

"No problem, master."

"You're a very efficient boy and Lady Sansa and I are very proud of you. Are you doing well with your new brothers and sisters?"

"We're doing better now, master. They're getting used to live here."

"Very well. Soon you'll be good friends, you'll see. You can retire and come back later to collect the things."

"Yes, master." The child bent and went out, with a broad smile.

"I think that he idolizes you," assured Sansa, grinning, sitting by the table.

"Clever boy," joked Tyrion, serving wine to her.

"He is. But it's difficult for a child not to idolize you. They sense your gentle nature. Your younger nephew and niece loved you very much."

He remembered.

"Cersei detested me to say certain things before them. Some curse words and stuff like that. They and I had our secret codes to plot behind her mother's back."

"Very nice. I see you were a great influence." She could not restrain her smile.

"They needed another perspective on life. Living tied to their mother's apron strings didn't benefit them very much."

"Sometimes, loving one own's children it's not enough, isn't it?"

"Not if Cersei is the mother, Sansa. You see what she did with Joffrey."
"Cersei was always so...?" She did not find the word to finish her question.

"So bitch?," ended him for her. "Yes, almost always. Sometimes she has had her moments of weakness with rare flashes of humanity. But even as a child she was an arrant asshole. I've never understood what it was that Jaime saw in her."

"She's beautiful. And she can be charming when she tries."

"It's true. She knows how to daze when it suits her," admitted him. "The gods know what she must be plotting now, with a clear track to commit any felony without Tywin to control her."

Sansa suddenly recalled something.

"And her engagement to Ser Loras?"

"It has come to nothing. There's no one left to force her to marry him. I'd dare to deduce that Loras is not very sorrowful for that, either."

"He loved Renly Baratheon. It must be dreadfully hard to lose him. And later, to feel compelled to feign enthusiasm for his engagement to me." She felt pity for her brief betrothed.

"You didn't have a good time then either, darling. And you also had to feign."

"He intertwined his fingers with hers. "But at least with our betrothal you didn't have to fake leaps of joy," offered him, with his half smile of apology. "Sansa... When my father commanded me to wed you, I admit that, at the deep bottom... I didn't feel so utterly bad as I should. A gorgeous girl, a real lady, from one of the most ancient families of Westeros and coming from the North, the largest territory in the Seven Kingdoms. I confess that... I desired you. Not only for your claim on Winterfell, but because... How couldn't I want you? You were what I've always dreamed of a woman, Sansa. Everything I was sure would never be mine. A beautiful and kind-hearted young woman to whom offer all I am." He cast his eyes down to the table.

She squeezed his hand.

"I know you'd never have been so selfish as to want me only for my claim on Winterfell. And that you'd have awaited as long as necessary, for me to give myself to you. I don't see anything bad in your desire for me, Tyrion. On the contrary, I feel pleased. You were one of the scant people there who didn't see me as the disgraced daughter of the traitor."

"You were a child. Tall and grown, but a child."

"And the fact that you thought that way speaks a lot about you, my love. You didn't throw yourself over my body as any other in your circumstances would have done. But it's natural that you found me attractive: I had flowered already and left behind the childish shape. You weren't made of stone." She smiled to cheer him up. "You were yearning for bedding me that first night, weren't you? When you were so drunk and I was so scared, and while I was undressing to consummate the marriage, you looked at me with those caressing and guilty eyes. I realized it, Tyrion. I noticed that you wished it."

"Yes, I suppose that I wasn't able to pretend very well. How could I? For me you were a goddess. Every night I was craving for bedding you. I longed for it like an insane man."

"I sensed it. By then I noticed intuitively your sexual need. But it terrorized me and if I accepted you in my bed, there wouldn't be a way back and then I was not ready to be your wife entirely. Or to admit that I was a Lannister. How could you fight back your need? I'm sure you had a bad time. I know you. But you said to me that you weren't unfaithful to me."
"And it's true, Sansa. I'd never have been unfaithful to you. I... relieved myself in solitary. With my own hand," confessed him, embarrassed.

A wide smile spread over her face.

"You masturbated? How many times?" Her calm curiosity surprised him.

"Many."

"Did you think of me while you were doing it?"

"Yes," answered him, baldly.

She got nearer him and pulled his manhood out of his trousers, starting to imitate with her hand the movements he would have done on his own cock.

"Did you do it in our bedroom?"

He was breathing laboriously, focused on that maddening hand on his cock.

"Yes. When I knew you were sleeping," he succeeded in saying. It was an effort to think.

"Did you like imagining that I woke up and caught you by surprise?"

She increased the rhythm, staring at his eyes.

"That drove me hopelessly horny, Sansa."

"Did you wish me to make it to you?"

He was about to explode.

"Exactly the same you are making now, darling."

She knelt before him.

"And would you have liked to finish like this?"

Sansa introduced his cock into her mouth and immediately received his seed inside.

"Sansa!," moaned him, transported. When he could speak again, he said to her, smiling out of sheer happiness: "Yes, darling. I'd have loved to finish like this."

"I'm glad I've fulfilled one of your fantasies," said her, naughty.

She put the relaxed cock back in its place and tidied up his trousers. She got up innocently, as if she had not just made him one of the best handjobs and blowjobs of all his life.

Soon afterwards Mhyraz returned to take away the dinner utensils.
Chapter 96

Meereen: Day 14

When Mhyraz retired, Tyrion laid his hungry look on Sansa.

"A Lannister always pays his debts. And I owe you one."

She smiled at him, suggestive.

"You know you owe me nothing. What I did to you before was as gift. For having respected me always, for not having mocked me like the people in the Red Keep, and for the times you desired me without touching me when you could have done it at any moment, and you didn't because you cared for what I wanted," clarified her.

"I know I owe you nothing, darling, as you don't owe me anything either. But I want to give it to you, if you accept my present." His green eyes were reverent over her body.

She took his hand, moved.

"Of course I accept it, Tyrion. I love your gifts," affirmed Sansa, with her roguish smile.

"And I love yours. Lay down onto the bed, darling, as my gift is about to start."

She lied down with her head resting on the pillows, moistening her lips with anticipation. He raised her skirt to her waist, uncovering her legs, and slipped down her underwear very slowly from the hips. Tyrion invariably held his breath every time he gazed at her more intimate parts, which gave so many pleasures to them both. He softly began to play with the pubic hair and made her separate her legs to have full access.

"Did you touch yourself any time, Sansa? Did you pleasure yourself before really knowing what sex is?" He was talking to her because of the great arousal he knew his words provoked her and, by the way, him too.

She blushed, as if what he was asking awoke her modesty while his fingers tangled softly in the auburn hair.

"No, Tyrion," confessed her. "I never touched myself. I believed it was bad to do that with oneself. And besides, I was not sure of how to do it."

His fingertips went down until they almost grazed the clit and she held her breath for an instant.

"Then, you were completely a virgin and so innocent... And that drives me very, very horny." He went on playing with the pubic hair, moving his index and ring fingers over her outer lips without touching yet the inner folds. "But when you flowered, didn't you feel the desire to touch yourself? Didn't you dream of the Knight of Flowers doing things to you? You must have some vague idea about sex. Your septa taught you that the wife must lay down on the bed and allow patiently her husband to place himself over her and stab his lordly cock between her legs. That's what all septas teach." His smile was wicked.

"Hey!," scolded her, mockingly, breathing faster. "Don't laugh at my septa."

His smile widened, while his fingers got dangerously next to the rosy folds.
"Septas are excellent teachers, except for what regards to sex. You should admit that, darling. Practically what they hammer into all the young ladies is that women mustn't enjoy these pleasures and have to remain passive in bed, because fucking is a sin if it's made for other things apart from procreating children," recited Tyrion. "But they aren't to blame for having to teach that drivel. That's what they have learnt. Didn't you wonder if there was a body made of blood and flesh and real hair under those decent dresses and capes which covered them from head to toe?"

She smiled with her eyes closed, focused on his fingers over the edge of her abyss, remembering that once Septa Mordane had asked her if she wanted to see the hair concealed under her cape. Sansa never had seen it.

"Of course I wondered that, Tyrion. She once, in King's Landing, during an afternoon in which I turned insolent because I was very angry with my father and Arya, she asked me if I wanted to see her hair, and I was impolite and almost spat onto her face that actually I wasn't interested in the least in her. Poor woman. She gave her life for me and that afternoon I behaved as a bitch." Tears filled her closed eyes and Tyrion dried them delicately with his other hand.

"She knew you loved her despite all, Sansa. She gave her life for you as a mother would have done."

His two fingers were extremely gentle over the outer lips. He then touched softly the inner folds with his middle finger, barely the hint of a touch like the graze of a feather. It was enough for her nearly jerking up and emitting a slight moan. The inner lips were drenched and Tyrion felt painfully pressed against his trousers, while his rebellious cock desired her with all its fury.

_I know this gift is a torture for you, dear insatiable cock. But now you have to put up with it. For once you don't intervene._ It was excitingly hard to restrain himself, but he would do it.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 14

"Did you see the dogs and horses copulate in Winterfell?" His middle finger slid over the wetness, up and down, tracing her sweet entrance.

"Yes, sometimes. My brothers, my sister and I laughed when we saw them and Theon made racy comments, but Robb and Jon quickly moved Arya and me away from the sight of the animals copulating."

"The defenders of their sisters' virtue," joked Tyrion, intensifying the touch of the finger on the folds.

"Don't mock," scolded her, without opening her eyes. Her mouth was open and her head was moving back onto the pillow. Tyrion got overexcited watching her delight. He started to rub the folds more intensely, using all his fingers except for the thumb. She instinctively parted her legs more and moaned audibly.

"Surely your eldest brothers and Theon jerked off. All teenagers do. You never caught them?"

She was so concentrated on the frenzy of his fingers that answering to him was starting to cost an effort. Tyrion smiled, observing all her reactions.

"Yes, Theon once, but he was backwards and I didn't see what he was doing. I only noticed that his arm was shaking and he was groaning as if he were in pain. When he realized I had just got into the room, he quickly stopped that and covered it up, but he looked at me in a way I didn't like at all."

"He looked at you with lust. That little scumbag desired you, Sansa. You didn't want anyone?" The fingers were reaching a constant and steady rhythm, but he incited her to recall the first sexual sensations of her childhood, to increase in her the feeling of agonizing pleasure.

"No, Tyrion. I dreamed of valiant knights and princes who came to fetch me and take me with them, and the only things I imagined were kisses and weddings but, beyond that, everything was like fog. I wasn't sure there was much more. And I also was a bit frightened of those other vague things." It was difficult to pronounce the sentences while his fingers were driving her mad. "Tyrion... I'm very near the edge. I want to finish on your mouth. Please."

He immediately placed between her legs, put her thighs onto his shoulders and held her hips firmly.

"Right away, my lady. Your wish is my command. I adore to taste this wonder between your legs."

"Do it, Tyrion. I want to feel you there."

He did not have to be asked twice and licked all the length of her folds, up and down.

"Yes, Tyrion!" She pressed his head against her, with her hands in his locks.

"Did you dream that a valiant knight did you this?," asked him hoarsely, plunged in her folds.

"No. I had no idea of this. I'm on the verge."

"You were so innocent. So lovely." His lips gripped the clit and his tongue made circles around it,
just how they carried her to the highest heights.

"Tyrion!," cried her out in the middle of the silence of the night, pressing him desperately, and he felt every one of her spasms of pleasure against his mouth and face. He helped her to overfly the waves and finally he gave a last wet kiss to the satisfied folds and stood up, smiling.

She was panting and a thin layer of sweat covered her forehead and her upper lip. He bent to lick the droplets over her lip and she moved a little to melt with him in a kiss.

"All this frightened you, didn't it? As much as it attracted you. You had barely any idea of this, but you felt things. Things you couldn't name." He searched for her underwear and helped her to put it on, attentive. He lied by her side.

"I knew that between my parents there was a sort of current of passion, and they often kissed in front of us. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, I heard my mother's muffled shouts and I got scared, convinced that something was happening to her, but as the following day she was perfectly well, I realized that whatever was what happened at night mustn't be so bad." She smiled at the memory. "My parents were lucky. They got married by duty, but they fell in love."

"Like us, Sansa. But I'm not going to be torn away from you, ever. I won't let any harm fall upon you, not any I can prevent," said him with fervour, taking her face in his hands.

"My parents surely thought that too, Tyrion. That they wouldn't be torn away."

"We aren't your parents. And I'm not Ned. For me you're everything, Sansa, everything. No one is going to separate me from you, ever. Not even the queen. No one, Sansa. Do you hear me? I'm going to spend the rest of my life stuck to you, and you'd better accepting it, because I'm going to fulfill it strictly."

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 98

Meereen: Day 14

She felt moved to the bottom of her heart. And she believed him fully. A voice in her insides said to her that he would fulfill it. Because he always fulfilled what he swore. He was a man of his word.

A man of honour. But his honour was absolutely and exclusively for her and the world he wanted for them both.

She accepted him and loved him as he was.

With the tears running down her cheeks, she put her hands on his beard and gave him the sweetest kiss in the world.

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Tyrion felt that his heart weighed a hundred stone while he headed for the bedroom.

He had never felt more ashamed of being a Lannister. His father's cruelty knew no bounds.

That day his hesitant relationship with Sansa had progressed to a likeable understanding. They had strolled across the gardens of the Red Keep. It was a lovely morning, with the warm sun shining and the clean and fresh breeze from the sea blowing. Sansa's hair gleamed in the sun and the whiteness of her skin contrasted with the burst of colours around her; the intense green of the bushes and the top of the trees, and the polychromy of the flowers. She was so beautiful that she took his breath away, and the act of looking at her hurt him because he desired her and he could not touch her. She was wearing one of those demure dresses she always wore in King's Landing, which were tied on the waist, with very long sleeves and a V neckline that scarcely showed the beginning of her breasts. She never asked him for anything, out of pure pride and because she did not trust him very much, and Tyrion was pondering to order new gowns for her, as jewelry were ruled out. She needed new clothes, because she only had a few dresses. He had taken note of the ones she had, which she wore often, and he deduced that his dear sister Cersei had not supplied her wardrobe since long ago, except for the ostentatious wedding gown and the one she would wear in Joffrey's wedding. He would have to bring her up the matter with delicacy and observe her reaction. He as her husband must provide for her and he wished to do it. He wanted to do something for her but he did not know what to do, because she did not request him anything and he did not dare to ask her.

He was walking by her side, thinking about that dilemma, when they crossed paths with those idiots called Ser Eldric Sarsfield and Lord Desmond Crakehall, who laughed at them when they passed by, like most people in the Red Keep. He started to recite their names and Sansa asked him:

"What are you doing?"

"I have a list," informed him.

"A list of people you mean to kill?," asked her, surprised.

"For laughing at me? Do I look like Joffrey to you? No, death seems a bit extreme. Fear of death, on the other hand..." His ironic tone was beginning to make her smile by then and he felt pleased with the sight of that smile that had not been lavished until that day.
"You should learn to ignore them," advised her.

"My lady, people have been laughing at me far longer that they have been laughing at you. I'm the Halfman, the Demon Monkey, the Imp."

"You're a Lannister," pointed her, feigning reproval. "I am the disgraced daughter of the traitor Ned Stark," recited her.

"The disgraced daughter and the Demon Monkey. We're perfect for each other," sentenced him. And the curious thing was that, when he said that, though mockingly, something stirred in his insides. A perfect couple. He almost could believe it. He quickly scolded himself for his nonsense.

After that Sansa asked him how they could punish the two blokes who had laughed at them. He proposed to find out what both dudes' perversions were, suggesting that someone named Lord Desmond Crakehall had to be a pervert. Sansa then said something which lightened his heart, not because of what she said, but because of how she said it.

"I heard that you're a pervert." She smiled, amused. Obviously since their wedding night she had time to confirm that her husband's reputation had been much exaggerated.

Tyrion was glad that she knew the truth about that side of him. Though he was not very sure that the rumours were too much exaggerated. He felt like a pervert because all he wished in those moments was to lay her down on the grass and make love to her until she cried out with pleasure.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 14

He made his usual joke about the reputation he had to maintain and then Sansa sat down opposite him, in order to level herself with him, and proposed, in a confidential tone, a way to punish those two, putting sheep shit into their mattresses. She was so innocent that Tyrion felt another sting of guilt. How could he desire that child? She was a child. And he was a pervert for wanting her. Well, the truth was that he had stared at her modest lowcut, and her breasts were not certainly those of a child. They were generous, and he noticed it, even though she did not make them jut out.

He had laughed with her when he listened to her childishly malicious plan of the sheep shit, and he realized they were enjoying together. It was something totally childlike and innocent, but a certain understanding had settled between them, and he was yearning for going on with the advance along that path and breaking one by one that hurt girl's walls.

But, as every time he had dared to dream of something beautiful, his father destroyed his hopes. The moment of understanding was cut short due to that damned meeting of the small Council in which Tywin and Joffrey had reported him the terrible assassination of Robb and Catelyn Stark at The Twins.

And Tyrion had to tell Sansa that news.

His heart weighed a hundred stone.

When he entered the bedroom, she was sitting on the windowsill, with her face swollen and drenched with tears.

Another person had come early and he did not know whether he must curse himself or feel relieved for not having to tell her the news.

But he felt her pain and her rejection as a knife wound. Sansa again was out of his reach, so far away from him that he could not access to her. The walls had returned tenfold. He was a Lannister, a member of the family that had killed hers.

He had never wished so much to offer solace to someone. If only she had allowed him, he would have hugged her and let her cry on his chest until she had emptied herself from her weep and at least she would know he was there. And that she was not so alone as she thought.

But now Sansa would never love him.

Tyrion woke up with his cheeks wet. He had wept while he was sleeping. The dream had been so exact and detailed as if he had relived that day, which had started so well to end in a complete disaster, with new and heartbreaking sufferings for Sansa and a deep sorrow and frustration for him.

The worst was the sensation that she was sneaking away from him. That his family were stamping her in all the possible ways and all he could do was to pick up her pieces and try to stick them together again.

That was what made him cry in his sleep. And what awoke him in the early morning.

Relief flooded him when he felt Sansa's warm body next to him. They loved each other so much
that his heart overflowed.

That damned dream reminded him of things he preferred to forget. But he did not want to forget everything about that day. He did not want to forget that morning of understanding with her.

Sansa, as usual, sensed his uneasiness and woke up. She looked at him sleepily and he could not help but smile.

"What's happening, my love?" Just then she saw the tears he had left forgotten over his face. "You're crying." She moved her fingers close to his face to dry them gently. "A nightmare?"

"Yes, you would call it that. I've dreamed about the day you found out about Robb and your mother."

"Oh, Tyrion." She continued to graze his cheeks softly with her fingertips. "You still blame yourself for that? You know I don't blame you for anything, my love."

"What actually torments me about that nightmare is that you in the end go far away from me and I can't reach you. That morning we had laughed together in the gardens, plotting the revenge against Ser Eldrick Sarsfield and Lord Desmond Crakehall. That was the first time you laughed openly with me. You lit up my day. For the first time I felt at ease in our marriage and I noticed that you also began to feel comfortable with me. I wanted so desperately to please you and to see you happy, Sansa. But just then you slipped through my fingers."

She caressed his beard.

"Now I am here, by your side. I'm yours. I'm not going anywhere. I love you, Tyrion." She took his hand and placed it onto her own body, so he could feel her. "See, my love? Touch me. Every time you have that nightmare, you simply have to touch me and you'll calm down."

"Sansa, I love you. I'll never deserve you."

"Shhh, hush. Let me decide about that. And now touch me for real. I've hardly felt your hand upon me. That has been like the graze of a feather," scolded her, sensually, with her voice still a little hoarse by sleep.

He hinted his lecherous grin.

"As my lady commands."

And he touched her in earnest, until he made her cry out in the middle of the early morning.
Meereen: Day 15

Tyrion got ready for his usual visits and gave Sansa a kiss.

"Have a very good morning, darling. I'll think of you and I'll get hard as stone recalling our last sessions. I have lots of pleasant images of you stored in my memory that gladden my time whenever I have to do tiresome and boring things which don't require concentration." He had taken her face in his hands and was smiling. "I can't decide which image is the best, if you making me the hand job of my life, or I fucking your pretty ass, or I making you a hand job, or..."

She silenced him, putting her hands on his lips and laughing.

"Tyrion, behave! You have to go out to fulfill your responsibilities with the queen, remember? If you start to list all we have done I'm afraid you won't leave this room."

"Don't tell me twice, Sansa, because I still can lay you down onto that carpet and add another session to the list."

She burst in cackles and pushed him to the door.

"All right, all right, I've caught your hint. But later I'm coming back to fix you up. Get ready. Maybe it will be difficult for you to sit down for some days because I have the intention to fuck you until I wear you away," threatened him, with sparkling eyes.

She laughed even more.

"We'll see. Perhaps I'll wear you away."

"Ah, so you're challenging me. Well, Well. I love challenges. And with a laughter and a body so cute as yours, challenges are a pleasure."

"Come on, go now, lustful man."

"See you later, hot woman."

They kissed a last time, smiling, and he, reluctantly, was gone.

The market was as bustling as usual. A horde of freedfolk and Meereenese citizens were walking along the narrow spaces between the stands and it was difficult to move forward among the crowd. If it were not for his escorts breaking him trail, it would have been specially complicated for him to move. Pod did not stuck from his side and kept alert.

He was searching for Sarik and might find him in any area of the market, so, as always, he summoned up his patience and got ready to comb the open-air venue elbowing his way forward among the throng.

Suddenly, in some imprecise place, an uproar started to be heard and Tyrion got tense instantly. He drew his dagger and Pod unsheathed his sword, prepared to defend themselves. The two Unsullied closed ranks around them, with their weapons ready.

The main issue was to locate a escape route. A human stampede could be formed at any moment
and Tyrion did not have the slightest intention to die crushed. People was getting scared and agitated and a mob out of control could be terrible.

"This way!," shouted Tyrion to his companions, pointing to a gap that led to a side street, out of the market. They ran through it and went far away from the human multitude.

Then they saw it.

Smoke.

Something was on fire many yards further. And the crowd ran riot, terrified.

A shiver ran down Tyrion's spine. That was going to be horrible. There were lots of women, children and old people in the market.

They reached safety far from those whom were running out of control, raising their weapons in case they had to defend themselves, and they observed trampled bodies, knocked down stands and they noticed the smoke which was spreading with its acrid smell. Screams could be heard everywhere, many of them ear-piercing. The Unsullied and the Second Sons who where Daenerys's city guards were doing what they could to contain and direct that chaos, but they were overwhelmed and had to move away from the massacre in order not to end like lots of those poor wretched.

Tyrion was thinking at full speed.

_How has the fire been started? It must have been intentioned. The Sons of the Harpy? The market is one of the biggest sources of income for the Crown and has many customers, among which there are hundreds of freedfolk. A very cunning blow. Will they leave their signature this time? Surely they'll make it look like it has been an accident. If the Sons of the Harpy come from the pyramids, they won't sign with blood on the walls like the first time. Their children are Daenerys's hostages._

"We have to do something," said him out loud. "There are many wounded who will die if they don't receive immediate help or if they aren't taken away from the mob. It's necessary to organize the assistance. Green Beetle and White Fly," he said to both Unsullied. "Gather your comrades-in-arms and carry all the wounded you can to the Square of Graces, which is very near here and has enough space to place them there. A group should search for the healers and another should go to the houses to ask for blankets, bandages, water and whatever the neighbours can contribute. The wounded are both freedfolk and Meereenese and this is not the moment to distinguish. At last, others must run to the camps and give the alert so many soldiers can come here to give a helping hand and restore order."

The two soldiers nodded and departed.

"Pod, we have to go back to the pyramid to speak with the queen and decide what plan of action will be the next. Important decisions must be adopted."

"Very well, my lord."

They ran through the chaotic streets of Meereen heading for the Great Pyramid, with their weapons unsheathed and regardful of all the movements they detected. Tyrion did not trust the shadows and the Sons of the Harpy could emerge from any corner.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 101

Meereen: Day 15

As soon as he crossed the doors, the commotion indicated him that in the pyramid the alarm had spread because of the catastrophe in the market. He instantly thought that Sansa might be driven mad with worry, but as he could not go to calm her down at that moment, he talked to Pod.

"Go to my rooms, explain Lady Sansa what has happened and say to her that I'm perfectly well, and that I'm going for an urgent meeting with the queen." He knew that Sansa probably would not have lunch alone, especially if she was nervous, so he had an idea. "Tell her too that I request her to go to your rooms so Leena can accompany her, and she might take her needlework labour or whatever she needs. And if I don't come back early, she can have lunch with you both. All right? I don't want her to stay alone waiting for me and suffering due to the anxiety."

"Right away, my lord." The boy vanished in the corridors.

Tyrion addressed a soldier in fluent Valyrian, which he had perfected since he was living in Meereen and which he already used in all his transactions, with no further need for interpreters.

"Where's the queen? I need to talk with her. You have heard about the market, don't you?"

"Yes, master. The Mother is in her private hall, with Missandei and Ser Barristan."

Tyrion thanked him and hurried ahead.

He arrived at the door of the private hall breathless and sweaty in his haste. The sentinels gave him way.

"Lord Tyrion!," exclaimed Daenerys, with the anxiety clearly showing in her tense face, extremely pale, paler than usual. "You're all right, thanks to the gods."

He went to the point.

"Thank you for your concern, Your Grace. I was in the market with Podrick and my two escorts when the fire started. We succeeded in escaping the stampede, but we witnessed atrocious scenes. I sent both Unsullied to organize the city guards to carry the wounded to the Square of Graces, apart from going in search of healers and asking for citizen cooperation. Others have gone to the camps to raise the alarm and mobilize so many soldiers as possible to help their mates and bring order to the city."

"Excellent measures, Lord Tyrion. It's a relief to know that you can be a person to count on in situations of emergency. I also have sent some of my guards to find out about what has happened and I have given them practically the same instructions you gave the others."

She did a pause and breathed deeply to recover her composure.

"Tell me. Have you observed something relevant about how could the fire start? Do you think it might have been a deed of the Sons of the Harpy?"

"I detected the cloud of smoke and the first screams quite far from where I were, so I could not observe how it all started. It might have been an accident, but we'll have to carry out some research, questioning direct eyewitnesses who have survived and trying to work out if the fire began
accidentally or if it was planned. And if it has been planned, my suspicions incline me, effectively, to the Sons of the Harpy, though I doubt that this time they have left their signature. If their members belong to the noble families, they won't lay claim to the attack as being their deed, because their sons, daughters, grandchildren, nephews and nieces are your hostages. I think what they'll do will be to create confusion and make us doubt if it could have been an accident, so we can't accuse them openly. It's what I was fearing; I knew they wouldn't stay idle. They're very elusive and tricky."

Daenerys sighed with frustration.

"My informants haven't been able to provide me with any revealing information until now. Those ruffians conceal themselves perfectly. They never join in groups that draw attention to them. They don't go from pyramid to pyramid plotting their conspiracies, so what occurs to me is that they set dates on the streets, where they meet among the passers-by without arousing suspicion, or they go to public places where they share their plans secretly, hidden by the bustle. Another alternative might be that they are banding together with merchants or other trade people, with whom they speak when they go to do their purchases and those merchants could be their spies and contacts. I incline myself to the latter option, which is even least suspicious and more difficult to discover than their meetings on the streets and public places. What is clear is that they are organized but they aren't gathering before our noses."

"I think the same as you, Your Grace. They must have contacts with whom plot their acts without drawing attention. Everybody has to make transactions and buy and sell every day. Who we can keep an eye on could be the rich merchants. If they possessed slaves, they might have entered the Sons of the Harpy."

"Well thought. We'll focus on watching them. But now we have a city to clear, many injured to tend to and dead people to bury. I have to go to the Square of Graces to verify the magnitude of the tragedy, and we'll have to fit out a temporary dispensary to shelter the wounded. Those who aren't seriously injured will go back soon to their houses, but the others need specialized assistance and I'm afraid the city healers are going to be overworked for a while, because they won't be sufficient. What building can be used as a dispensary? All those poor people shouldn't be left in the open air."

Tyrion thought of a solution.

"We'll request the Green Grace to let us use the underground chambers of the temple with that purpose. They are quite large. The illumination and air circulation aren't very good, but at least the wounded will have a roof. The chambers are not places consecrated to worship and they have independent entrances, so the priestesses won't be forced to interrupt their normal activities, though they also will suffer the nuisances of this emergency."

Daenerys looked at him approvingly.

"We all are going to suffer the nuisances of this emergency, and the gods cannot turn their back on their harmed sons and daughters," she said, with irony. "So the Graces are going to do more than praying. It's decided. I'm getting ready for the visit to the victims. You'll accompany me along with the other counselors. I'll send you notice by means of Mhyraz, so be ready when the boy summons you. Go soothing Lady Sansa. I'll await you in an hour."

"Yes, Your Grace. I'll be there."

He addressed her a bow and hurried to Pod and Leena's rooms.
(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
"Tyrion!," exclaimed Sansa when she saw him coming in. She threw to the floor her needlework labour and she almost flew to him. She knelt and merged with him in a ferocious embrace.

"I'm all right, darling," comforted him, caressing her back. "That's it, that's it. Be calm." Sansa was crying onto his shoulder. "Pod must have told you everything. Fortunately we escaped on time." He let her vent herself with weep.

"Oh, Tyrion. I heard voices and I went out to see what was happening, and when I asked one of the Unsullied, he told me about the fire in the market. I got so frightened! You go there very often and precisely today it was your turn to go, and I believed I was going to turn insane with anxiety." She was touching his face as if to check it was him, who had come back to her, and that he was in one piece. Her frantic preoccupation moved him to the deepest.

"I was dying to see you when Pod and I returned, but I had to join the queen, so I sent Pod to you. But I'm sorry a lot for all this and for not having been able to come earlier by your side, darling. I hate that you suffer." He was drying her tears with his gentle fingers. "Remember I swore I would always be with you. I'm fulfilling it, you see? I said there won't be anything or anyone that separate me from you. I'll always find the way to come back to you."

"I love you," said her, and she hugged him again. "Stay with me."

"Always, my love. Always." He took her face in his hands and gave her a reverent kiss.

"You were very brave and acted with a clear mind. You took charge of the situation," said Sansa, smiling, already calmer. "But that doesn't surprise me."

He smiled at her as well.

"What's going to happen now, Tyrion?"

"In short the queen will go to the Square of Graces to evaluate the damages and to visit the wounded. We have agreed that the serious ones will be accommodated in the underground chambers of the temple and the healers will look after them there. The rest, especially the ones who don't need care, will be moved soon to their houses."

"It might have been an arson attack?"

"The signs look like it, but a research must be carried out."

Sansa kept silent and exchanged with him an understanding look. They would speak about all that privately. She turned to their friends.

"Thank you very much for your hospitality. If weren't for you, I don't know what I'd have done."

"You don't have to thank us, Sansa. We'll be here whenever you need us," affirmed Leena, taking her hand.

"I know it, and I'm glad. We also are here whenever yo need us." Sansa returned the squeeze. "We're going. Tyrion'll march in the queen's cortege in short and I must ensure that he eats
something before that."

Both couples bent and Tyrion and Sansa went to their chambers. Sansa did not let go his hand.

She asked one Unsullied to request Mhyraz to bring Lord Tyrion a collation as soon as possible, because he had not lunched.

"Take it easy, darling. I'm not going to starve," jested him, touched, when he closed the door of their adjacent hall. "A skipping meal won't be a great deal for me. You care for me so much that I'll get fat and I don't want to add overweight to my physical attractions."

"Tyrion, you have to feed yourself, especially after such an intense day like this," insisted her, serious. "Do me that favour, my love."

"Of course, darling. For you, I'd do anything."

They sat while they were waiting for Mhyraz.

"What do you think of all this disaster?," asked Sansa.

"I think the Sons of the Harpy are responsible for it, but surely it'll be impossible to prove. They won't admit to have done it, and if that's so it will be because they belong to the nobility and their children are Daenerys's guests. I'm afraid that from now on they'll act this way. They are playing with the fact that the fire could have been an accident. Fires are too frequent. Those motherfuckers are very astute."

Sansa frowned, thoughtful.

"What do you reckon will happen now in the city?"

"Once the funerals have been celebrated, the streets have been cleared and the remains of the catastrophe have been moved away, I imagine that the market will return to normal little by little, but watchfulness will have to be increased. Today there have been many human casualties and it's going to cost a great effort to the city to recover from this blow."

"There must be a lot of innocent people there, Tyrion. Children. If it has been pre-meditated, those who have done it are rabble of the worst kind."

"There are plenty of rabble of the worst kind. I've spent my life among a few of them."

Sansa grasped his hand, saddened, without words in the presence of so much horror.

Mhyraz knocked and put supper onto the table, with a bow.

"Enjoy it, master."

The boy retired and Tyrion started to eat.

"Be very careful now, my love. The streets are very dangerous."

"Don't worry, darling. We'll have a numerous escort and I'll be alert. Trust my oath, Sansa. I'll always come back to your side."

"You'd better," threatened her, with her half smile.

"You're going to tire of my beautiful face, because you'll have it before you until you get bored,"
warned him, mocking.

"I adore your face. It's the most attractive face there is." She traced with her finger the outline of his scar, and began to get lost in his green eyes.

"Well, yours it's not so bad either, darling." Her gaze was hardening him and the worst was that he had to go in some minutes. "When I'm back, if you're awake get ready because I'm planning to seek compensation with your splendid body, which I'm missing terribly." His eyes full of desire were piercing her and she felt wet between her legs.

"Out there people are suffering and we're here thinking about our pleasures," said her, with a slightly guilty tone.

"We have to celebrate life, Sansa. We're together and love each other, and we can't waste this rare blessing." He intertwined his fingers with hers. "I'm determined to make the most of every minute with you."

"And me too with you."

Mhyraz announced that it was the time. Tyrion gave a long and deep kiss to Sansa, swore that he would return safe and sound and departed.
Chapter 103

Meereen: Day 15

The city was immersed in the calm after the storm. A tense and stiff silence coated the streets. The market square had been cleared of rubble and waste. Most stands had been damaged and some had been charred, and Daenerys commanded to be led to the exact area where the fire had started. Sarik and several freedpeople, guarded by the city guards, were awaiting the royal retinue, to narrate what they had observed. Sarik was there as the market supervisor, and the others were survivals of the tragedy who affirmed to be present at the spot where the fire began and they showed light injuries. Everyone knelt in front of the queen and she made a gesture to indicate them to stand up.

"I was just here," was explaining the one with a grey beard. "I'm a spice merchant and my stand was located just next to the one which started to burn. The fire spread very fast. A spark ignited in my wretched neighbour's tunic and he quickly turned into a human torch. Everyone began to scream and run and the fire spread to some more stands, until some people had the idea to pick up the buckets of water which are placed at intervals. By the time they managed to control the fire, it had consumed five stands, mine among them, and some people had serious burns. But the worst, as you know, was the stampede. Several friends and acquaintances of mine are dead and others are wronged." The man's chin was trembling.

Another, one who had suffered light burns, took the floor.

"No one knows how everything began, Mother," he said. "We were as usual announcing and displaying our products and the next moment the fabrics stand was hell. There were a lot of people and it was impossible to see if someone had caused that. It might be that one of the lanterns caught fire."

"Thank you for your collaboration," said the queen, grateful. "Don't you know anyone else who could have seen something?"

"Only a few who were carried to the Square of Graces and others who are dead," said the burned man.

"Go back to your houses and the Crown will supply you the lost products so you can restart the market as soon as possible. Sarik, inform the merchants that I'll double the surveillance in the market hours and all of them should be alert from now on."

"Yes, kind Mother." The man nearly touched the ground with his forehead.

"Let's go to the Square of Graces," ordered Daenerys to her retinue. "I want to make the count of the dead and the wounded and to organize their move to the temple."

The Square of Graces was a beehive of activity and a pathetic scene. Many gravely wounded were groaning aloud, others suffered quietly and others remained unconscious. The healers and some volunteers were moving from one to another. The dead were stacked in rows in one end of the venue and a large horde of flies were buzzing around them. The guards were preventing their families from taking them away until the Mother had inspected them.

Daenerys walked to the corpses and, while she was advancing, the injured who where laying down on the ground tried to get up and raised their arms to her, calling her Mother in Ghiscari. Mhysa. She addressed nods to all of them and kept silent. Tyrion knew she was so touched she could not
speak, at the risk of bursting in tears, and she could not let herself show weakness in front of her people.

"How many are there?," asked her with a steady voice to the sentinels, staring without blinking at the sad rows covered with flies.

"Sixty-three, Mother. Eighteen of them are men, some of them old, thirty-five are women, almost all young, and there are ten children."

"And soon we'll have to add those who will die in the upcoming hours," added Daenerys, making a great effort to look serene. "How many wounded?"

"One hundred and eighty, Mother."

"How many healers to tend to them?"

"Four, and three assistants with medical knowledge."

_That makes forty-five people per healer, perhaps a little less if we take into account the volunteers. The numbers aren't very uplifting_, thought Tyrion.

"Have they at their disposal all they need to tend to the victims?"

"A big number of citizens have donated sheets, fabrics for bandages, water, vinegar to disinfect, herbs and ointments."

"All must be carried to the underground chambers of the temple, where they'll rest until their recovering or until they pass away to other life. There they'll be properly looked after. The Graces have been alerted already and they'll open their doors." She did a pause. "Get the dead into carts and cover them. In short we'll take them to the ground consecrated for burials in the outskirts of the city. All who can must go to the place and dig a grave spacious enough. We'll officiate the funeral there. The Green Grace will lead the procession and she'll be accompanied by her priestesses."

After that, the entourage got going to the temple, where all the priestesses were awaiting at the main entrance. The wounded who could not move were being moved with stretchers, and others were carried in arms or leaning onto the guards' shoulders.

The Green Grace walked ahead to greet the queen ceremoniously.

"We are sorry for this terrible mishap, Mother. We'll stay up seven nights to pray for the souls of those who have left this world and for the souls of those who are suffering due to the tragedy."

Daenerys nodded respectfully.

"I'll decree three days of official mourning so the relatives can mourn their dead beloved. Now, we'll depart for the burial ground. The dead must be lay to rest as soon as possible."

"Of course, Mother."

The priestesses got ahead and placed themselves in front of the entourage. The guards closed ranks tightly around the queen, the counselors and the priestesses, and a great crowd of people started to incorporate to the funeral procession behind the main retinue. Soon the carts with the corpses arrived, decorously covered with canvas and with the buzzing flies circling around them.

The entourage started to advance slowly. There was at least a mile down the road. The sun soon
would begin to draw to a close and its golden light was coating Meereen and provided it with a deceitful beauty. Tyrion was missing Sansa by his side, but the way things were it was unthinkable that she went out of the pyramid. Under any concept would he risk her to that threat. Moreover, the city was that day a too much sad scene and he did not want Sansa to witness all that. She had understood him without words and had not pleaded with him to allow her to go with him, because she knew he would stand firm in that matter.

But that did not ease the fact that he was missing her. And thus taking into account that the entourage had departed short ago.

But she was like his second skin and his whole heart, and he felt her absence painfully.

(Part of a longer chapter)
Chapter 104

Meereen: Day 15

The long funeral procession kept a reverential silence, only broken by some sobs and weepings. No one spoke and in the sky the swifts were launching their characteristic squeals, and even the sound of the wind that lifted the brick dust could be heard.

By the time they arrived at the place, evening had almost fallen and the sun was hanging over the horizon like a big orange disc. A great number of soldiers were finishing digging the enormous pit. Tyrion observed that one of the volunteers was Jorah. He raised a hand in his direction and the knight corresponded to his greeting. Immediately Tyrion watched how the former royal counselor devoured Daenerys with his eyes, and in his expression there was an unbearable longing. The queen noticed as well and both exchanged a look loaded with emotions.

*He doesn't know yet about her affair with Daario. It's early for it to have come to light, but the rumours soon will be spread, and when it happens Jorah's not going to take it well.*

Tyrion was sure the knight would react very badly and feared he could commit a blunder that costed his life. He would like to be able to help him to overcome the rough time if it was possible and to prevent him from screwing up, but he could not keep an eye on him and the man was old enough to take care of himself.

Everyone awaited that the pit was ended and then the Graces placed themselves on the edge of the hole, facing the royal retinue and the crowd.

The Green Grace pronounced her prolonged speech to commend them to the gods' mercy, and preached for stoicism before misfortune, for the peace in Meereen and for a friendly coexistence of the people. Those were times of change and everyone must accept the divine designs and open their hearts to the new order where all the citizens were free.

*A very nice speech, but I know how much the Sons of the Harpy care about it. Besides, I don't trust these Graces too much, either. All of them come from the Meereenese nobility and it's doubtful that they have sacrificed completely their earthly passions. And anyway the only one I'm certain that nearly came up to those extremes was Baelor the Saint, and he wasn't a great example to follow, either. He was a sanctimonious who was convinced that he could get the realm off the ground with prayers,* thought Tyrion with sarcasm.

The soldiers uncovered the carts and they put the bodies one by one onto the earth. Just then, scenes of pain were unleashed and the frenzied weepings filled the air and got spread, carried by the wind. The burial took long, because the corpses were handled with delicacy and placed carefully on their spots of final rest, side by side. A few of the attendees were crying desperately the names that must have had some of those wretched when they were alive; surely they were their wives, husbands and sons and daughters, who had been so suddenly and cruelly snatched from them. Some of them had to be restrained to prevent them from throwing themselves into the pit.

Tyrion was glad that Sansa was not present. Even though she was strong and had witnessed enough horrors, those people's pain was hard to see.

The soldiers covered the grave with the removed sand and the Graces were singing a canticle that shook like a cry. Daenerys was looking at her front with a solemn expression and, by her side, Missandei was giving free reign to her sorrow silently, with tears running down her cheeks. Ser
Barristan, Grey Worm and Daario stood guard in their strategic positions, and Tyrion, Hizdhar and Kerro took their places behind the queen. The nobleman kept a serious expression, and Tyrion could not discern if that was a mere facade or if the man was really affected. Certainly he knew very well how to be polite.

When the last shovelful of sand was thrown onto the mass grave, the ceremony reached its end and the entourage went back to the city, immersed in silence and in the murmur of the steps on the ground. The wind had stopped and the stars were shining. Tyrion thought that one of them was the evening star, which offered its steady light in the stripe of residual light that the sun had left over the western horizon.

When they arrived at the pyramid, Daenerys announced the counselors that the next day they would meet at first hour to debate the last events, and bid all them good night.

Sansa went to join him when he heard him entering and hugged him.

"Hi, darling," greeted him, with a tired voice.

"Hi, my love," answered her, smiling at him.

They took a seat.

"I'm sorry for coming back so late. The funerals have taken long. Have you eaten dinner?"

"No, but short ago I've requested Mhyraz to bring a buffet supper so we could eat the moment you arrived."

"Very well, my love. How was your afternoon?"

"Leena has accompanied me. We have finished her wedding gown and now we are sewing Pod's suit and yours as well. She's becoming a good seamstress."

"She has the best teacher," lauded him, taking her face with his hands and giving her a kiss.

"How was everything, Tyrion? I've missed you an awful lot."

"I've missed you too." He took her hand. "But the way things are I don't want you to go out."

"I know. I'd like to be always by your side, but I don't want you to worry about me more than necessary."

"Neither I want you to worry about me more than necessary, honey. Remember that Pod and my escorts go always with me, and when they don't it's because I'm marching in the queen's retinue, guarded by two hundred sentinels, so I'm highly protected. And moreover, I'm a clever dwarf and good luck is with me," joked him, to lighten Sansa's mood.

She smiled to show him that she accepted the situation, though the hint of fear did not disappear from the bottom of her eyes.

*It's natural. She loves me as much as I love her. It's the same hint that there must be in my eyes for her.*

"Well, tell me everything, Tyrion."

He related her his morning visits to the builders and the subsequent tragedy in the market, which
happened at noon, in the hour at which the venue was packed, what did it more suspicious to Tyrion's eyes. He told her his reflections about the Sons of the Harpy and his meeting with Daenerys. At last, he described the itinerary of the royal entourage through the city, Daenerys's conversations with the witnesses, the wounded's move to the temple, the count of victims and the funeral procession to the consecrated grounds.

Sansa kept silent for some minutes due to the number of dead and injured. Tyrion squeezed her hand.

"What's going to happen now?," asked her, disheartened.

"Only the gods know. Tomorrow at first hour there will be a Council meeting."

"Let's hope you find a way to find out all you can about the Sons of the Harpy. They have caused a great damage already." She too was taking for granted that they were the authors of the market massacre.

"I'm afraid they go ahead of us, Sansa. They know every trick in the book. We can't accuse them openly. For now we only can keep an eye to try to discover any of their members."

"You'll do what you can, my love. I know it. No one watches over this city more than you."

"But it's not enough, Sansa," said him, with a long sigh. "It's not enough."

Mhyraz brought dinner and they ate it quietly.

"Let's go to bed. You have to rest," said Sansa when the boy went away with the utensils.

He looked at her with hungry eyes and his lewd grin.

"But before that, if you don't mind, we have something pending."

She shot him her provocative smile.

"You're taking long," scolded her.

He lifted her by her hips and she grasped his shoulders, laughing. He carried her to the bed and forgot the rest of the world with her until they fell asleep.
Chapter 105

Meereen: Day 16

"The catastrophe of the market shows hair-raising numbers," began Daenerys. "There are sixty-six dead people by now. Two women and a man have died this early morning in the temple. The one hundred and seventy-seven remaining wounded are being tended in precarious conditions, as they are too much for so scant healers. These do what they can, but they are human beings too and have their limitations. Luckily, more people have offered themselves to give a helping hand, especially victims' relatives. Even though they ignore everything about healing, they are giving a valuable help." She hushed and let her look wander over her counselors. "The inquiries about how the flames ignited in the fabrics stand are being carried out, but without conclusive results until now. The eyewitnesses affirmed that by the moment they realized something was happening, the flames were consuming the stand, which by chance was one of the most vulnerable to fire due to be filled with weaves. There were so many people moving around that every area was packed and no one could see what or who caused the hell. But I suppose all of us coincide that it's very suspicious that the fire started precisely there and it spread so fast. What I've confirmed is that no one in the stands had lit lanterns or torches at that hour of noon. In the beginning it was thought that the reason could be some merchant's slip-up, but it's quite doubtful. It cannot be dismissed that it could be an accident, of course. But the signs point to the fact that it has been intended. One of the most flammable areas of the market, at the rush hour of costumers. Too many coincidences."

"Do you think the Sons of the Harpy are the authors, Your Grace?," asked Hizdhar.

_or he's being genuinely sincere or he's a cynic who pretends very well, _thought Tyrion.

"I can't assure or deny anything. We'll have to take the research to the extent it can be taken and come to the relevant conclusions," answered Daenerys, without getting her fingers burned. "I want you to act on that line, trying to find out all you can about the Sons of the Harpy. It's going to be one of your tasks and I expect to have results in a reasonable period. You know this city like the back of your hand and know better than me how the Meereenese citizens think, feel and act."

She's fully aware that he won't be a great ally in that deal, but she has to perform her role before him. If Hizdhar belongs to the organization, he'll conceal information and lie and he'll only say what his accomplices dictate him, and if he doesn't belong, he won't take much risk, for fear of what his fellow citizens might do him. Being a double spy guarantees him some more immunity in both sides, at least for a time.

"I'll do all it's in my hands, Your Grace."

"I expect so." She looked at him with a cold gleam in her light-green eyes. "I don't want incidents like yesterday's to be repeated, or more innocents to die or be badly injured. We all have the responsibility to safeguard the peace in Meereen," said her, taking them in with her eyes.

"It's going to be like that, my beautiful queen." Daenerys did not feel touched in the slightest by the nobleman's flattery. Daario half-closed his eyes and looked like to be in the verge of leaping to cut his neck.

"During the three days of the official mourning the market will remain closed and the monetary losses will be high. A compensation must be given to the merchants and to the dead sellers' families, and the Crown coffers, which were picking up, will be dwindled again until the market recovers. Our sources of income have lessened drastically and we can't afford more disasters."
Hizdhar, how are the transactions for the fighting arenas going?"

"Apace, Your Grace. I'm recruiting the fighters who are volunteering. Some of them are from the city, others are freedmen, others come from neighbour villages and there are even dothraki who have ridden from the Great Sea Grass purposely for the combats. The news of the reopening of the arenas has spread very fast and has aroused great expectations."

"How are you going to organize the contests? The minor arenas will be open, apart from Daznak's?," inquired Daenerys.

"For now it looks like that. There will be enough fighters. Depending on the category and quality of the warriors, some contests will be developed in the minor arenas and of course the best ones will be saved for Daznak's. There will be two types: single combat and group combat. The fighters will fight in several rounds and the winners will wing next round, until only the final winner remains. In the single combats the fights will be between two opponents, and in the group combats all will fight against all in the same combat but in the end the result will be the same, who is victorious will wing next round. Moreover, I've planned comedy shows between combats. By the way, Your Grace, some of the warriors request you to allow them to be involved in shows with animals like bears, lions, wild boars, wolves and dogs. They want to prove their bravery against the beasts."

_Hopefully the comedy shows won't be borne by dwarves. It's going to be arduous enough already to endure several non-stop hours watching men killing each other or being disemboweled by beasts_, thought Tyrion, frowning so much as the queen.

Daenerys made a grimace of displeasure.

"And who is going to get the beasts? Are my soldiers supposed to go hunting them or what?," set out her, clearly bothered.

"No, Your Grace. The men themselves will take charge of bringing them."

"If it's their wish and they themselves take the trouble with the animals, I won't object. But on them will depend their care, watchfulness and support. Make it crystal clear to them. On the contrary, I don't want animals in the arenas."

"They know it perfectly, Your Grace."

"Well. When do you plan to start the season?"

"In two weeks I'll open the minor arenas, and Daznak's in one month at the latest. The shows will be announced throughout the whole city. I'll publicize them broadly to draw the biggest amount possible of spectators."

"I trust your ability to organize, Hizdhar."

The nobleman nodded in token of assent and respect.

Then, she addressed her captains.

"Daario and Grey Worm, I blindly trust you and your soldiers to keep peace and order in this city. Your work is excellent and yesterday you carried out an invaluable task managing to restore calm in a short period, and besides thanks to your efficiency many people have survived the market massacre. And that without mentioning your enormous daily effort. You're the best armies a queen could have and I'm proud that you remain loyal to me," praised Daenerys, clearly moved.
Especially the look she exchanged with Daario was about to give her away. "Although fortunately Meereen is not at war and you can't test your valour in the battlefield, you prove it through many other ways, day after day."

"Thanks, Mother. One lives to serve you," said Grey Worm.

"I swor my sword to you and it'll be yours until the day of my death," reaffirmed Daario.

And you have sworn other things to her, too, friend. Tyrion smiled, sarcastic.

"The following subject is that I've sent a raven to prince Doran requesting him to send maesters from the Citadel. After the tragedy I've noticed that we lack sufficient medicine men and I want to offset that shortage. The maesters will live in the Great Pyramid and will tend to everyone who needs their care, along with the Meereenese healers."

"Excellent measure, Your Grace," pointed Ser Barristan. "Lots of lives will be spared."

Daenerys smiled at him and addressed the next issue.

"The school will be opened next week. In a few days Lord Tyrion will give me the final count of children and teachers, but it seems that it's situated in around three hundred pupils plus my thirty guests and a total of twenty suitable teachers. The rooms for the lessons will be ready in short and they'll be the ones on the second floor which aren't occupied. Lady Sansa will go on teaching her lessons to the orphans in the room adjacent to the chambers she shares with Lord Tyrion."

She crossed a look with Tyrion and he nodded.

"At last, twenty families on extreme situation will move to the pyramid to spend the winter. They are families in which some of their members are severely disabled or have some incurable and not contagious illness, prioritizing that who suffer it are the patriarchs or matriarchs, who are in a difficult situation to maintain and provide properly for their relatives. Here every one of them will receive the adequate attentions."

She did a last pause.

"Regarding the rest of the matters, some relevant reports have come to me. King Tommen tomorrow will wed Lady Margaery, and Lady Lysa Baelish, formerly Arryn, is dead, likely at the hands of a bard who threw her through the Moon Door of the Eyrie."

Sansa's aunt? Has Littlefinger got rid of her so soon? It's not surprising, on the other hand. She was a frankly annoying woman, reflected Tyrion, ironic, without feeling too much regretful for his thoughts. Daenerys doesn't swallow the story about the bard, of course. Now Littlefinger, after becoming a widower, is the regent lord of the Vale on behalf of loony Robin Arryn who, as I can foresee, won't live much beyond his spoiled childhood with such a father-in-law as his protector. This keeps getting more interesting.

"That's all for now. In an hour the public audience will start and today I'll be accompanied by Daario Naharis and Lord Tyrion. Go freshen yourselves up and I'll wait for you in the audience hall in a while. Have a good day all of you."

Everyone made a bow and went away.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 106

Meereen: Day 16

Sansa was getting ready for the orphan's lessons of that day, which like the audience would start in an hour. Dara had just combed her hair and she was radiant.

"You're very beautiful," lauded him, as every day.

"Thank you, my love," said her, bending to kiss him. "How was the Council meeting?"

Tyrion told her everything.

"My aunt Lysa is dead? Thrown through the Moon Door?," asked her, shocked.

"And I think I know who is her true murderer."

"Littlefinger?"

"No more no less. No offense, darling, but your aunt was not too much in her right mind ultimately. I had occasion to check during my journey back from the Wall. I have to tell you that story another moment," promised him, smiling. "But as I was saying, it's not that I think that because your aunt had a bee in her bonnet she deserved such death, but I believe Littlefinger perfectly capable of getting rid of her. For him she was a nuisance. He already had what he aspired to, at least in that front, because that man never settles for anything. He always wants more. Anyway, he already became the lord regent of the Vale by his marriage to Lysa. He used her for his goals and, as not to endure her, he has got the problem out of the way easily. Of course, it won't be proven that it was him. He even has accused a wretched who must be over there, and that poor man will carry the can. But sincerely, Sansa, only a baby wouldn't suspect Littlefinger."

Sansa had turned a little pale and was staring at the floor.

Something is embarrassing her. Why?, thought him, startled.

She coughed and looked uneasy.

"Tyrion... I have to tell you something I haven't spoken about until now because I didn't want to hurt you. When you have brought up the issue about Littlefinger in the Vale, I've felt that I owe you an explanation."

What?, wondered him, alarmed. What has my wife to do with that son of a bitch?

He looked at her nervously, despite he was trying to cover it up.

"Tell me," encouraged him, with his voice as calm as he could manage. "I won't get angry for anything you tell me, Sansa. I know that, whatever it is, you're not to blame." He caressed her hand.

She seemed to relax a bit and took a deep breath.

"He had a plan to take me away from King's Landing, since much long before I wedded you. I was languishing for escaping and joining my family."

"It's understandable, Sansa. He was taking advantage of your weakness and your innocence. Go
on."

"When I was engaged to Ser Loras, I thought better about the escape plan and I said I'd rather
awaiting more time. I was looking forward to my wedding in Highgarden and I didn't want to go
any more. Littlefinger showed himself very understanding and kind."

"Of course. You were Catelyn's daughter, Sansa. And he's an expert in slyness. Indeed, he's one of
the most deceptive and treacherous people in the Seven Kingdoms."

"I know. At the beginning I thought he was a friend of my family, but later I found out, through
certain rumours, some things and I cast aside such a naïve belief."

"Did you discover that he betrayed your father and it was him who put a dagger over his neck to
hand him over to Joffrey?"

"Yes. I stopped trusting him. But that happened some time later than the moment I was talking to
you about. I asked him to await more time and he seemed to agree. Soon afterwards, you came to
announce me we had to wed and... I regretted having rejected the advances in Petyr's plan. I
recriminated myself for my new stupidity. If I hadn't refused to go with him, probably by then I'd
be far from King's Landing."

"And you wouldn't have had to marry me," finished him. "I understand it, honey. How could you
not be yearning for slipping away if you were going to be married to the Imp?"

"Tyrion, I'm sorry... That happened in very unfavourable circumstances but now I'm infinitely
happy that things for us turned out the way they did, my love." She put a hand on his cheek, over
the beard. His look softened.

"My love, you don't have to justify yourself for past incidents. I really understand it." He placed a
hand over hers.

"Thanks, my love. You're unburdening my heart." She breathed deeply and went on. "You and I
wedded and my only hope was that Littlefinger came back to propose again his escape plan... What
he did."

"But he was in the Vale, Sansa."

"He did it through Ser Dontos," revealed her.

"The jester knight whose life you saved during the celebration of Joffrey's nameday? By the way,
Sansa, according to what I was told, what you did that day was amazing. The poor man simply was
a drunkard and didn't deserve to die like that, drowned in wine. But you made the most of Joff's
imbecility and you managed that he appointed Ser Dontos a fool instead of killing him."

She blushed, pleased.

"Well, it wasn't really that great. Anyway... You remember that I went often to the godswood?"

"In order to pray, supposedly," said him ironically.

"I once met Ser Dontos there. He confessed me that he was a Petyr's secret ally and he would help
me escape from King's Landing, as it was planned. He gifted me a gemstone necklace which had
belonged to his mother and he recommended that I wore it in Joffrey's wedding."

*It's true. Sansa was wearing that necklace, whose origin I ignored, as I hadn't gifted it to her. Why*
did she have to wear that necklace? It wouldn't be to make her more beautiful, because she's pretty whatever she wears. What was contained in those stones? His mind was working at full capacity. Wait a moment. Olenna came near us and began to chat with Sansa. She touched her hair. Perhaps she pulled up one of the gems surreptitiously? I didn't notice that detail, but I'm sure it was like that. Olenna later could have dropped it into Joffrey's cup. That gem contained the strangler poison. I bet anything that it was that way.

"What are you thinking about, Tyrion?," asked her, anxious.

"Don't worry, it's that I also have something to tell you about Littlefinger, but I'll do it later, when I come back from the audience. But continue, please."

"In the corridors of the Red Keep I heard a pair of lords speaking of how Littlefinger had given my father what he deserved putting a dagger over his neck to take him to justice. I then realized I had been stupid for trusting that man."

Tyrion sighed. He did not like that she undervalued herself.

"Darling, once more I remind you that you were innocent and naïve, not stupid. I don't want you to underestimate yourself."

She caressed him over the beard.

"I've matured since then," said her, with her half smile.

"Of course you have. Go on."

"I no more wanted to go with him, but I neither was happy in King's Landing. I felt like a caged bird. The Hound had called me Little Bird and then I understood why he did. Because I was like a parrot which repeated what the others wanted to hear, and besides I was caged. And by the way, after what happened to my mother and Robb I was very depressed and thought constantly of death. I wanted it to take me too. I lost my appetite."

"I remember, Sansa. I was so worried..."

"I know. But I didn't want anything from you. And later, in Joffrey's wedding, when I started to open my eyes to the fact that you also were a victim of the circumstances and not my enemy, for the first time I saw you the way you were, what I had refused to do before. And I discovered I was beginning to like the way you are and that I wasn't so uneasy beside you. When Joffrey collapsed onto the floor and the commotion burst, Ser Dontos came next to me to take me out of the Keep. He said to me it was the moment to flee. And I refused. I told him that I wouldn't go. That my place was by my husband's side."

He felt so touched that he was in the verge of tears.

"Oh, Sansa." He kissed her palm.

"Just then you came running to save me and I went with you without hesitation. I made my decision. I would stay with you and we'd run away together from that nightmare."

The tears were sliding down her rosy cheeks. He dried them.

"You have nothing to be ashamed of, my love. Do you know how happy it makes me to know all this? When we were forced to marry we hadn't any choice, but in that moment you chose me. You could have abandoned me, but instead you remained with me. All my life I'll be grateful for your
decision. And I'll do whatever I can so you never regret having made it."

"I'll never regret being with you. And I'll be grateful to you for my whole life too."

They kissed with all the tenderness they felt.

"And after you once more have made me the happiest man, unfortunately I have to go to the audience. I was planning to reward you for how glad you've made me, but it'll have to wait," said him, resigned, with his suggestive smile.

"I take your word, my love. And remember you too have to tell me what you know about Littlefinger. It seems like he's everywhere."

"Not half, Sansa. Not half."

They kissed again and he went out.
Chapter 107

Meereen: Day 16

That day the queue of petitioners was not very long. The reason was the mourning days ordained by Daenerys; people must be licking their wounds and taking their time to mourn the beloved who had found death or had been very seriously injured in the catastrophe of the market.

Tyrion observed that ultimately the number of shepherds who went to complain for his animals burnt by the dragon had decreased considerably, and no one else, apart from little Hazzea, had suffered damages due to the dragon. The preventive measures promulgated by Daenerys were paying off.

Those who were part of the queue were, above all, people who went to complain about what happened in the market. They were slightly injured who pleaded with the Mother to prevent such tragedies from happening again. They had seen others die around them, some of whom were relatives and acquaintances, very close in some cases.

Daenerys doesn't have a goddess' powers. She can't stop every disaster in the city, thought Tyrion. But they think she's almighty. What will they do when they realize that she's only a young woman with any human being's limitations?

A woman with two children around five and seven years old stepped ahead when it was her turn.

"Their parents died in the market and they don't have anyone who takes care of them. I already have five children and I can't adopt these two, Mother."

"They will go to the custody of the Crown," declared Daenerys. "Thank you for having cared for them and brought them here." She turned to Missandei. "Take them with the other children and tell them they have new brothers to embrace."

Missandei turned to the youngsters and spoke to them sweetly. The woman exchanged some words with her, addressed a bow to the queen and left.

Tyrion observed if more petitioners were accompanied by children, but he did not see any.

Two little more victims. The ramifications of the disaster are long.

Soon afterwards the hall was empty and Daenerys, Missandei and Tyrion stood up. Ser Barristan and Daario bowed out to return to their daily trainings.

"Come with me to my private hall, Lord Tyrion," she said, when both soldiers were gone.

"Of course, Your Grace."

It was necessary to light braziers to heat up the rooms, and when they entered the private hall, a pleasant temperature enveloped them. More pleasant than the vast and cold audience hall.

"Yesterday we couldn't speak openly before Hizdhar. This is the way I feel obliged to act, holding clandestine meetings behind his back," sighed Daenerys. "Lord Tyrion, neither you or me suck our finger. The evidence points increasingly to an intended fire with the aim of killing and harming the maximum possible. They have killed two birds with one stone, delivering a stab to our biggest source of incomes and by the way attacking many human lives. The noble people had to be warned
beforehand; it's too much coincidence that there wasn't anyone from the pyramids. Moreover, the nobility despises the rest of the Meereenese population. Those who are above look down on those who are below. All of them have always been free citizens, but even among free people hierarchies exist. They know it very well in Westeros, as well as everywhere. The Sons of the Harpy only look out for their same social rank, the ancient clans and the rich. They don't care about the others. If the Meereenese common people have to fall along with the freedfolk in order to sabotage us, they are less worried about it than when they trample a cockroach."

"Are your spies located already in the strategic spots to keep an eye on the rich merchants?," asked Tyrion.

"Yes. The rich merchants are all spotted and since today they'll be followed and exhaustively monitored. Something must be achieved with that measure."

"But have one detail into account, Your Grace. If you discover that any of them is a member of the organization, don't order to arrest him immediately; that would alert the rest and would ruin the plan, because they already would be warned," he advised.

"I've thought about it. The most suitable would be that my spies gather all the information they can without the merchants or their allies noticing. And once we are sure who are all or most the involved people, we'll act. We should catch a sufficient amount of them to destroy the organization. And once caught, I'll apply an exemplary punishment."

"And if meanwhile they are planning other attacks? We have to prevent them from carrying them out, but without arousing suspicion. They mustn't know we are hard on their heels."

"We'll overtake them and we'll adopt their same way of acting; without leaving evidence and so they can't prove anything."

Tyrion smiled. Daenerys definitely was an extremely intelligent woman; he never needed to tell her twice, and often he did not even need to tell her at all, because she had already thought those same things.

She was the kind of ruler with whom Tyrion had always dreamed to collaborate. Robert and Joffrey were all but rulers, and his father was in charge of making all the decisions disregarding Tyrion. Disregarding him more than anyone else.

"Let's hope that the measures are fruitful, Your Grace. The city won't tolerate more massacres and a riot in which the common people take the law into their own hands would be the worst that could happen."

"I'm very conscious of that, Lord Tyrion. I have faith that we'll achieve advances. The situation in Meereen has improved in a few weeks, despite the setbacks. Many people live better than they lived before. We aren't going to permit to be frightened off by a handful who don't want to admit that they have lost the privileges they had at the expense of stealing their freedom to other human beings."

"That's true, Your Grace. Meereen is better than it was."

"Then let's trust the achievements and let's focus on keeping them and increasing them. A few masked blokes aren't going to stop us."

Attitude is essential. And she has the proper attitude. Not to admit defeat, or, though it's admitted, to stand up to try again. That's a leader's true spirit.
"And now, Lord Tyrion, tell me what your opinion is about Lady Lysa Baelish's murder."

Tyrion had decided to convey her his suspicions involving the lord regent of the Vale.

"You neither swallow that a bard threw her down the Moon Door, do you, Your Grace?"

"Of course not," she confirmed, hinting a smile. "What a convenient death for Lord Baelish. I understood that he loved Lady Sansa's mother, not her sister Lysa."

"If that could be called love. I feel more inclined to believe it was simple obsession. Lady Catelyn was everything he aspired to and what he never could obtain. Perhaps, if he had got her, he'd have tired of her soon. He's that way. He always aspires to more than he possesses."

"Then, Lord Tyrion, we agree that he pushed her." That was a statement.

(Part of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 16

"I got to know Lady Lysa in person, as much in the period during which she lived in King's Landing with her husband Jon Arryn, who was Hand of the King, as when I had my troubled journey back and forth the Wall. She was an unbalanced and paranoid woman and she spoiled her son Robin. When her husband died in unsolved circumstances, Lysa draw back to the Vale and sheltered there. The Eyrie is one of the most difficult fortresses to attack in Westeros and she must feel very safe in its heights. She refused to take sides in war, even for her sister. When Catelyn ordered me arrested in an inn on the Kingsroad, believing it had been me who had made an attempt to kill her son Bran, she took me as a prisoner and headed for the Vale so Lysa would dispense justice with me."

"Wait a moment," interrupted Daenerys. "I knew that one of Ned Stark's sons became a cripple due to a fall. The kid you're talking about is him?"

"Yes, Your Grace. Brandon. A charming boy who loved climbing up all the walls and towers of Winterfell."

"He could have fallen by accident."

"It seemed that it wasn't like that. Someone pushed him. That happened during our visit to Winterfell. And of course it wasn't me who did it. I don't have the habit of pushing children from the top of towers."

"And Lady Catelyn believed it was you. Why?"

"Because, when my family had just left Winterfell, and the boy was unconscious after the fall, a man who had my Valyrian steel dagger infiltrated in the castle and tried to slit Bran's neck, but Lady Catelyn and the boy's direwolf stopped him."

"And as it was your dagger, she suspected you. Have you thought about who might be the author of the attempts to kill the poor kid?"

"I'm not sure about who pushed him, though probably my sister was involved. But in regard to who sent the murderer with my dagger, I do know."

"Who?"

"Joffrey. He never stood out by his brilliance and that was a blunder. No one else than him could have planned it."

Daenerys nodded.

What Tyrion did not say aloud, and which he would never tell anyone, and Sansa least of all, was that he feared that Jaime also had something to do with Bran's fall. All evidences pointed to the fact that the boy had been an involuntary witness of some scene and Tyrion's twin siblings tried to silence him forever. The reason could be easily imagined.

*He surely caught them fucking in the tower. They were always searching for any corner where they could do it furtively.*
He felt deeply uneasy when he thought of all that, so he made the effort to cast it aside from his mind.

"Well, go on with your narration about your adventures in the Vale." Like any teenager, she liked gossiping. Tyrion smiled when he thought it.

"Catelyn took me to her sister and I was locked into a sky cell. I suppose you know how those cells are."

"They are open to the void and the floor is inclined, isn't it?"

"Yes. I had to spend several days in one of them. One morning I woke up just on the edge, and below me there were hundreds of yards of freefall. I decided I had reached my limit of endurance and tried to bribe the jailer. I convinced him to take me to Lysa. I promised I'd confess all my crimes."

"And you did? Lots of horrific crimes in your conscience?," asked her, with sarcasm.

"Indeed. As a child in Casterly Rock I used to entertain myself robbing the maids' clothes while they were bathing in the river. I also put shit into the servants' shoes and put flour sacks and water buckets upon the doors. Some times I decorated my sister's dresses writing pretty insults on them. And I did many more things. But I wasn't going to confess what I haven't done, and I had nothing to do with Bran's fall, as I neither had anything to do with Joffrey's death. It seems that people insist on lumbering me with others' crimes."

"You were a fine one." She could not help a smile of amusement. "I imagine that everyone in the Vale would find themselves up a stump after such dreadful confessions."

"They didn't have any sense of humour."

"And what did Lysa do?"

"She felt disappointed because I didn't confess what she wanted to hear and she was determined to put me back in the cells, accusing me of being a liar. She wouldn't rest until making me fly through the Moon Door. But then I requested a trial by combat and set that the champion who fought for me were my brother Jaime. Lysa said that the combat would have to be carried out at that moment and I was beginning to have a rough time, as I didn't have many allies there who wanted to fight for me. Luckily, a sellsword with whom I made friends along the road volunteered to fight in my name and defeated the knight who did it in Lysa's name. And I was free." He did a pause. "Lysa was round the bend. She nursed her eight-year-old son, who she treated like a baby, and he was a boy who clearly had a mental deficiency, no doubt caused by his mother, and he was a repellent creature."

"And Lord Baelish got rid of her. What do you think of him?"

"I haven't proved what I'm going to tell you, and I ignore if it'll be possible to prove it in the future, but I have the intuition that it was him who schemed Joffrey's regicide."

Daenerys opened her eyes wide, surprised.

"Of course, he would be perfectly capable. What makes you point at him as the main suspect?"

"That for him Joffrey didn't suit on the throne because he had become too much unruly and unmanageable. That Baelish wanted to unleash chaos in order to get his share. That he was conveniently far away, in the Vale, when everything happened. He had accomplices who
implemented the plan."

"Do you know who they are?"

"I know at least two. Lady Olenna Tyrell was one of them. She was who put the poison into Joff’s cup. She didn’t want to see her granddaughter Margaery tied for life to a sadistic husband. She got what she wanted, that was seeing the girl becoming a queen, but the king was a nuisance. What I’m not sure about is if Margaery herself was mixed up in it."

"Very interesting. And the other accomplice?"

"Ser Dontos Hollard, a knight who had been demoted to a jester of the court. My wife, when she was Joffrey's betrothed, with cleverness prevented the king from commanding the poor drunkard knight's death and managed to convince Joffrey to spare his life, appointing him royal fool. Littlefinger must have heard of what Sansa did and recruited Ser Dontos to plot a plan with which to kill several birds with a stone: organizing Joffrey's death and evading Sansa from King's Landing to take her with him. Supposedly it was Dontos who had to take her out of the city. He gifted her a necklace and suggested her to wear it in Joffrey's wedding. I'm completely sure that the gems of that necklace contained the strangler poison. During the celebration of the wedding, Olenna pulled a gem out inadvertently and later she only had to drop it into the cup in a moment of inattention."

"It makes a lot of sense. You really are a brilliant man, Lord Tyrion. Your family had to be very blind to waste a mind like yours," praised her with full sincerity.

"They despised me, Your Grace. I was my mother's murderer, the dwarf, the monster."

Daenerys looked at him with sympathy. Not with pity, but with her usual empathy.

"Fortunately now you're in a place where your qualities are appreciated." She kept silent for some moments. "Was Lady Sansa willing to flee with Baelish?"

"At the beginning she was, but later she changed her mind. She discovered what a treacherous man was Catelyn's supposed friend."

"And she chose to stay with you."

"Exactly." Since Sansa had told him that, he felt like floating on a cloud.

"All you're relating me about Westeros, as much the personalities who pull the strings, as the patent facts and others you suspect, are greatly useful to me. Between you and Lord Varys are providing me with an enormous amount of information that can serve us facing to present and future. I expect to go on counting on your services indefinitely, if you still consider me worthy of them." Daenerys was recalling with amusement the boldness he had displayed in his first audience with her, and she liked to joke about that subject.

"Don't worry about that, Your Grace. I doubt I find someone worthier of them than you." The sparkles of humour were dancing in his eyes.

"Thanks for your contributions. Have a good day. By the way, Lord Tyrion, now I remember it... Would you like to go down one of these days to meet my dragons? I think the moment has come to introduce them to you."

Tyrion felt a shudder of astonishment. He ignored if it was caused by fear or by his curiosity for finally seeing the beasts.
"They are the first dragons in centuries, Your Grace. As a child I dreamed with them. Of course I'll see them, but I've promised Sansa not to end like roasted meat."

"Tell her she can rest easy in that sense. I won't deprive her of her brave husband."

"I hope that calms her down."

They smiled to each other, he made a bow and went to join Sansa for lunch.
"Hello, honey."

"Hello, my love." They gave each other their usual welcoming kiss.

As every time she awaited his return, Sansa was sewing by the window. The embroideries on Leena's dress had a magnificent and extremely delicate finish, and she had concentrated completely on the task. Tyrion examined the meticulous labour and admired her wife's skillful hands.

He got hardened recalling other skills for what Sansa's hands were excellent.

_They know how to drive a man to the supreme happiness. When they are upon me and caress me until they raise me to glory, they are magical._

"How were your lessons?"

"Today they had to be suspended earlier because, as you must know, two new orphans have come. We have been introduced to them and the other children have taken them to make them familiar with the pyramid and help them to settle. Poor things. They have lost their parents so soon...," said Sansa, with an expression of pity.

"It had to be expected that some children orphaned after yesterdays's tragedy, but only have been them two. On the queue there were no more people who were taking with them children without family, to be sheltered by the Crown."

"I wish they adapt well and get back their joy little by little. They were very sad. Surely the rest of the children are succeeding in cheering them up."

"They're strong. They learn fast to overcome the difficulties," assured Tyrion. "They have to mature prematurely to try to make up for their lack of family. As long as it was a normal family, of course. Because with relatives like mine, orphanage would be preferable."

"At least you have a brother who loves you, Tyrion. These kids have no one of their blood who loves them."

"Yes, that's true. At least I have Jaime." His brother was not the best of men, and had done terrible things. Tyrion did not defend or justify his reprehensible acts. But both loved each other and Jaime also was brave and had a personal code of honour which no one who did not know him would accredit him. Everyone saw the _Kingslayer_ and that was all his brother was. Even though Tyrion would never tell her about Bran's fall, he would like to explain to Sansa that the fact that Jaime had assassinated Aerys the Mad King implied much more than the simple breaking of his oath as kingsguard. It was not that he wanted to incline her toward him, but to help to reduce the prejudices that immediately interposed when Tywin's first-born was mentioned. Though, of course, having thrown a ten-year-old boy from the top of a tower was unforgettable, if it had been Jaime.

Unluckily, Tyrion could not drive off the sensation that Jaime was responsible. He could not tell if Cersei had incited him, but it was very likely. In whatever involved protecting her universe full of secrets, lies and intrigues, she did not use to have scruples.

Tyrion was yearning to shake Jaime by the shoulders and bring up what he had done to poor Bran, but he sensed that his brother, after his odyssey as a prisoner, had changed remarkably and felt
guilty enough, though he hid it behind his challenging attitude. When he returned to King's Landing, without his right hand, he seemed a man very different from the one who departed for war. He appeared to have aged ten years, and was humbler. His poise and arrogance had lessened along the curves of his troubled journey. And in his eyes had stopped nesting that careless recklessness of yore. Now in them resided uncertainty and the fear of knowing that not even him, one of the best warriors in Westeros and Tywin Lannister's son, was invincible.

"You're deep in thought. Were you remembering your brother?," guessed her.

"Exactly, Sansa. I was thinking about Jaime. One day I have to talk to you about him."

"All right. It's fair you talk to me about the people you love when I've done the same other times. Through the ones we love we too learn to know each other better," reasoned Sansa.

"Of course, darling. And at this point of your life one knows that people aren't white or black. They have infinite shades of grey."

"Joffrey tended to the black extreme, of course," affirmed her. "And there are much more that tend to black more than to grey. But to white... very few."

"I agree with you in that, Sansa. I admit that for example your family were quite next to white, but... Does really exist anyone, and I refer to anyone old enough to be aware of his or her own actions, who reaches pure white? I doubt it very much."

"I doubt it too. We all have darkness in our souls," admitted her.

"Yes, all of us. It can't be any other way in this world. The soul gets stained inevitably."

"The only we can do is to try to advance to light through the shadows. Sometimes one succeeds in touching it, even for an instant."

"As when I look at you and you are like a miracle to me. Or when I get lost into you and I believe I'm grazing the sky inside of your body," whispered him, taking her face between his hands to kiss her. "You're my light, Sansa."

"And you're mine, Tyrion." They melted in a tender kiss which progressively intensified and both started to moan onto each other's lips.

But Mhyraz knocked announcing lunch and they had to detach reluctantly. They smiled to each other, promising with their looks pleasures for after lunch.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 16

During the entire lunch they exchanged inflamed stares and Sansa, intentionally, licked her lips and her chin while she was tasting the pears of the dessert. They were very watery and their liquid oozed. Tyrion's own pear fell from his hands onto the dish, watching Sansa and getting dangerously aroused. He almost jumped over her, licking where she had done it before and introducing his tongue into her sweet and fresh mouth. She uttered an exclamation of surprise due to his fast gesture, and she promptly laughed on his lips. Seconds later she was corresponding to the intense kiss which tasted like pears, and she grabbed his hair.

Mhyraz went back and they had to interrupt their erotic actions, panting. They ignored if the boy was aware of what they were doing, as he more than once had been about to catch them, but he must have some knowledge of the activities that adults shared in their privacy.

They feigned while the boy was picking up the things, and as soon as he went out Tyrion leapt on Sansa again, hungry for sex. He took her to the bed by the hand and stripped her garment after garment, quickly, and she was getting excited with his urgency. Sometimes they fancied it slow and tender and other times they wanted it that way, voracious and urgent. He undressed himself in a rush too and devoted himself once more to her lips which still tasted like pears. With his wicked grin he moved aside from Sansa and brought near them the wine decanter. He soaked his fingers in the liquid, rubbed them over her nipples and spread the reddish liquor over the remaining skin of the breasts. Sansa shuddered because of the liquid coldness and moaned softly, foreseeing what was awaiting her.

"You get me more drunk than this wine, Sansa," said him upon her skin. Soon his tongue was cleaning the remainders of the liquor.

He scattered more wine on her belly and repeated his former actions. She was grasping his long blond hair and he moved down. Tyrion groped her wet entrance with two fingers and introduced them without preamble. They entered without the slightest resistance.

"I'm so glad, Sansa, that you're so eager for me. That you open for me this way." He moved his fingers inside of her and stimulated the clit with his thumb.

"Oh, Tyion!," moaned her, transported. "I like it very much."

"Tell me how you like it. Like this?" He accelerated the movement.

"Yes! Like this," nodded her.

"You want me to make you finish? Or you want me to stop?" He set with his fingers a fast and steady rythm he knew would make her come in half a minute.

"Make me finish."

"As you wish, my godess." He kept the movement and made his thumb twist around her clitoris.

"Tyion!," shouted her. Her inner muscles pressed his fingers with every spasm and he did not cease until she got relaxed. He pulled out his fingers and licked them with delight. She was staring at him, gasping.
"Gods, what an amazing woman.

"You're delicious, Sansa." She blushed with the double meaning of his words.

"Fuck me now, Tyrion. Finish inside of me. I like feeling your hot seed."

"When you ask for it this way, you drive me crazy." He raised her long legs, placed them upon his own shoulders and penetrated her. Holding her thighs, he propelled himself, giving in to the absolute pleasure which enveloped him every time his manhood was absorbed by that warm abyss, slippery and maddening that adapted itself perfectly to his measurements. That time he did not try to control himself to delay his climax, but he rammed her without restriction and he did not take long to dissolve into the explosion which ran across his whole body whenever he emptied himself into his wife's sweet and cozy womb.

"Sansa!," moaned him with each wave that filled her with seed.

Afterwards he collapsed onto her, without pulling his manhood out yet, letting it relax until it came out on its own.

"Why, every time we fuck, I have the impression that it's like a first time, Sansa?," asked him with his face resting over her bosom.

"Because every time is unique, my love," affirmed her. "The pleasure is renewed every time we make it." She was stroking his hair.

Soon after that they let themselves drift to sleep, but before that Tyrion covered them both with the bedcovers to prevent themselves from getting cold.

"We have a pending conversation about Littlefinger," Sansa reminded to him, when they woke up a while later.

"Dear me! That you bring that topic up after an amazing sex session is like throwing over me a bucket of cold water," protested him, smiling.

"I'll reward you," promised her, cuddly.

"I'll make sure of reminding you that." He rubbed his eyes, trying to clear his head. "Well. Littlefinger. Let's begin with the period where he was tempting you with getting you out of the capital. When did he speak to you about his plans for the first time?"

"Soon after the breakup of my betrothal to Joffrey. I liked to sit with Shae on the shore of the bay and look at the ships. I came up with a game in which we had to invent destinations for every vessel we saw and describe the type of merchandise they carried. Shae took part only to please me, because she didn't like that game. She said that she already knew where they sailed to and she didn't see the point of making it up. I told her that reality was quite horrible and therefore it was good to evade ourselves sometimes with silly games like that."

"Yes, she looked like she was quite practical," pointed Tyrion, with a neutral tone.

"She had to be practical. She survived all the way since she left her native place until she entered my service. It mustn't be easy."

"No, it mustn't be."
"How do you reckon she'll be? Maybe she has entered another lady's service," said her, concerned.

"I have no idea, Sansa. But I hope she found relocation and she's well." He wished it wholeheartedly. Shae was the second love of his life and, even though they ended in bad terms, he wanted her to reach the happiness she deserved. He hoped that she by then had forgotten him and had rebuilt her life beyond the Narrow Sea.

"I'm sure she's well. She's a strong woman," said Sansa.

"Indeed she is. I was a little scared of her. She looked at me as if she wanted to strangle me." Tyrion smiled with melancholy remembering his early stages as a married man with Sansa and Shae stabbed into him her pupils loaded with jealousy and resentment, like daggers.

Sansa smiled.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 16

"She was very protective of me. She didn't want you to hurt me. And she warned me against Littlefinger."

"What did she say?"

"I told her about an occasion in which he came next to me on the dock and he was particularly kind with me, offering me his friendship and kissing my hand. He looked at me as if... As if I were my mother, and that confused me a bit. I told Shae and she made clear that all men want only one thing of a pretty girl. She asked me to report her if he tried to take liberties with me, implying that she was ready to protect me at all costs. Now I think she had seen through him clearly and was trying to alert me against him."

"A clever woman. What else Littlefinger did?"

"He joined me on the dock more times and he explained to me his plans to carry me in his ship, far from the capital."

"You know what he wanted you for, do you? To use you as his puppet. He was dying to bed you, because he couldn't have your mother. Did you know he claimed you for himself, but my father refused it? Of course, Tywin wasn't going to give you to anyone who wasn't a Lannister. My father spat to Littlefinger that his origins were too low to be your husband, although he had been appointed lord of Harrenhal. The truth was that my father had other plans for you."

Sansa shivered.

"Petyr asked for my hand? When?," inquired her, disgusted.

"Just after he had been handed over the lordship of Harrenhal. But after the refusal he received, he remade his plans and carried out his scheme of consolation, which consisted of marrying your aunt Lysa to become the lord regent of the Vale. As he couldn't get his hands on the North, he would get them on the Vale. He knew it wouldn't cost him any effort to convince your aunt. She was always infatuated with him. So he set sail to the Eyrie. But that wasn't his only scheme."

"You'd imagine that. What other schemes did he have?"

"To kill Joffrey," declared Tyrion.

"What?," exclaimed Sansa, shaken.

"As you hear. It was him who plotted Joffrey's assassination. I'm almost entirely sure of it."

"But he's a Lannisters' ally."

"Littlefinger isn't anyone's ally, Sansa. He only is loyal to himself. He does what suits him for his ambitious purposes and he doesn't care about anything else."

"My mother grew up beside him. They were like siblings. He declared his love for her and tried to fight for her. My mother loved him as a great friend. But she was deceiving herself, wasn't she?"
"Your mother was smart, but she was blinded by affection and loyalty. She wasn't able to see in time what he really was."

"Why did he decide to kill Joffrey? Because he was an awful king?"

"Yes, and because Joff was unpredictable and didn't listen to reason. A king who cannot be handled doesn't suit ambitious people like Littlefinger. And moreover, because this one enjoys unleashing chaos and plunging his hands into the disaster to obtain profits."

"And what does he expect? The Iron Throne?," asked Sansa, sarcastic.

"Maybe you're not wrong. He wants everything."

"You're right, Tyrion. Once, talking about his ship, he told me he had always yearned for a ship. And when he got it, he wanted a dozen. He confessed to me that it doesn't matter what we want, because once we achieve it, we want more."

"That's his way of being. He's never content with anything. If he had obtained your mother, he would have tired of her. If he always had that obsession towards Catelyn it was because she was out of his reach. He looked at her tenderly. "I, on the contrary, feel that with you I've reached all I've wished to have. What I possess now is the aspiration of my whole life and I'd never get tired." He caressed her cheek.

"I also have all I want, my love. And as no one can give me back my parents or my siblings, who are the only I would wish to have with me as well, I look ahead and now you're everything for me, Tyrion."

They looked at each other in silence and he slid his fingers over the soft skin of her jaw.

"Tell me how Littlefinger plotted his plans," requested her.

"It was the perfect plan. He knows how to take advantage of other people's weaknesses. Due to that he's such a good procurer. He earns a lot of money with the feeblenesses of the flesh. He formed an alliance with Lady Olenna, who of course wasn't eager to see her dear granddaughter living together with a monster. The ideal was that Margaery wedded in order to be queen consort but without having to endure her husband beyond the wedding day. They must plot about the strangler poison, though I'm not very sure if that idea occurred to Littlefinger or to Olenna. The old woman wasn't negligible in the least."

"Indeed she wasn't," remembered Sansa, with a smile. "She commanded me quite respect the time I spoke with her. She called me to inquire how Joffrey was and I told her the truth." She kept quiet for a moment, thinking. "Do you know what I'm thinking? That perhaps was then, just after confirming what she suspected about Joffrey, when she decided to conspire to kill him. And she found an excellent ally in Littlefinger."

"Very well thought, Sansa. You have just provided me with an important piece of information. I ignored that you had maintained that conversation with Olenna. Now you mention it, it fits perfectly that was then when she entered the conspiracy. And Ser Dontos was another accomplice, too."

"He knew about the plot to kill Joffrey?," asked her, surprised.

"Of course he knew. In fact, the necklace he gifted you wasn't harmless."

"In what sense?," inquired Sansa, disoriented.
"The stones of the necklace contained the strangler poison. Olenna pulled one out during the wedding feast. She came to chat with you, remember?"

"Yes. Then... She did all that to pull out the stone and drop it into Joffrey's cup?"

"No more no less."

Suddenly Sansa burst out laughing. Tyrion looked at her, puzzled. Certainly all that situation had been comical in a twisted way, but it escaped him what was whatever Sansa found so funny.

"Tyrion! That woman is terrible. You were by my side and you heard the last sentence she said to me." She went on laughing.

He tried to remember, with no result.

"Excuse me, darling, but I had other things to think about. I wasn't in the mood to listen to an old gossip."

"After offering her condolences for my mother and my brother, she said to me that killing a man in a wedding was an horrible act. As if men didn't have already sufficient reasons to fear weddings."

Tyrion caught the humour of the situation and a cackle raised to his throat.

They laughed together until their stomachs hurt. When at last they could speak again, he said:

"And that was precisely what the old bitch was plotting. Killing someone in a wedding."

And they roared with laughter again uncontrollably.
Meereen: Day 16

"I should trim a bit your mop of hair, my love. Long hair suits you very well, but it's high time to tame it. And your beard as well. You're resembling more and more the lion in your blazon," said Sansa, joking.

*Shae called me "My lion". Luckily Sansa doesn't call me for any ridiculous nickname like that,* thought Tyrion, smiling for himself.

"Do you know how to cut hair?," asked him, surprised. "As long as you let sound some inches of my face and my ears aren't endangered, then come on."

"Very funny. It turns out that my mother used to cut our hair and I learnt how it was made. I see you trust your wife a lot," accused her, sarcastic.

"I put myself in your magical hands, my dear, as I always do. Have you any time done to me something wrong with them?" He imposed his question a quite obvious intention.

"I've never heard you complaining," said her, grinning.

He, for a change, was already feeling pressed against his trousers.

*This girl makes me like a bull in heat, as much if she does it on purpose, as if she doesn't.*

"You'd better put to the task as soon as possible or you won't be able to trim my hair or my beard because I'll fuck you on the carpet until I turn dried up like a raisin. Once you have the razor blade in your hand I'll think a bit before attacking you, so hurry up."

She burst out laughing.

"Oh, gods. What am I going to do with you, my lord?"

"Shall I give you a few ideas, my lady?"

"Oh, no," refused her, rummaging through a drawer to find the blade. Mhyraz had brought it some days ago along with other objects they might need. "I know very well where your ideas are aimed." She then went to fetch a towel to cover his neck and shoulders and prevent the hair from falling into his clothes.

"Ummm, I see you're a little arrogant. You don't know all my ideas yet, honey. There are things I haven't tried with you by now."

She made him sit down and covered his shoulders and his torso with the towel.

"Ah, no? Interesting," commented Sansa, as if they were talking about the weather. A teasing smile was spreading over her lips. "Be careful now. I have the blade in my hand and I have the intention to use it." She raised the sharp tool with a comically threatening gesture.

"Wow. That has driven me very horny. Seeing you wielding that weapon and moving it near my body is going to pursue me in my most wet dreams."

*The worst is that the matter about becoming horny is true. It's going to cost me an effort not to*
jump over her. Especially when she puts her pretty tits next to my face while she is concentrated cutting my hair. On reflection, it's not so bad. He hinted his wicked grin.

"So you like dangerous women, my lord?"

"I like you. Even when I'm running the risk of losing some protuberance in your gorgeous hands."

"It's good to know it. That way I won't have to worry if any bit of your protuberances falls onto the floor."

She began to stretch some thin locks between her index and middle fingers to measure their length and decide where she would cut. He quickly sensed the balsamic effect of her delicate hands on his hair.

"As long as they aren't protuberances placed between my legs, no problem for me. I don't think I'll ask you to shave me over there." Tyrion closed his eyes, relaxing. But the pressure into his pants did not diminish.

"It could be that there are people who shave themselves there?," asked Sansa, with a giggle.

"Yes, there are. Some of them do it due to their religion or belief, and others do it because of their job. Many people who work as prostitutes remove unwanted hair from their whole bodies," informed him, distracted by her hands on his hair. He then realized what he had just said and thought he had screwed up.

Even though whoring was a thing of the past, Sansa mustn't feel very pleased if he brought the subject.

And she still has the blade in her hands, thought him, mocking.

But if she felt annoyed, she must be trying to conceal it.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"Do prostitutes shave their crotch?," asked her, to her husband's surprise, who did not expect such a direct question. *This girl always astonishes me. She's absolutely exquisite and hot.*

"A lot of them do. Are you really interested in this topic, Sansa?," asked him, ironic. And he already was breathing faster.

She blushed, as if she had been caught at fault.

"How do they do it? Do they run the blade over there?" She seemed almost scared, as if fearing that a prostitute was going to bleed to death with a slash bigger than the slit with which nature had already equipped her between her legs.

Tyrion smiled with that display of morbid curiosity. And the issue of his pressed pants was going from bad to worse. As soon as she finished cutting his hair, she would have to do something with his cock, with the blade securely far, of course. He had his manhood ready and in pain beneath the fabric.

"I suppose they shave all that area, yes. I don't mind very much what they do during their leisure." He was envisioning Sansa's pubis and outer lips without hair and that was turning him very randy.

Suddenly she astonished him even more. She bit her lip for an instant, thoughtful.

"Would you like I did it to myself?," she blurted out. The air escaped from his lungs.

*For the gods. This girl is going to kill me one of these days out of desire.* He was imagining her running the razor blade very delicately over her most intimate skin and... he was about to peak in that very moment. He recriminated himself. *What are you thinking of? She's going to notice that it would drive you crazy with desire if she did that. And it's risky. She could cut herself."

"Sansa... I adore you the way you are, including your downy hair. Where would I tangle my fingers? How would I feel that pleasant tickle when I touch your pretty sex?," asked him, trying to dissuade her.

The sound of the blade was soft and the cut hair was falling down. In that moment she was working on his forehead and her breasts were mere inches far from his face, and he had to inhale deeply, slowly, in order not to make a sudden movement.

"Don't you want me to try at least once, really? I'd be very careful, as I know it wouldn't be the meat of my lunch what would be under the blade, Tyrion. I know how to carry out pinpoint labours."

He had to make a real effort to control himself. He kept his ground.

"Darling, I don't want you put yourself at risk of hurting yourself. If you're thinking about doing it to please me, I want you to know that you already please me with profit simply by being next to me. I don't need you to shave such delicate areas because you think I'll like you more if you do."

"It's all right, my love." Sansa kissed the crown of his head. "I won't do it if it scares you so much."
"It's better this way, honey. I don't want a single inch of your cherished skin to run any risk."

She smiled to him, touched.

But the fact that she had proposed something so bold had him helplessly driven mad, in addition to her sweet scent and her mesmerizing movements so close to him.

_Shit. Now her shaved sex is going to add to my high amount of erotic dreams._

"Being a slave prostitute must be terrible," reflected her. "Because the others at least do it freely, but the slaves haven't chosen that profession."

As any girl who had grown up far from that sordid world, whores' lives drew her attention.

"Nearly all the slaves are ravished, Sansa, even though they don't have a tear tattooed on their cheeks. The only difference is that slave prostitutes' owners earn plenty of money offering them to dozens of men every day, and the other slaves are forced to make it for free."

"Do you reckon Missandei...?" However long she lived with Tyrion, there always would be things Sansa never would be able to say. He adored her tact.

"Yes, Sansa."

She had finished with his hair and was starting with his beard. She kept a saddened silence for some minutes.

_It will be better I don't tell her that many freed children were raped by their former owners, too._

That would inflict too much pain to her and she did not need to know about that.

"It musn't be easy for free prostitutes, either. I don't believe that most of them perform that job for pleasure. It doesn't have to be pleasant to make it with anyone," continued her.

"You're totally right, darling. The majority of them perform it for necessity. Because it's the only means of survival they have found."

( **Part 2 of a longer chapter** )
"Poor women," pitied Sansa. "They have to accept in their bodies all kinds of men." She made a grimace of disgust. "I remember perfectly when I feared that Joffrey touched me during my upcoming wedding night with him... Only that he wouldn't just touch me. He'd beat me and caused me all the pain he could, apart from raping me. And I got sick every time I thought of it. Whenever I thought he'd invade and batter my body and I'd have to carry his children in my belly... If he spared their lives. Because it was most likely that he'd kill them with the beatings he'd give me. I doubt he restrained himself during the nine months without using me as a target for his practices," confessed her, with a bitter tone. "Do you know Joffrey threatened with ravishing me in our wedding night, yours and mine, Tyrion?," declared her suddenly.

He ran out of breath for some instants.

"What? When did he say that? When you stood up for a walk through the celebrations hall and he took your arm to start the bedding ceremony?"

"Yes," confessed her. "I was strolling with Shae by my side and Joffrey followed me. He congratulated me because I had achieved the dream of my life, which according to him consisted on being a Lannister, and it wouldn't matter which Lannister planted a baby into my womb. With his revolting and sadistic smile he told me that he perhaps would come round our bedroom when you had passed out with drunkenness and if I fought back, Ser Meryn and Ser Boros would hold me."

Though the snot was really dead, Tyrion felt his blood boiling with retrospective rage. He controlled himself because, after all, Joff would not harass Sansa again.

"I'm so sorry for that, honey. Once more I proved my uselessness as your husband. That was what remained of my oath to protect you. A snot was threatening with putting his hands on you and I did nothing." He felt a little downcast once more, even though she denied everything.

Sansa dropped the blade for a moment and knelt to his height to look him in the eye.

"My love... What could you do? You couldn't run more risks than you were running. Your father wouldn't have saved your neck every time you stood up to Joffrey. And I in the least wanted to be the cause of you risking your life. Therefore I said nothing about his plans to rape me. But I don't want that you feel bad for that now, Tyrion."

"How couldn't I feel bad? Ours was a dreadful wedding, mostly because of me as I embarrassed you, and besides the snot put the icing on the cake. As I've said to you, I bear perfectly the mortifications aimed at me, but not at you." He took her face between his hands, closing his eyes to try to banish the tears.

"He's dead, and we're alive. And I love you. You're the bravest of men." She kissed his closed eyes, sweetly.

But I don't feel that way. Despite all, her gesture and words consoled him greatly. His young wife always knew how to restore his peace.

He opened his eyes, moved.
"In these moments I can't express with words what I feel for you, Sansa. It's so intense it overflows me," said him, kissing her palm.

"Then express it the way you are best in," encouraged her, addressing him that smile which hardened him in an instant. "But before that you'll have to wait until I finish with your beard."

"Cruel girl," protested him, grinning again. "You know very well how you turn me on."

"I know it perfectly, my love. You aren't precisely very subtle in that aspect."

"No, I'm not. Not with you. You're too much beautiful. Well, I'll have to suffer a little more while I gaze at your pretty body so close to me and I smell your scent..." He hushed while she leveled another lock of his beard. "I thought about taking you away from King's Landing just when your mother's and brother's tragedy happened."

"Taking me away from there? How?," asked her, puzzled.

"Taking you for a journey, for a while, after Joff's wedding. Maybe to Casterly Rock. I wanted to cheer you up and it occurred to me that a change of scenery would do you good. Leaving the rat nest and stop seeing Joff's, Cersei's and my father's faces at least for some months. I was desperate to do anything for you."

"Oh, Tyrion. To think about that was a great detail in your part. I'd surely had accepted your proposal so I didn't become insane in King's Landing. Anything to get out of there."

"I knew Joff wouldn't let us go willingly, but I thought up that my father convinced him. The explanation I was going to offer my father was that a change of scenery would do you good and thus you perhaps would be more willing to consummate the marriage." He said it with a tone of apology. "Tywin was obsessed with the issue of our progeny and the ideal pretext to make him let us go was the promise that, far from the capital, you'd agree to fulfil your marital duties. Of course, I'd tell him that so he approved it, but I'd go on keeping what I promised you in our wedding night; that I wouldn't touch you until you wanted me to. I even was planning to take the books of accounts to keep working as Master of Coin in Casterly Rock and using the crows to send and receive information about my labour." He caressed her hand. "I was longing so for seeing the colour back to your cheeks and the laughter to your lips..."

"I'd have answered you yes to the travel. In Joffrey's wedding I decided I'd stay with you against all odds and I'd have accompanied you to any place you wanted to take me. And I imagine that, once out of the city, my feelings for you would have begin to strengthen, as indeed happened since we departed to Pentos. But, although Joffrey hadn't died and you hadn't offer me any trip, I'd have admitted that I was starting to love you and I'd surely have given myself to you in our chambers of the Keep."

"You weren't safe there, Sansa. Joff was pesterling you and I'd have discovered it. Anyway, I'd have taken you far away to fulfil at last my oath to protect you and care for you. And I'd have done it anyway, though you never had wanted to give yourself to me. I want you to know it."

"I know, my love. But it's clear that one can never say never, because some day one can regret it. And I did when I realized that I was yearning for your touch. I regretted the pain I inflicted in you with my rejection in our first night."

"You were still a child, we were two strangers stuck together by force. And I wasn't the man of your dreams. I didn't reproach it to you."
She ended with the last lock of his beard. She removed the towel and shook it over the trash can. Tyrion shook his clothes as well.

"It's been a good job, my love. You still have your mane of hair and your beard, but less wild," jested her.

He didn't like to look himself in the mirror, so he trusted his wife's aesthetic judgment, as usual.

Sansa knelt before him.

"You're so attractive that I wish you to do what you said before. I think I recall that you suggested something about making it on the carpet," insinuated her, naughty. "And another thing, my stubborn husband. You really were the man of my dreams. But by then I didn't know it yet."

Tyrion did not restrain himself any more and silenced her with a kiss with which he had the intention to express her all the love he felt.
The mourning days ordained by Daenerys passed without incidents. The market remained closed and the city guard was increased fivefold. Jorah, after the request he made to Daario to become a part of those reinforcements, obtained the queen's permission and his task was to patrol the streets, keep order and watch people's movements to find out if someone was plotting something. Tyrion was glad for the improvement in the knight's circumstances. He did not just await in the camps, but he was carrying out an important mission, with the incentive of being closer to his khaleesi. But the question of the affair between Daenerys and the sellsword captain was still pending, and Tyrion continued to fear a reaction which would not benefit Jorah at all.

The queen's efficient spy service was beginning to bear fruit and the information was arriving. For a start several rich merchants were involved or took a direct part in the Sons of the Harpy, and the names of members of some noble families, none of them belonging to Hizdhar's lineage, the Loraqs, had been mentioned. All those pieces of information were kept in a strict secret and were known by a scant number of people, among whom Hizdhar, of course, was not included, or that was what Tyrion hoped. There was no way to know if the nobleman had his own sources of information who whispered in his ear.

The last night of the official mourning, Daenerys met Tyrion in the private hall and conveyed him the advances in the researches about the enemy organization.

"We know for certain that four merchants are members of the group, as they act as accomplices of members of several noble families. They are the lines of Pahl, Kandaq, Reznak and Ghazeen," detailed her. "For now, four of the fifteen. This discovery is a great advance and gives me hope that we'll eventually unmask the rest."

"Have you found out something about the fire in the market?"

"They were the authors. As we suspected, they have adopted the tactic of not leaving their signature. But now we know it from their own lips."

"Has any other plan to carry out an attack been intercepted, Your Grace?"

"Yes. They're scheming to cause damages in the houses under construction, to delay the end of the works and hinder that the freedfolk of the camp can settle in the city."

"A crafty ploy on their part. Have you thought about the way to impede that? Reinforcing the watchfulness in those areas?"

"Yes," affirmed her. "I've placed more sentinels to stand guard day and night. It was a measure that, as you know, was being applied since the works commenced. I've added some sentinels in every place, not so many as to raise serious suspicion, but enough to keep a close watch over the buildings and the soldiers can support his mates in case they are attacked."

"Excellent, Your Grace. And what about the reopening of the arenas? Have the Sons commented something regarding it? It's going to be a much talked-about event in which you'll be present and I doubt they miss the chance to plot something."

"For now my spies haven't reported me anything about it, but I don't dismiss that something is
being plotted by members and accomplices we haven't identified yet. This organization has all the looks of being the type of those which don't transmit the whole information to all the members at the same time, but it's distributed stepwise or selectively to mislead and deceive. And that way, if any member is caught, though he or she is tortured, won't be able to confess what he or she ignores."

"Anyway you have to extreme caution, Your Grace. The high mistrust my experience has awarded me dictates that the fighting arenas can be the perfect trap. You are an easy target exposed in the royal box of an amphitheater, though you're guarded by the best sentinels in the world."

Tyrion had been reflecting on the matter after the tragedy of the market and he decided that, under any concept, would he endanger Sansa taking her to the arenas. He still had to set out that problem to her, and he feared she would not accept very well that he attended without her. Both of them loathed the bloody shows that would be displayed there, but he refused flatly that his wife, apart from having to witness that, ran a serious risk because of the Sons of the Harpy.

He was firmly resolved. Even though it resulted in an argument with Sansa, and she got angry with him, he would not compromise. Not when the life of the woman he loved was at stake.

He was aware it would be unfair that he knew she was safe in the pyramid, whereas she was suffering for him, worried for his security while he was taking part in the queen's entourage in the arenas. He put himself in her shoes and imagined her hitting the roof with anguish, just like he himself would feel. He detested that she had to suffer because of him. But he did not find another solution to the dilemma. As a royal counselor he could not refuse to attend.

"I'm fully conscious that I'd put myself in a very vulnerable position, Lord Tyrion, but as the queen of Meereen I can't elude my appearance in the box. What I can do is to place at the entrance of the amphitheater a high number of sentinels who frisk the people in the queue to check they don't carry weapons or anything suspicious. If the Sons of the Harpy have the intention to get in concealing their masks under their clothes, my Unsullied and Second Sons will catch them. Weapons and masks are easy to detect."

"It will be an arduous task, Your Grace. The Daznak amphitheater is fit for fifty thousand spectators. You'll need to employ at least three hundred soldiers to hurry the frisks."

"That's what I have the intention to do. The days in which the Daznak amphitheater will offer shows I'll summon one extra thousand soldiers to the city. Three hundred will frisk the spectators; another two hundred, placed at the doors, will watch carefully so disturbances or attacks don't happen in the queue during the frisks; two hundred will guard the royal box and three hundred will be scattered around the arenas. For the rest of the fighting pits, fifty soldiers will frisk the audience, fifty will watch the entrance and one hundred will guard the arenas during the shows. And of course, the five hundred city guards will patrol daily."

Tyrion showed satisfied with those measures.

"That way it's going to be really difficult that they can commit any misdemeanour in the arenas. It appeases me a lot that you have planned so exhaustively the security during those events," praised him.

"Precisely it's in public events of that magnitude, in enclosures where everyone gets distracted watching the combats, where we can be more vulnerable. So I'm not going to skimp on security, Lord Tyrion."

(Part of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 19

At least Sansa'll stay calmer when I describe to her the deployment Daenerys is going to carry out. I'll make sure of highlighting it to help her accept that she won't attend with me. I have to manage that she resigns herself to my resolution and so when I have to go to the arenas she copes with it reasonably well.

For him it was fundamental that she understood it. He would feel really low if he had to depart for the shows knowing that Sansa was left behind ill-tempered and preoccupied.

"Your soldiers need activity, and their mission of vigilance during those days is going to be of vital importance. I think it's ideal you employ all the soldiers you can. Ten thousand warriors cannot restrict themselves indefinitely to await in the camp," explained Tyrion.

"Armies are intended for action, and action is what they're going to have. Not for war, not yet at least, but for many other functions. An army is a powerful and useful tool if one knows how to use it. And I have plans for mine."

Tyrion nodded again.

"Has news arrived from the sea or beyond, Your Grace?," asked him, interested.

"Only that the sparrow's of faith are spreading like wildfire in Westeros. They promulgate extreme austerity, chastity and the purification of sins of the flesh. They're washing the brains of thousands of devotees every day and they're becoming a plague."

Tyrion thought that his sister was lighting a flame in a storehouse of wildfire which very soon would explode on her face.

Once you've placed in the top a bunch of fanatics and lunatics, there's no way to make them get down. I already warned you regarding Joff, and you didn't listen to me, dear sister. Let's see how will you manage to stop them. Father is here no more to get you off the hook and uncle Kevan has got tired of you, what was to be expected.

He did not feel the slightest pity for Cersei. She alone was digging her grave.

You've never been clever. Father had intimidated the whole kingdom because he was a very clever stinker. It's not sufficient to be simply a stinker to keep the crown, dear sister.

"Your nephew Tommen must have married the Tyrell girl by now. Let's see who'll wear the crown, whether the new queen or the regent queen," said Daenerys with irony.

"The most likely is that they tear it to pieces pulling it from both sides," said him, equally ironic.

"And while they are playing their capricious power games, the folk pay the consequences. It's not that I wish any war, but it wouldn't be strange that people end up rising up against the Red Keep."

"It's very possible, Your Grace. When winter reaches its height and millions of people have nothing to eat whereas the rich go on getting fat, desperation will cause devastation."

Daenerys kept quiet, undoubtedly very aware of what might happen when winter bit hardest.
"And how is the rest of the matters going?," asked Tyrion.

"The ploy to incite the slaves of Yunkai to rebellion has been brought into operation, and in a matter of weeks we'll know the results. As to the merchant ships, they must be on their way to Tolos, and the Dornish fleet must have got into the Gulf of Grief. When they arrive at Tolos they'll send the next crow, or maybe earlier."

Suddenly Daenerys smiled, as if remembering something she had forgotten momentarily.

"Your squire Podrick this afternoon has asked for my permission to wed Leena in a week. He's going to talk with one of the Graces so she officiates the ceremony in the pyramid. I've told him they can celebrate it in my private gardens, where they can put on the reception as well. It's a special favour for his great fidelity and for making Leena so happy."

Tyrion smiled, glad.

"They deserve it. Will you attend, Your Grace?"

"Of course," affirmed her. "I have scarce entertainments at my disposal and this wedding we'll provide me with some hours in which I'll simply be one more guest."

"You'll do well. Remember my advice. You won't be young again."

"I don't forget it, Lord Tyrion. But I'm who least can do whatever wants. This wedding will be an exception in my routine."

"It's curious how every one thinks his or her own way. My nephew Joffrey thought quite the opposite. That he was who most could do whatever wanted."

"The last three kings who have seated on the Iron Throne, including the current one, haven't been authentic kings. And neither was my father in his final years. It's time for things to change."

"It's time," corroborated Tyrion.

They drank a sip of their cups of wine.

"Tomorrow the official mourning will end and the market will be reopened. You'll be able to return to your usual occupations as a general supervisor and you'll have to draw up a balance of the losses."

"I'll do it, Your Grace. I'll calculate the amount of losses and I trust that in a matter of some weeks we have rebalanced the scales, counting on the profits captain Gilean will obtain and the incomes of the arenas."

"We'll recover. We'll stockpile all the supplies we can. The worst of winter is still to come. And one is never ready enough when it comes."

"The Starks knew a lot about that," said Tyrion, who in spite of having teased Sansa because of the motto of her house, respected its meaning.

"Do you believe that your wife's whole family are dead, Lord Tyrion?"

"Sansa is clinging to the hope that any of her siblings might be alive and hidden anywhere. It's possible. The Starks are a strong class. My wife is a living proof of that. No one in the Red Keep would have bet for her survival, alone among enemies. And she got here."
"I know what one feels being the last of his or her lineage. But at least Lady Sansa can have children who'll continue with her blood and legacy. The genuine Targaryen blood will die with me. The houses related to the Targaryens are only distantly related. Who will bond with the dragons when I'm gone?" Her look was lost in the distance.

"Maybe it will rise up another lineage related to dragons. Who knows. But take into account that, if a female dragon isn't born in any other part of the world, dragons will extinguish again. Yours are male and can't reproduce among themselves."

"Once they were given up for extinguished, and they have been reborn. Stranger things have happened, Lord Tyrion. This life has taught me to keep the faith in the most harebrained things."

"I'm a proof of it. That I've lived until entering your service is harebrained in itself. Starting with the fact that my father was about to throw me into the sea when I was born."

"You see? You confirm my idea. There is a lot that shouldn't be given up."

"This is a strange, terrible and beautiful world, Your Grace. I admit I love clinging to it until my last heartbeat comes."

Along with Sansa.
Chapter 117

Meereen: Day 19

It was not late yet when Tyrion went back to his rooms, as his private meeting with the queen had not been prolonged. Sansa had changed into her sleeping garments, wearing her light-blue robe, and she was reading by the candlelight the volume about the history of Westeros in which she had advanced more than a half.

"You're a little like me," joked him, observing the curves of her breasts beneath the robe. "I've always liked reading at night, when insomnia gave me no respite."

"My mother ordered to put plenty of candles in your chamber when you came to Winterfell. I think that they also put some barrels of beer." She smiled, amused.

"I see that my fame transcended borders," pointed him, sarcastic. "Was there anything you weren't told about me, my love? It had to be a little disappointing for you to marry a man so known that his sordid secrets were shouted from the rooftops. Everyone knew even the size of my cock." He got closer to give her a kiss and inhaled her scent with a hint of lemon. That afternoon they had bathed and the sex in the water was as awesome as they could dream.

"Oh, yes, you were an open book. A no interesting person at all, of course," mocked her, biting his lip playfully. "Except for the size of your cock. When I heard the rumours, its length was legendary," whispered her on his lips. Tyrion slid his fingers over her hair and he drew her to him, getting his tongue into her mouth. Sansa moaned.

"How long was it?," asked him with a hoarse voice.

"At least half a yard," answered her, breathless.

"At rest or stiff?" In his green eyes danced sparkles of mischievousness. His hands were gliding over her soft neck and descended until encircling her superb breasts upon the wool.

"They didn't specify it and I by then didn't have a very detailed knowledge about men's cocks."

He was rubbing her erect nipples. He held his breath for a second. Those nipples were his passion.

"Tell me what did you know about men's cocks." He loosened the belt of her robe and opened it. Her white cotton nightgown jutted her breasts out in an absolutely tempting way.

"I knew they could be... introduced inside of women and impregnate them." Sansa observed with dilated pupils how his hands stroked her breasts, which under the nightgown were bare.

He stared at her while he went on massaging.

"Tell me how you thought a man introduces his cock in a woman." He pressed and she felt an intense heat in her low belly and a flow of wetness in her sex.

"I actually didn't know how he could introduce it... I wondered how it could fit inside."

Tyrion raised her nightgown very slowly. He uncovered her long legs and caressed them.

"Did you think that a thick and hard cock didn't fit into a woman? That women's entrance was too
small? You believed that because yours was still too much small, Sansa." His hands continued to slide over her legs to her hips.

"I was convinced that it had to hurt a lot and draw blood, as if it stabbed. Whenever I heard my mother moaning, at first I got scared with the image of my father stabbing my mother just there. Thereupon she groaned, because it hurt. But later I reasoned that my father would never hurt her and moreover I learnt that what I heard weren't groans, but sounds of delight."

Tyrion was taking off her underwear.

"And did you know that men spill their seed?" She raised her arms and he removed her nightgown.

"No, I didn't know that at all." She was exquisitely flushed and gloriously naked, sitting on the bed before him.

"Of course you ignored it, darling. Your septa never talked to you about the pleasure a man feels when he spills. She never described you the sublime sensation of finishing inside of a woman."

He took her legs and put them over his shoulders. He knelt and his face leveled to the height of that sex which pursued him waking and sleeping. He got his lips closer to her intimate folds and she shivered.

"But she didn't describe you either how a woman feels when a man pleasures her with his mouth." He was speaking almost grazing the reddened and soaked flesh. "How a man's tongue tastes her most sensitive areas until driving her mad with desire." He licked all her opening. Her flavour was making him lose his head.

She released a plaintive moan, throwing her head back and arching her back. She encircled him with her legs to press him against her.

"Tell me how you feel me in your skin, in your insides, in your private parts," requested him, giving her another lick with his tongue.

She raised her head and they looked into each other's eyes.

"I feel you so intensely that you fill all my being, apart from my body." She gasped when he sped up the movements of his tongue. "I always want to feel you completely, and due to that I need to hold you tightly, to merge with you, because I want to have you entirely."

"You're doing it wonderfully well, Sansa. Little by little you are daring to express more your emotions and that makes me very happy. And now, excuse me a moment." He stood up quickly without giving her time to protest, because he immediately penetrated her with all his longing. "I adore you to peak on my mouth, but there isn't anything so beautiful as feeling how you do it around my cock. Feeling how your climax drives me to mine." He started to move inside of her, slowly. "Your hot walls absorbe me to your interior, which is like a sky where I fly away and I go up and up until nothing exists, except you." He stimulated the clitoris. "Tell me how you feel now."

"When you penetrate me like this it's as if I become... complete. I feel I'm yours to my last corner and my last thought. I have a fantasy. You want me to describe it to you?"

He was going in and out of her and his fingers were pulsating the strings of his wife's delight.
"Describe it to me."

"I imagine that I belong to you because you're my owner. You bought me because you saw me in
the slave market and pitied me. You desire me but you promised that you wouldn't touch me. You are so gentle, and look at me so much with those eyes which make me feel the most beautiful woman, that I fall madly in love and decide to give myself to you in every possible way, and every time you want me I am willing and I give you all the pleasure I can, because when you're in my body you're mine, only mine, and I can do no other thing than loving you and receiving you inside of me."

The visual contact between them was so intense that it burnt. Her erotic and sweet tale, in addition to her ardent core encircling him, were going to drive him to glory at any moment, so he moved his fingers faster upon her clitoris and made her come.

He loved to hear his own name in each one of her cries, he loved that she enveloped him with her vertiginous legs and with her warm abyss, and that she grabbed his hair.

Some instants later, and just after she did it, as almost always, Tyrion flew to the sky of that womb which was the only true home he had known in his whole life.

(Part of a longer chapter)
"I have to tell you something that won't make you very happy, darling," tested him, when they were lying in their favourite position.

She rested on an elbow and looked at him, inquisitive.

"Does it have to do with the meeting you've had with the queen tonight?"

"Yes, but actually I've been turning it over and over in my mind since before. See, Sansa... I don't want you to attend the shows in the fighting arenas. Not after what happened in the market."

She frowned.

"But, Tyrion... We already agreed that we'd both go. I'm your wife and it's normal that the wives of royal dignitaries accompany their husbands in certain acts of protocol."

"Honey, listen to me, please. Daenerys is going to provide the amphitheatres with a powerful deployment of guards during the events and the security will be very high. It will be really complicated for the Sons of the Harpy to accomplish any sort of attack, against the queen herself or against her subjects. I can guarantee you nearly one hundred percent that they won't succeed in touching her a single hair, neither me. You know me, I'm a hard nut to crack. But risking you... I can't, Sansa. As your husband, it's my duty to protect you and that's what I'm going to do. I as well want to keep you from those pathetic scenes that will be developed in the arenas. It'll be enough with me enduring them. You don't have the obligation to spend hours watching that."

"And do you think I'm going to have a very good time here knowing you are there? Do you think I feel for you less than you feel for me and I'll suffer less?" She had never shown openly before him anger or resistance, and he liked that she expressed herself freely, without her former constant fear of doing or saying something inappropriate. But in that occasion he could not give in.

"I'd never undervalue your feelings, Sansa. I care loads for all you feel and think, darling. I know you love me as much as I love you. And I know it's unfair that I go, leaving you safe here, and you stay here worried for me. I've thought of it such as I'm saying it to you, truly. I haven't stopped to turn it over and over in my mind. Daenerys' impressive deployment will be enough for me and I'll be able to keep an eye on whatever happens around me. I'm an old hand, as I've said to you several times, and no one catches me off my guard easily. But you're very young and vulnerable, my sweetheart, you're a lady trained to lead a quiet life in a castle with thick walls and men to guard it, and you don't deserve to be put at any risk. If necessary, I'd defend you with my own life, but I don't want you to endanger yourself if I can prevent it. Please, Sansa." He knelt before her and took her hands, gazing at her with imploring eyes. "I know you must be thinking that the queen's safety measures are as good for you as they are for me, and surely you're right, and I'm no more than a stubborn dwarf. But I plead with you not to close ranks with what I'm requesting you. I'm not going to have a better time than you, my love. The hours during which I'll have to bear it all in that damned box will be eternal without you. Do you think I wouldn't prefer a million times to send the arenas to hell and stay here with you?" He kissed her hands in a gesture of devotion and submission.

Her anger had faded at the middle of her husband's passionate speech. She was incapable of being annoyed with him. He thought of her above all, he always put her ahead of himself and only for that
she felt moved to the roots of her soul. Everything he did, he did it because he considered it was the best for her and he so far had taken care of her in the best way possible and had made her happier than could be told. How could she contradict or displease him if he had not failed her a single time?

"Tyrion." He raised his head from her hands and looked at her, anxious. She smiled at him and saw how a weight lifted from his shoulders. The expression of his green eyes was of relief and gratitude. *He loves you so much that it hurts him to see you sad, scared or angry and he does all in his hands to ease you. How many others would be so concerned about what resides in your heart, you fool? "You're right, my love. You're going to need all your concentration. My company would distract you and it would be much more difficult to keep an eye on me, on the queen and the people surrounding you. I understand it now. In this case, you'll manage better alone. I'll miss you as much as you'll miss me and both of us will be looking forward to the end of the damned events." She embraced him around his waist and drew him to her. "I'll only ask you for one thing: that you always come back to my side."

Tyrion took her face in his hands.

"Always, Sansa. I'll always come back to your side." He kissed her with reverence. "Even though I'll have to manage alone in the arenas, don't forget that there are other things with which you manage wonderfully, my beautiful lady," insinuated him.

"Then let's use them, so it's not said that I don't have my skills," joked her, laughing over her husband's warm lips.

*(Part 2 of a longer chapter)*
Meereen: Day 20

Just before dawn, they chatted about other topics of the meeting with Daenerys. Tyrion told her about the people implicated in the Sons of the Harpy and about the *sparrows* in Westeros.

"My cousin Lancel, my uncle Kevan's son, is one of them," commented him.

Sansa recalled that blond and callow teenager boy, with his face so soft as a maiden's, who had been Robert's squire.

"I remember he fought in the Battle of Blackwater Bay and he went to Maegor's Holdfast to persuade Cersei to let Joffrey lead the charge against Stannis. He had been wounded in an arm with an arrow shot and Cersei squeezed his wound cruelly and chased him out of the holdfast, telling him that her precious son wouldn't go out to risk his skin for the men who were risking it for him."

"My sweet sister. Since her childhood she has been fond of twisting her finger on other's wounds," pointed him with sarcasm. "After all, it seems that my little cousin wasn't as coward as he looked. Now I'm even regretting to have taken advantage of him. But I haven't told you that story," recalled him with naughty rejoicing. "Do you want to know a little more about your husband's warped skills, honey?"

"Oh, gods. What did you do to the poor boy?" She was smiling, pitying Lancel a bit. Whatever the lad had done which was not to Tyrion's liking, he surely had ended peeing on his own pants.

"He was bedding Cersei. Jaime was being held prisoner by your brother and she, who never has distinguished herself for her perseverance or her patience, must be missing a cock between her royal legs. So she opened them for our cousin. It turned out that he began to put on airs and on one occasion let's say that he addressed me in a disrespectful and haughty tone, believing that fucking my sister gave him immunity. I quickly had a grab on his balls (not literally, you know what I mean, as they aren't my favourite attributes) and it sufficed that I mentioned Jaime for the boy to be put the wind up and fall to his knees, virtually licking my shoes. I'm not a man who enjoys tormenting idiot arse-lickers, but there was a way of making the most of everything my cousin knew about my sister, so I blackmailed him and compelled him to spy on Cersei and told me everything he found out. I didn't trust her and I wanted to follow her steps to come earlier than her plots."

"By then you were Hand of the King. You haven't spoken to me of that period, either." She had her amused look filled with curiosity. It was the look she had whenever he narrated funny stories to her. "You must badly have the bug to rule, didn't you, my husband? You like to take charge when you have the chance."

Tyrion caressed her back.
"It's true. I enjoyed a lot being Hand of the King. It was the first time in my life that my father gave me an important post and I was more than willing to practice it."

"I remember when you got back from the war between my brother and your father, but first you better end telling me about Lancel, and later narrate about your period as Hand."

"I'm glad to oblige. After my threat, Lancel showed himself much humbler and I think that sometimes I went a little too far scaring him, but I achieved my goal, which consisted in keeping an eye on my sister, and thanks to that I discovered the wildfire. It was part of Joffrey's supposed tactic, which his mother must have suggested to him, to defend the city against Stannis, but I was afraid that the weapon was going to be wasted in my nephew's brilliant mind. Nevertheless, the wildfire gave me an idea which helped us to resist the invasion. I visited the Order of Pyromancers, which had lost almost all its prestige since the Mad King's times. As you know, Aerys was obsessed with roasting. He commanded to make thousands of jars of the substance to put them undersoil, underneath all the strategic spots in King's Landing."

"He was planning to blow up the city?," asked Sansa, with her eyes wide.

"Exactly. He was so bad in the head that he was willing to turn into embers half a million souls in a blink. But my brother killed him and his wild dreams ended there. Every man has his limit and my brother's was overtaken after hearing Aerys repeat hundreds of times that he wanted to burn everyone."

"Jaime saved King's Landing?," realized her, shocked.

"Yes, Sansa. At the expense of breaking his oath as a kingsguard and becoming cursed, he saved the fucking city," stated him.

She remained silent, processing that.

"My brother isn't a paragon of virtue and he can be cruel, because the only one he has ever loved really has been Cersei and he hasn't given a rat's ass for anything else. Except for me, because he cares for me, and besides he's passionate about being a great warrior, although he is no more now. I'm not trying to promote him before your eyes. But if there's something good he has done in his life, it has been preventing Aerys from committing a massacre. Though it wasn't of great use, because quickly my father took charge of sacking the city, causing a slaughter. Well... There's not much more to say about Lancel. Simply that Robert humiliated him, I took him down a peg or two and used him up, and that he behaved respectfully during the Battle of Blackwater. And after being wounded he woke up to the light of faith. And now he is a real threat, because he's a fanatic surrounded by fanatics. They're multiplying due to the misery that war has left, like ravens sniffing at carrion. Well, we'll talk another time about the sparrows, because I don't want this pretty morning to turn sour. What else do you want to know about my splendid memories as Hand?"

"First things first." Sansa accommodated better on his shoulder to listen to him with her full attention.

"Good. Are you ready? To begin with this story, I have to chain it to my trip to Winterfell. That's where it all started."

Mhyraz would still take at least an hour to bring them breakfast, enough time to share some confidences and memories.

"Come on," encouraged her, always eager to know more about her interesting husband.
"The trip to Winterfell was for me the payback for a thwarted dream of my youth. Some of my ancestors were adventurers who went away to see the world, my uncle Gerion among them, who was the only one apart from Jaime that was fond of me. I admired him. He told me all sorts of stories, as he was a good story-teller, and besides his restless spirit had led him to live some fascinating experiences, or that was what he made me believe. Whether what he narrated to me was real or not, the truth was that I didn't mind; he carried me to places I had never seen, places of exotic beauty with people who spoke in unknown languages, wore the most peculiar clothes and had customs strange for us. He conveyed his hunger for knowledge and discovery to me. One day he left for a quite crazy endeavour, supposedly to seek the Lannisters' Valyrian steel sword, lost a long time ago. And he never came back. I missed him greatly, because he was the only member of my family, save Jaime, who loved me." He did a pause, trying to recall his uncle's beaming face. He did not resemble Tywin, except for the blond hair and the greenish eyes. "Well, as I was saying, I fed the hope to carry out a long journey to get to know Westeros better and cross the sea to Essos, before adulthood pounced on me with all its burdens. But, of course, my father thwarted my great hope, such as he had cut short every dream or plan I had fed since a child. He spat to me that I already was quite a dishonour for my surname as to add more shame with my eccentricities, so he forbid the journey and, not satisfied with that, he appointed me the Master of Drains and Sewers of Casterly Rock. I was chief responsible for keeping them clear. You see what a gorgeous consolation prize he gifted me in exchange for not allowing me to go for a travel."

Sansa caressed his cheek and he kissed her palm.

"I was sixteen years old and I hadn't went out of the Lannister's possession. The farthest I had gone was Lannisport. Imagine the frustration of a dwarf teenager boy whose designs have been shattered to pieces one by one and who scarcely has been permitted to go beyond the door of his house due to what people may say. Books were my escape. The library was the only room in the house where I could be in peace and evade myself far from there."

She toyed with his beard.

"When Robert decided to set the whole royal entourage in motion towards the North, my sister grumbled and protested. She wasn't attracted to spending a month locked in a rattling cart, enduring the harshness and discomfort of the way, but Robert, as usual, made little account of her. He was an embittered man who for the last seventeen years had been getting fat, drinking and fucking every women he caught. The man of action he had used to be barely was left in him by then, but the travel to the North breathed new energies into him. He was going to join at last his old friend Ned and to visit his beloved Lyanna's tomb, the only that was left of her. As you know, Jon Arryn had just died and Robert needed a new Hand. I have my suspicions regarding the death of the former Lord of the Vale, and I'll confide them to you another time, if you don't mind."

"All right. But now tell me just one thing. Was Jon Arryn murdered too?"

"I think so. Death by natural causes is a rare phenomenon in the Red Keep," answered him with irony.

"Well, we agree that later you'll speak to me about that. Go on."

"Robert awoke a bit of his lethargy, remembering his old times as a tireless warrior. The others
bore the lack of comforts better or worse, but the only other person in the expedition who really liked that displacement along so many leagues of the Kingsroad was me. My sleeping longing for traveling was being payed attention to at last, and I saw in all that a chance to experience new things, to see sceneries to fix in my mind, to feel the ass calloused on the saddle, to move forward under the sun, the rain, the wind. The open air. Far from the Keep, from the Court with the same faces and the same insufferable dudes, far from King's Landing. Far from the weariness that can feel someone who sees day after day his bitch of a sister, the imbecile of his eldest nephew, the whoremonger and drunkard king who treats him with contempt, and his deadpanned father who reminds nonstop his dwarf son how filthy he is. The boredom of someone who feels that he is wasting his life and isn't much better than the whoremonger and drunkard king."

He kept quiet for some seconds, stroking absent-mindedly Sansa's back.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"I myself had designed some years ago a specialized saddle to control horses barely using the legs, and it was very useful to me. Later I redid the designs in several sheets of paper to give them to your brother Robb. Thus they could make a saddle with which Bran would be able to ride. I simply added some little changes to the one I had planned for myself. That happened when I was coming back from the Wall and I sought asylum in your castle."

"You gifted Bran a saddle adapted to his handicap? Oh, Tyrion." She gave him a kiss.

"Your brother Jon requested me to try to help Bran and I remembered about the saddle and also that, though I'm not an accomplished rider, I've managed quite well on horses thanks to my specialized saddle."

"You're my hero," complimented her, smiling.

"I've always wanted to be a beautiful lady's hero," teased him, cocky.

"Well, you've achieved it."

"It hasn't been so difficult." He was smiling mockingly and she tugged his beard softly.

"Well, let's go on. I rode beside Jaime and we chatted as in our childhood in Casterly Rock and, whenever we stopped at the inns, I found a hearty meal, all the ale I wanted, a bed and new people to talk with and share news and gossip."

_I also laid a few whores in each stop, sometimes two or three at the same time, but Sansa doesn't need to know that._

"And another positive consequence of riding was that I practically didn't see my sister all day, until she got out of that mastodon on wheels which was a sort of walking home. Joffrey, Myrcella and Tommen traveled with her, and Robert traveled on horse but he didn't like my company or Jaime's, a mutual feeling. I quickly got used to that routine and the days passed speedily for me, because I was enjoying myself. After a month on the road, we arrived at Winterfell but I didn't join the rest of the party for your welcome. I wandered through the surroundings, exploring the woods and the village adjacent to the castle. I was not very fond of formal receptions."

_Like Oberyn Martell when he went to King's Landing for Joff's wedding and left me in the lurch whereas he dedicated himself to go whoring and stab one of my Lannister distant relatives in Littlefinger's brothel, thought him with sarcasm. And yes, I had gone to explore, but not villages or woods. Most likely Ros' body and other northern whores'._

"Therefore we didn't see you with the others. Arya was eager to know how you were. She was very insolent and didn't stop asking for you. We had to order her to be quiet."

He smiled.

"Children's curiosity. She wanted to see the famous Imp, of course. But she was disappointed. Tell me one thing, Sansa. Joff, after entering the castle, did give you his good-and-irresistible-boy smile?"
Sansa was amused with Tyrion's ability to see through his nephew, guessing even his gestures and actions without having been present.

"What do you think, Tyrion? He couldn't waste the chance to dazzle a naïve girl. He looked so charming and good-looking, with his elegant clothes... And I fell." She did not like to remember that. "He was the prince of my dreams and he would take me to King's Landing to make me his queen. I was floating on the clouds. My siblings immediately realized how he actually was but I refused to see it."

"You had a crush on him and besides you were betrothed to him. You insisted on seeing him as you wanted him to be, and it's completely understandable, Sansa. You only were... twelve, thirteen years old?"

"Yes. But that's when the end of my childhood began." She sighed with melancholy.

"Mine had a terrible end too. Take a mental note of it for our list of pending matters, because this is another thing I have to talk to you about."

"I'm sorry, my love. Whatever it was, I'm sorry for what happened to you." She rested a hand on his beard.

"Thanks, my love. It will be a harsh story, but you must know it. I owe it to another person and I owe it to you."

"A girl?," guessed Sansa.

Tyrion always had felt curious about women's sixth sense to detect when other women were or had been involved with their men.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
"Yes. She was my first girl. I promise I'll talk to you about her, but not now, you agree?" He kissed her hands.

"I agree." Curiosity and perhaps some hidden retrospective jealousy danced in her big blue eyes. The fact that she felt jealous of a girl who had gone away from his life so many years ago caused him a sensation of intense tingling. He loved that she wanted to possess and treasure for herself all he was, including his past. He would always feel amazed of being so loved by Sansa.

He felt exactly the same for her. He wanted to treasure her entirely. If previously to him any upstart had stolen her heart and the pleasures of her divine body, he would have cursed him in silence, especially if the dude in question had lied to her or hurt her any way. Obviously, being an innocent girl as she was until she became a woman with him, she did not have time to know true love before meeting him. No love at all, in fact. Her betrothal to Joff or to Loras did not count. They were only adolescent infatuations. With Joff it had vanished all of a sudden with one fell swoop of the large sword over her father's neck, and with Loras it would had faded just when she had observed in the handsome knight's eyes his total lack of interest toward her feminine charms.

*I'm her first true love, and I hope to be her last, because I'm going to fulfill what I told her and won't unstick from her side until I die, what I'm determined to delay until we are two oldies,* thought him, smiling.

"Where were we? Ah, yes. At the arrival of the dashing prince and the eccentric royal family. Robert greeted you affectionately, ignored Cersei as usual and ordered Ned to take him to the crypt to pay his respects before Lyanna's tomb, am I right?"

"Yes, you are." He always made her want to laugh when he told her his stories with that amusing tone and he guessed point by point everything people had done.

"Later the feast commenced and my sister must be displaying her charms to enthrall you. She was winning you over and sharpening her claws. Robert was making out with a peasant or servant wench in view of the entire hall, and Cersei was hiding her rage beneath her unctuous smile and her pleasantries. With Robert alive and being out of her ground, she didn't dare to uncover her true bitchy manners. She hated that trip, detested Winterfell and she didn't care in the slightest for the Starks. What regards to Joff, he surely didn't stop staring at you with his seductive little smiles."

"You're right in everything, Tyrion. It happened exactly the way you've told."

"It's not necessary to be very keen to deduce how everyone behaved. I lived together with them for too much time, darling. Well, I was outside, drinking ale, and ran into Jon, as I told Daenerys the last time we had lunch with her. Jon was the only one who made me feel comfortable that night. But although I barely was in the feast, I observed you."

"Did you pay attention to me?" asked her, elated.

"Not the way a man looks at a woman, Sansa, as I'm not one of those degenerates who get excited with little girls that don't bleed yet and whose tits haven't grown. But I admired your beauty and foresaw that you would become a beautiful woman. And I also felt pity because I knew what awaited you with Joff."
"Did you find me pretty, then?"

He smiled with patience. All young women liked to be told that they were pretty. But in Sansa's case, it was the pure truth and even the word *pretty* was an understatement.

"I found you beautiful. Anyone would have found you beautiful. But you were a child."

She did not insist on the subject, sensing that she was touching a sore point. He surely kept an inner battle with himself in that matter, and she would have wanted to say to him that he was not a pervert for finding gorgeous a girl who soon would not be a child any more. To say to him that he was the gentlest man in the world.

"Anyway, that you found me beautiful makes me happy," said Sansa. "And now continue, before Mhyraz comes."

"The following day there was a hunting party and I wasn't eager to endure another of Robert's hunting parties, but I had no other choice. And the rest of the days weren't very amusing, either." *Except for my getaways to the village brothel.* "Whenever I could I stayed in my room reading books of your library, which was very well provided. I've always valued the castles for their libraries, and the one in Winterfell was one of the best in Westeros. A pity that so many valuable volumes got burnt in the fire." He squeezed Sansa's hand.

"So many things were burnt, Tyrion..."

"I know, honey. And if one day I can, I'll rebuild for you everything that can be rebuilt."

She stared at him with intense emotion and caressed his cheek through his beard.

"And even though we couldn't rebuild it, I'll be equally happy, my love. I'll have you and our children, and the memories of my childhood. And that's enough for me."

"For me too, Sansa. Even if I might never have Casterly Rock, I'll be so happy with you and our children as I am now, or maybe even more. But if I can claim Casterly Rock as mine and recover Winterfell for you, I'll do it."

"Thanks, Tyrion." She gave him a sweet kiss.

"Thanks to you." He gave her another kiss and, as always, got aroused. The kiss prolonged and he asked, mischievous: "Do you think we'll have time before Mhyraz knocks at the door?"

"If we make it fast, yes, I think," answered her, suggestive, with her womb ready to receive him.

"Then no more talk. The rest of the story is left for another moment."

And he did not waste a single second to penetrate her and get lost in their pleasure.
Merry Christmas Day to you all!

Meereen: Day 20

He kissed Sansa before going for his morning tasks.

"Be very careful," pleaded her. "Stay alert."

"I will, gorgeous. Have a fruitful morning."

"You too, my love."

They kissed again and he went out, happy because of the session of whirlwind sex they had just before breakfast. They had peaked in scarcely two minutes and both of them were flushed and panting out of the effort, but full of optimism and energy as in each occasion in which the delight of their joined bodies carried them away.

As every time he had his urban tour of inspection, Green Beetle, White Fly and Pod were waiting for him in the corridor. Outside they were received by a cloudy sky, the first since their arrival at Meereen. A mass of dark cumuli were hovering over the city, moving fast due to the wind.

*Bad perspective. If it rains, the market will be closed and there will be monetary losses today as well.*

He did his usual itinerary. As there were lots of areas in works, Tyrion had distributed them in his route so that to visit them all he would need more than two weeks, and that would be so even stopping just enough time in each one to check that it was going well and make the appropriate entries. That day Kerro was in the camps arranging the transfer of a consignment of granite of the quarry, allocated to the buildings, so Tyrion talked with Koleos, the foreman. The builders were working hard so they and their families as well as the rest of the freedfolk could have at their disposal a house for winter.

He remembered that he had to go to supervise the brotherhood of carpenters, which were making the wooden furniture for the houses. It had been fitted out for them a whole block of braced buildings whose definitive remodeling would be delayed until the rest of the constructions were finished. The dimensions of the doors and windows hollows were the same for all the houses and that made their making easier. Most of the timber came from a wood that the brotherhood had found ten miles north of Meereen, and the rest would we acquired by Gilean in his business trips. It was a material difficult to obtain in those territories and the carpenters' production was slow due to the scarcity of raw material.

In the Square of Graces, apart from the constructions intended for some of the brotherhoods' jobs, Daenerys had designed a soup kitchen for the people in worst situation, especially cripples, disabled and old people who lacked relatives who could care for them, and anyone that for whatever reason could not have their bowls of food in the camps or in their houses. Daenerys
would adopt measures to prevent guile and would inform the freedfolk that anyone who played on
the free canteen without being suitable for it would be severely punished for robbing the food to
the weakest.

The increase in the city guard was evident in all the streets and the daily bustle was perfectly
controlled. The passers-by walked in order, with their movements monitored. There were no
beggars or naked or dirty kids as in any other city, because the queen did not allow a single person
to be left unattended or without a place to accommodate in. The orphans had been automatically
admitted by the Crown and the cripples and old people who had been in a situation of
abandonment were living in the camp for the moment and Daenerys ensured that no one lacked
basic cares.

The market had returned to its former activity, though it was not yet so bustling as it had been
previously to the disaster, but people was beginning to be driven, and Tyrion calculated that in a
few days, if the rain did not prevent it, it would have restored its full swing. With the details Sarik
gave him, Tyrion figured the total losses and wrote down in his papers. They too forecasted the
upcoming collections after the reopening and they estimated that it would take from three weeks to
a month to make up for the losses and obtain profits again. They hoped that Gilean's mission were
successful, because until the city recovered from the blow, they were going to depend on the
Toloshi captain's efficiency. If he had finished his buying and selling in Bhorash, perhaps a raven
was about to arrive, and everyone was awaiting the news.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 20

When he finished all his transactions in the market, relieved because the heavy clouds were hesitant about discharging themselves, he asked some guards for the section in which Jorah patrolled and they informed him. Tyrion wanted to see how the knight was managing in his new post into Daenerys' army.

When he was heading for the place, a shadow darker than the cumuli flew through the sky and many people looked up, petrified.

_Drogon. He has come back. Let's hope he doesn't feel inclined to roast the pedestrians. We've had enough with a fire._

The huge winged shadow was flying to the Great Pyramid.

_He's going to visit his mother. The unruly son misses the shoulder upon which he alighted when he was born from the egg._

Daenerys would get euphoric. She had not seen him in several weeks.

_He really is very big already, and he isn't two years old yet._

The black dragon went past and everyone released the air in their lungs. They burst out speaking about the impressive animal which had just overflown their heads.

Tyrion had felt a strange mixture of fear and emotion. His youthful passion toward dragons remained in a corner of his spirit and he kept staring at the winged beast until it went out of sight.

He changed his plans and took the direction of the Great Pyramid, like a child drawn by a puppeteer.

He asked for the Mother and he was told she was on the terrace of her private rooms, where Drogon had perched. He said to Pod and the two Unsullied that they could retire, and he went back to his chambers. Sansa was in the next hall teaching her lessons and he missed her on the chair where she always sat to sew by the window. He put away the papers he was carrying and got out to the corridor again. He went closer to the adjacent door and heard Sansa's voice, which was reciting something and a chorus of children's voices was repeating it. Tyrion smiled, proud of her once more. Without knowing very well what to do and eager to find out about the queen and the dragon, he strolled along the corridors and visited the halls that were going to be used for the school. They were being setting up with benches so the children could sit down.

He went up to the third floor, where the halls were being transformed into homes for the freedfolk families who would move to them. The Unsullied were busy carrying objects from side to side. He would have to take Sansa there so she could see the progress. Thus he would take her out of their rooms and entertain her with the improvements in the pyramid developed to give shelter to the disadvantaged people. She was going to love it and maybe she could suggest ideas for the decoration or whatever occurred to her. Sansa was very sensitive to the necessities of those who were less lucky than her. Day after day she made her husband feel more admiration for her. He had always dreamed of a woman like her, sweet and strong at the same time, with a generous heart and a lot to offer to the people she loved, and he woke up in the mornings giving thanks to any god.
who fancied listening to him for having her by his side.

He ascended some more floors and, in every one he looked at, there was the same activity of Unsullied carrying things, so he descended again. He told himself that he had not inspected yet the first floor in its entirety, or the underground levels, but those were prohibited, because Daenerys forbade access to whom were not in charge of taking care of the dragons. She soon would take him to meet them.

In the main floor, apart from the lobby, the audience hall and Daenerys’ hall for private meetings, were the orphans' rooms, some spaces for the permanent sentinels of the pyramid, the warehouses, the kitchens and the cooks' and their families' homes. Tyrion had never seen the staff responsible for cooking the meals for all the inhabitants of the big building and which Mhyraz took to Tyrion and Sansa punctually, and he was considering to thank them one day for their excellent work. They were part of the brotherhood of cooks and they lived permanently in the pyramid. The cooks in the camps prepared community meals in large cauldrons or spits and all the freedfolk had decent food to eat. Moreover, the soup kitchen in the Square of Graces would feed those who did not belong to any brotherhood or could not work because they were incapacitated or ill.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 125

Meereen: Day 20

After a long while he returned to his floor and when he was going to enter his rooms, a soldier informed him that the Mother claimed his presence. She was waiting for him in the corridor of the first floor.

"Good morning, Lord Tyrion. I can suppose you have seen Drogon, haven't you?"

"Yes, Your Grace. He has caused a great shock. I myself have been left speechless," answered him, smiling.

"He has come to see me," said her, moved. "He has perched on my terrace and I've felt a strange sensation of solace. I've feared that he could cause damages when he has overflown the city, but he has restricted himself to come and go away peacefully. I hope he hasn't attacked more people apart from little Hazzea."

"There are no rumours about it, Your Grace. No one else has come to the audiences complaining for human lives lost by the fire of the dragon. Perhaps what happened with the child was an error. Maybe he mistook her for a lamb. Her father was a shepherd and surely the child was among the animals Drogon had the intention to hunt and he didn't distinguish."

"I also suspect it was like that, Lord Tyrion. It reassures me very much to know that Drogon doesn't attack indiscriminately animals and people. He's cleverer than we believe."

"Some dragons of the past only lacked the ability to speak, but they proved to be among the most intelligent animals in the world. Because of that the alliance between them and the Targaryens was so powerful, during the first centuries at least."

"A single dragon is so valuable that all gold or all the gifts wouldn't offset its value. Three dragons... might conquer the world, if one learns to control them, of course," said her, releasing a sigh.

"You don't need to conquer the world, only Westeros," jested Tyrion to cheer her up. He knew she felt frustrated for not being able yet to make her dragons take her serious.

She addressed him a slightly humorous smile.

"I've summoned you here because a promise is a promise, and the Lannisters know a lot about doubts. And I have one with you."

"Am I going to meet Rhaegal and Viserion, Your Grace?," guessed him.

"If you are ready for it, Lord Tyrion."

"Of course. Who doesn't want to look face to face at a dream of his youth?," said him with irony to hide the nervousness that suddenly settled into his stomach.

"Let's go, then. When we go down to the dungeons, stay behind me at a prudent distance. The fire doesn't affect me."

They walked to the underground level, escorted by some Unsullied.
"When did you discover that you had the blood of the dragon, Your Grace?"

"I was a little girl. Once I fell over a brazier and my skin didn't even turn red. I didn't feel pain. My clothes burnt but I was harmless."

"Were someone else present when that incident happened to you?"

"No. And I didn't tell anyone. Any time Viserys frightened me, he said I mustn't wake up the dragon he carried inside. He ignored that he wasn't a true dragon, but I never dared to make him think otherwise. Anyway, I was a scared girl who only had him and my blood from Valyria didn't serve me much in those circumstances."

The tunnels were lit with torches on the walls and they almost had reached the end of the ramp.

Tyrion heard clearly the growls of the animals, which reverberated in the tunnels. His heartbeats sped up.

"We are here. Enter very slowly and don't walk beyond the threshold," warned Daenerys.

"All right, Your Grace."

They arrived at the large entrance of the dungeon and he stopped there, observing from afar. At the other side of a row of thick iron bars which on some spots were slightly melted, two monsters of considerable size turned around to look at him. They immediately half-closed their eyes in a hostile attitude. They recognized their mother, who was getting closer without showing fear. She murmured something and the beasts seemed to calm down a little, but in spite of all she stopped some steps far from the cell, unsure of their reaction. She had locked them and they detested their confinement.

Tyrion watched them in silence in order not to get them angry. Rhaegal was the biggest of the two, and his green and orange scales glinted under the light of the torches. His beauty was wild and terrible, pure fire made flesh with great difficulty. His brother Viserion, the smallest, shone brightly in tones between whitish and golden, with reddish flashes on his wings.

The floor of the cell was covered in bones of sheep and goats, and the granite walls had acquired a tinge of soot.

Daenerys turned around to study her counselor's reaction, amused. Neither of them spoke so as not to annoy the unpredictable animals. Then Daenerys moved away from the bars and joined him at the entrance. Tyrion glanced for the last time and the dragons looked at him in return, defiantly.

"Soon I won't be able to contain them here." She got thoughtful. "Do you think I should set them free?," asked her, hesitant. "If I did that, my subjects would scream blue murder."

"Drogon isn't fond of killing people if he's not provoked or if he doesn't feel threatened, and that taking into account that he's the fiercest of the three, Your Grace. What happened to Hazzea points at an accident, as we have commented before. I doubt they attack the settlements if they aren't incited. What we must fear is the people's reaction when they know you have let them loose."

"Yes, that's what worries me. That the settlements react in an exaggerated way and it really could awake the rage of the dragons. How could I make them understand that they won't attack if they are left alone?"

"You could divulge a campaign of awareness through messengers, as you did when the neighbour villages were warned about Drogon's appearance. If they have accepted that Drogon is loose, why
aren't they going to get used to the presence of the other two?"

She took his words into consideration.

"You might be right, Lord Tyrion. I must achieve that people get used to them. But it's obvious that 
Rhaegal and Viserion can't go on chained in a dungeon. And if people get accustomed to the 
dragons, the dragons will do the same with them. Drogon has proved it," reasoned her. Her eyes 
were shining with enthusiasm. "I'll start the campaign and I'll soon set free my two youngsters. I 
trust that everything goes well."

The fact that the queen spoke about those two mastodons as if they were babies at the breast 
amused Tyrion.

"I'm sure it will be a wise decision, Your Grace. They need to fly and hunt and so they won't be 
resentful against you, and when you're crestfallen and overwhelmed with problems, you can 
remember one thing, Your Grace: that you're the mother of the most powerful creatures that exist."

She raised her chin, proud.

"From now on I won't forget it, Lord Tyrion."

They bid farewell and he went to his rooms, where Sansa must be sewing by the window while she 
waited for him.
Meereen: Day 20

"You won't believe what I've seen today, Sansa," announced him, with the tone of suspense he used whenever he was going to reveal something unusual.

"Let me guess," requested her, with her most seductive smile. "Let's play a game. If I'm right, I'll do to you what I want. And if I don't, you'll do to me what you want."

He felt painfully pressed against his pants.

*For the seven heavens and the seven hells. This girl is going to make difficult for me to grow old. Or perhaps spending my life madly in love and driven crazy with lust for her like a young boy would be the ideal thing to grow old.* He smiled from ear to ear.

"I accept. Come on, tell me," hurried him along.

"I see you very impatient, my lord. You have to learn to value the virtue of patience," scolded her, mocking.

"Teach that to my cock, my lady. In a second it has turned thick and hard as rock. Would you mind spilling it out your speech about patience, to see if it pays attention to you?" replied him, with his eyes shining with amusement and lust.

She laughed with her singsong laughter and moistened her lips.

*Gods, I'm going to pounce on her at any moment and I'm truly going to teach her the virtue of patience onto the carpet,* thought Tyrion relishing and stripping her brazenly with his look.

Sansa automatically felt the heat in her lower belly.

"What would you prefer, to win or to lose?" inquired her.

"I'm not sure. To be in your hands would drive me absolutely crazy, but, on the other hand, to have you at my mercy and do anything to you without hearing you complaining... For the gods, Sansa. Whatever you want to say, do it now because if you don't hurry up I'll lay you down on the carpet, I'll rip your clothes in pulls and I'll sink into you like an animal in heat."

"My husband is very ardent. Like the dragons he has seen today," blurted her with an air of triumph.

His predatory smile widened.

"You've just won, gorgeous. But tell me if you knew that already and you've cheated, or if you've guessed it."

"Would it bother you very much if I had cheated?" asked Sansa innocently.

He felt on the verge of lowering his pants to relieve the pressure of his swollen manhood.

"It wouldn't bother me at all, darling. Not in this. But whatever you want to do to me, do it now, please."
She laughed again. He really looked like as if at any moment he were going to beg for the release of his sexual tension. Sansa grinned mischievously.

"I'm the boss. I don't want you to do anything until I command it, you understand?"

Her imperious tone shot up the lust he felt to impossible levels.

_Gods, I feel limp like a shy green boy. And I love it. It's very arousing when she sometimes takes control and I submit to her will._

She looked sublime when she expressed with total freedom her wishes and she was more beautiful than ever.

"Lie on your stomach," commanded Sansa.

He did as he was ordered, almost trembling with anticipation.

She started to undress him without leaving a single garment on his body and thereupon she took off her own clothes, while he heard the sound of the fabrics as they slid over the skin. Then he felt something like a silky graze on his back.

_She's caressing me with her hair. Oh, for the seven hells._

The soft brushes went down his back to his buttocks and afterwards, to his legs. Thereupon Sansa kissed and licked his nape and descended slowly, covering all his skin with caresses. He shivered and moaned hoarsely, especially when she bit his buttocks. She made him separate his legs and did something totally unexpected.

She licked his testicles from behind, with her face between his legs.

_For all the gods! That sensation was indescribable._

She went up from his testicles to his buttocks, licking all the skin in her path, and she moved again through his back. She straddled the back of his thighs and dropped until touching him with her breasts. She pressed them against his back and she herself took them to rub them up and down him, letting her cascade of hair fall upon him.

"You like this, Tyrion?," asked her by his ear.

"It's wonderful, Sansa. You have me helplessly crazy. I'm making a great effort not to finish at this very moment onto the sheet," said him, choking with emotion.

"You have to hold on. When you see what I have in store for you, you'll be glad to delay your highest pleasure."

"I'll hold on," affirmed him.

"So I like. And now I want you to look at me without touching me. Turn around and lay face up on the pillows."

He did it and observed her, with his pupils dilated and feeling the heat of desire which was invading each fiber of his being.

Sansa put a cushion at the feet of the bed and lied opposite him, offering him a splendid view of her wet sex. She was very flushed and suddenly turned a little insecure due to what she was going to do, but she cast aside her shyness.
He knows perfectly every corner of my body. It's nonsense to feel shame.

She started to masturbate before him.

Tyrion released the air of his lungs in a sudden moan which went out from his depths.

This woman is incredible.

"That's it, Sansa. Masturbate for me. Touch yourself so I can see you. You want me to touch myself before you too, gorgeous? You're the boss."

"Yes, Tyrion. Touch your cock so I can see you as well. But I don't want you to finish."

He began to move his hand up and down his cock.

"You're giving me a hard time, gorgeous," protested him, smiling, moving his hand very slowly.

Both looked at each other while they were stimulating themselves with their hands. Sansa was rubbing all her entrance and spread the wetness. She introduced herself a finger and afterwards two, and moaned.

"Gods, Sansa. You're the hottest woman I've ever met. No other woman has gone so far for me ever." He was moving his hand as slowly as he could to delay the explosion which was threatening to invade him.

"I like very much to be the one who has taken you the farthest, Tyrion. None of the others has loved you or desired you as I do. I know exactly what you want, what drives you crazy, what takes you up." Her fingers went on going in and out.

"You take me higher than I've ever gone before, gorgeous."

"How many women have you possessed?" She was looking at him flushed and absolutely desirable and lustful.

"Lots of them, Sansa. I don't know how many." The game she was playing was tremendously arousing. She, strangely, seemed to feel overexcited with that conversation about his past sexual partners. But he knew why. Because, except for Shae, he only had felt physical pleasure but he had not loved them. He had not experienced the glorious union he felt with Sansa, it simply had been the momentary relief of his erotic urgencies. She felt a retrospective curiosity for his releasings but those women did not really awake her jealousy. Tysha, however, did, and Sansa still did not even know who she was. And it was better that Sansa did not find out at all about Shae, though he had not been unfaithful to her with her former handmaiden. He was sure she would feel hurt to know that Shae was his lover and he had been in love with her, until he wedded Sansa and he started to develop feelings for his wife. No, it was not something a wife should know.

(Part of a longer chapter)
Chapter 127

Meereen: Day 20

"You enjoyed them very much? You made them enjoy?"

"Much less than I enjoy together with you, gorgeous. I think I made some of them enjoy. That was how I learnt to please women, Sansa," admitted him.

"I can't understand why they didn't love you. Why they didn't see the man I see."

The drenched fingers going in and out had turned him mad.

"They saw the Imp, Sansa. The Halfman."

She suddenly got up and straddled him, introducing her wet fingers into his mouth. Tyrion quickly sucked and tasted her flavour.

"That was their loss. But I'm glad, because now you're mine. Touch my tits." She rarely used a filthy language, but he loved when she did. He obeyed instantly. "Suck them," commanded her.

He did not have to be asked twice. She was rubbing her soaked sex against his hard cock, tormenting him.

"You're the most ardent man and you're mine. You were waiting for me." She pressed him against her and he was sucking her nipples hard.

"Yes, my love. I was waiting for you. The most beautiful woman in the world."

Sansa at last eased his torture introducing his cock into herself and riding him while she rubbed her clitoris. Both moaned when they felt his manhood entering her.

"They say that Daenerys is the most beautiful," replied her, looking at him maliciously while she was moving over him.

"Not for me. She certainly is beautiful, but for me she isn't as much as you, and you're who I love." He went on licking her breasts and was squeezing her buttocks while they moved up and down.

"You're a very attractive man, Tyrion. Surely she has noticed." It was more and more difficult to pronounce the sentences and she was panting.

"I'm not her type and she isn't mine, either." He was panting too.

Sansa accelerated.

"I'm going to finish, Tyrion," announced her. He knew it because he was beginning to feel the tension of her inner muscles.

"Finish, honey. Do it for me. I want to feel you."

"Tyrion!," shouted her, shuddering, her insides pressing him strongly with every delightful wave.

"Sansa!," added him a few seconds later, emptying into her his warm seed in several shakes.
He fell on the bed, worn out, and she fell onto him, covering him with the curtain of her red hair.

"That you're so creative drives me mad, Sansa," lauded him, smiling at her.

"My love for you makes me so creative. I want to turn you more and more mad with desire for me."

He nodded firmly.

"You've accomplished it with profit, my love. I'm more and more mad with desire for you. It's a great effort to be separated from your body. And unluckily I'll have to be, because Mhyraz is going to bring lunch and I suppose you don't want him to find us this way, do you?"

"Oh, no! I nearly forgot about lunch." She jumped out of the bed and started to get dressed.

"I think one day I'll keep you stuck here and I won't care that the boy catches us naked in the bed," commented him naughtily.

"No way!," opposed her, throwing him a cushion and bursting into giggles.

"I intend to do it," threatened Tyrion with half-closed eyes, getting dressed. "I'll immobilize you on the bed and Mhyraz will see us playing adult games."

"Don't even think about it," hissed her.

The knocks at the door sounded and Tyrion shot his flushed wife a devilish smile.

While they were having lunch, Tyrion told her everything he had done that morning.

"I have to take you to see the progress in the halls they're preparing to be homes in the pyramid, Sansa. You'll like it. The Unsullied don't stop carrying things from one side to another. Maybe you could suggest details for the decoration or whatever your wise woman's touch wants to add."

"I'll love that you take me there, my love. Soon our new neighbours of the pyramid will live there. Surely we'll be housing companions for a long time and the more we get along together, the better."

"Of course, gorgeous." He changed the subject. "Today the threat of rain has been about to spoil the market, but it didn't came to happen and just when I was going to see how Jorah is managing as a city guard, Drogon flew above us among the clouds and all the spectators remained paralyzed with fright and surprise. But he only came to visit Daenerys and has lef the city alone. The queen and I have come to the conclusion that Drogon attacked that girl by mistake. She was a shepherd's daughter and she must be playing among the sheep. When the dragon had the intention to hunt some cattle to feed, he surely didn't see the youngster or mistook her for a little lamb. No one else has come claiming for people attacked by the dragon, so it's evident that the animal doesn't attack human beings if these give him no reasons for it. Dragons are fierce, impossible to tame and difficult to control, but very clever."

Sansa reflected.

"You know them probably better than most people, Tyrion. You have read a lot about them. I'm sure you're right in you judgement, as usual." She caressed his hand over the table and smiled to him, proud.
"I came back to the pyramid, as I was eager to know about Drogon's visit to the queen, and soon afterwards she summoned me. She remembered that our visit to the dungeons to introduce me to Rhaegal and Viserion was pending, so she took me there."

"And they were like you had envisioned them?," asked her.

"They are very big, Sansa, despite that they're smaller than their brother Drogon. This one is black, darker than storm clouds. Rhaegal is greenish, bronze-coloured and orange, and Viserion is whitish and golden with reddish wings. They are gorgeous in their wild way. And as these animals haven't been born to be locked, Daenerys has made a decision I support."

Sansa opened her eyes very wide.

"She's going to let them loose?"

"Yes, Sansa, but I've advised her that before doing it she send messengers to the villages to get them ready and remind them that the black dragon has been loose for a time and it has hardly caused damages regarding his size and natural fierceness. We'll convince them that dragons let alone the settlements if they do the same with them. As soon as they get used to their presence, they'll see them as something normal, little by little."

"You believe it'll work, Tyrion?" She was trying to hide her preoccupation. She was a bit apprehensive with the issue of the dragons.

"I believe it. People has got used to Drogon and he scarcely has bothered the settlements. I don't see why it hasn't to be the same with the other two."

"Well, my love, until now you've always made the proper decisions." She smiled at him to make him see that she trusted him completely.

"People simply have to be cautious, as they have been since Daenerys alerted them, and all will be alright, you'll see. If any sheep or goat is burnt, the queen will make up the affected people for it. The shepherds won't allow their children to play among the flock and thus they won't run greater risks than normal."

She nodded.

"At least this way we have solved the dilemma of the confinement of the beasts," continued him. "They have to live in the open air to grow up fully. The Targaryens's last dragons became dwarves because they were kept imprisoned. The solution isn't to chain them, but to learn to live together with them peacefully."

She intertwined her fingers with his and looked at him with admiration.

"We have pending a conversation about the adventures of your travel to Winterfell and your experience as Hand of the King," reminded her, smiling.

"I don't forget it, gorgeous. We'll postpone it until this evening, agree? In this moment I have to work on my papers and you must do your needlework, and it'll be better to delay the pleasant activities until tonight," suggested him, with his naughty grin.

"Of course. Leena'll come here soon. We've nearly ended all our garments for the wedding, including yours and Pod's."

"I won't be a very handsome guest, but I'll be one of the best dressed ones," jested him.
"Oh, you fool. To me you'll be the handsomest. I'll be longing for taking off your elegant clothes during the whole day," insinuated Sansa.

"It also will be an effort for me to keep my hands off you, darling. I'm always longing for taking off your pretty dresses, but in those occasions the excitement of seeing you so beautiful and not daring to touch you... Gods, Sansa. You turn me on completely."

She noticed her husband's pressing need and the heat went down, as always, to her lower belly.

"Come here, Tyrion. Let's make it quickly before Leena arrives. We have a little time."

He, as always, did not waste a single instant.
Meereen: Day 20

That dusk the storm announced since the morning broke furiously. Sansa and Tyrion peeked out from the windows to contemplate its fury over the bay. Some lightning bolts fell onto the sea for brief instants, resembling huge incandescent branches.

What are lightning bolts made of? I've always wondered that. No doubt it must be something similar to fire, because when they fall upon trees or wooden houses, they're burnt.

Tyrion liked to think about enigmas of that sort. Nature was a mystery, but it had its laws and it was obvious that it followed a series of patterns. He also wondered if the gods really had created the world, the sun and the stars, or if they had come from other causes. He once read, in a very ancient book, the theories of a wise man who was ahead of his time, a visionary who stated that the world was a round planet which turned around itself (thus creating the days and the nights) and moved in the space, describing a wide ellipse around the sun (and that ellipsoid trajectory, which moved the world further and closer to the sun alternately, was the reason of the irregular seasons). He too affirmed that the moon was a tiny planet which rotated around the world. Some of the little lights in the sky were not stars, but other planets which turned around the sun as well.

Those revolutionary theories, which were categorically rejected by the maesters and experts of their time and subsequent times to the present, were fascinating to him. Why did not they have to be true? It was very logical to him. There were plenty of unknown and incomprehensible phenomena for the human mind. He was not in favour of denying the new ideas. His open and restless mind made him adopt as a rule not to discard anything, because everything was possible.

Thunder rumbled and Tyrion counted with his fingers to guess if the storm was getting far or close. He knew that trick, which his uncle Gerion taught him as a child. For some reason, the light of lightning traveled much faster than the sound which thunder produced, and calculating how much time took thunder to be heard after lightning, it was easy to deduce the rough distance of the storm.

Sansa observed the movement of his fingers, amused.

"What are you doing?," asked her, intrigued.

"I'm counting how much time thunder takes to sound after the fall of lightning. Thus I can work out the distance of the storm and guess if it is moving closer or away from us," explained him patiently. "It's around two miles from here, and it's coming near us."

She looked at him, surprised.

"How do you know all that?"

"My uncle Gerion taught me, and well, I like to study those phenomena on my own and read books about the mysteries of nature. They are rare and ancient books, but there are a few. In your library of Winterfell I found a very interesting copy."

She smiled at him with admiration.

"It shouldn't surprise me. Your mind is always hungry for knowledge. I love that feature in you," praised her. "One more of the many features by which I'm so in love with you," whispered her, taking his hand.
"My body is always hungry too, Sansa," murmured him, with his voice low and hoarse, gazing at her with his eyes shining with desire.

"That feature too is one of the many which make me be so in love. I adore that you desire me so, Tyrion. I want you the same. Do you think this is another mystery of nature?," asked her, wicked.

He hinted his mischievous smile.

"Absolutely. Losing ourselves in the wonders of sex is one of the greatest mysteries, gorgeous."

He got closer to her and began to loosen the laces of her bodice. "Discovering the pleasures of your magnificent body never ceases to be an enigma for me. Feeling that deep connection with you is something I'll never be able to contain completely. People are the greatest mystery we know, Sansa." He released her breasts and started to lower her gown to take it off her. She let him do, smiling. "Your exquisite figure, the curves of your breasts, your waist and your hips, your arms and your legs, the turgidity of your lips..." He slid her underwear along her legs. "All of you are a perfect design conceived to drive men mad with lust and so these want to fuck you to plant their children in your belly. But you have chosen me to allow me to possess you and spill my seed into you, and that way your children will be half mine too." He took her by the hand and guided her to the bed. He started to undress.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 129

Meereen: Day 20

She sat on the mattress and thought about all he had just said, very interested despite the heat and the tingle of lust which was flowing throughout her insides.

"Then, men's body is also designed to attract women so they want to copulate with them to conceive babies," reasoned her.

He had sat next to her, naked like her, and was caressing her arm, softly, going up slowly.

"Exactly, Sansa. That's what I think. Our bodies are a lure to produce descendants. Just think, a woman's womb harbours the unborn baby and her breasts feed it when it's born. And your pretty curves, which are planned for a baby, drive me mad. All this have to be a plan of nature so the species go on living through their progeny." His fingers were going up to her shoulder and neck, and dilated upon the soft cheek. "Have you wondered how children are formed from the seed?"

She was breathing faster, feeling the effect of his warm hand over her, which was descending upon her chin, her neck and her breast.

"It's curious, isn't it, gorgeous? How from some male fluid a creature starts. I suspect that the woman also produces something in her interior which when mixed with the seed originates a child. Therefore not always that a man spills his seed in the womb a pregnancy begins. The woman has to contribute some way and for that reason her children resemble her too, not only the father." He was pinching her erect nipples and she was moaning under his hands. "When you get aroused, your sex moisten. Maybe in your inner dampness sometimes there's something alike to what must be in my seed. Perhaps due to that, when my seed blends with your inner moisture, in some moments two elements, yours and mine, could join and create a baby. The moon tea has to prevent your body from producing that element, and so you don't get pregnant." He stopped speaking and licked her breasts.

"I like so much that you reason so elaborately all that, my love," murmured her, arching her back and embracing him tightly. "Then... All this we do, all this attraction, it's a trick so I conceive? How... unromantic," joked her.

"Romantic or not, there's something true, and it's that you have me crazy all day long and wishing to plant a baby in your cute belly," said him, smiling upon her skin. He layed her down on the mattress and placed himself between her legs. "The trick works perfectly with me."

She laughed, blushed by the ardent touch of his hands over her breasts and, a moment later, of his mouth on her sex.

"And with me, Tyrion. When you make me that with your tongue all I want is to open to you and bury you into me." She stopped talking, as a deep moan emerged from her throat when he intensified the contact of his tongue on her intimate folds.

"All of you are divine, perfect, incomparable. I'd make you a baby after another if I could," murmured him against her soaked flesh, mischievous. He looked her in the eye and knew that she would not last long to let her pleasure unleash.

He raised and penetrated her. She instinctively encircled him with her legs in her possessive
gesture.

"All this delight of my cock rubbing against your walls is aimed at the same goal. And your playful clitoris is aimed at it too. It makes you have the need to be penetrated by me and to receive my seed into you."

She was stimulating herself, while he propelled into her insides, with his hands resting on the bed on both sides of her waist. "And this moment you're going to reach your climax, I can feel it."

"Oh, Tyrion!," cried her, shaking and pressing him tightly against her to increase the sensation.

"And now I'm going to peak, darling. You see? It's a perfect plan of nature. The ideal union." He interrupted his speech. "Sansa!," moaned him, spilling.

They fell onto the bed, smiling.

"It has been an amazing lesson, my love. You're a good teacher." She hugged him and stroked his hair.

"Glad to teach you, my lady. It's been my pleasure."

"Same here. And now, after this practical lesson about how making children... What about continuing the narration of your trip?"

"Of course, Sansa. Where were we?," asked him, trying to remember.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 20

"We were in the part where you stayed in your room reading, because going hunting wasn't your favourite activity," summarized her.

"Ah, yes. Well, I also entertained myself strolling around the spaces and the patios, observing the inhabitants of the castle. Sometimes I went to the parade ground to see your brothers' training. They detested Joffrey's presence, who didn't have anything better to do than outboasting and criticizing, abusing his condition of royal prince. They, prudently, made an effort to ignore coldly his bravado. With Tommen, on the contrary, they were openly kind, as he's a charming boy. Besides, I took a walk around the stables, the forge, the storehouses, the well, and in one occasion I climbed up one of the ramparts to admire the scenery from the heights."

He caressed Sansa's back, as he used to do when they were in their favourite position and he narrated her some story.

"Moreover, almost all days I went out to the village. In short, I didn't have a very bad time." He did a pause and put his other hand onto Sansa's cheek. "Then happened Bran's accident and I was very sorry about it. Joffrey didn't want to express his sympathies to your mother, but I forced him. I smacked him for his lack of tactfulness and he had no other choice but doing what I had commanded him. I still had power over him and I exerted it whenever he revealed his nasty and cruel streaks. Shortly after, Robert and the rest, including you, headed for the South and I took the Kingsroad in the direction of the Wall, accompanied by Jon, Benjen and several criminals recruited by Benjen, whom had chosen to dress the black. I talked a lot with your brother, though it was more like I said nearly all the things and Jon listened and from time to time inserted two or three accurate words. He wasn't very talkative, but we felt comfortable in our mutual company. Your uncle, on the other hand, was cold and haughty with me. The Lannisters have never been welcomed in the North," said him, ironic. "The Starks and the Lannisters have been steadfast enemies for many generations and that's very difficult to change. Exceptionally you and me have broken the tradition. I think that our match, yours and mine, has been the first between our houses in living memory. And it's even more exceptional that a Lannister and a Stark are in love with each other," said him, smiling at her.

"I'm glad we're the exception, Tyrion. We are the proof that everything can be changed."

"It's true, Sansa. All can be. As for example, that the cutest and most incredible girl in Westeros loves the dwarf with the longest tongue in Westeros."

"I agree with the long tongue," jested her.

"I have some other long attribute over there but I'm not going to boast of it being the longest in Westeros. I haven't compared it with enough men's to affirm it."

She laughed and tugged his beard.

"You goofy. Stop bragging and go on telling," scolded her, amused.

"Bragging? Me? Indeed I am one of the most modest men I've ever met."

"Very modest. And now... Would you mind continuing, please?"
"All right, all right. Though perhaps if I play hard to get, you'll beg me in some suggestive way..."

"Hey you! Focus. You're worst than children." She tugged his beard again, grinning.

"That's because you distract me, gorgeous. You have such a glorious body that I don't even know what I'm saying."

"You were heading for the Wall with Jon and Benjen."

He released a sigh of fake resignation.

"Its height impressed me when I saw it for the first time. I had heard and read a thousand stories about the legendary ice construction, but the first time one sees it is never forgotten."

"I haven't seen it, strange though it may seem. My father never took us to visit it."

"It's not a place for children, Sansa. Your father did well with respect to not having taken you there." He gave her a kiss on her forehead. "When we arrived, the outlook wasn't very encouraging and I did what I could to help Jon to adapt to what was going to be his home from then on. Nearly all the men and boys whom went there were of very poor origins and some of them had committed horrible crimes, but Jon had to understand that the Night's Watch is a brotherhood, whereby all the differences of origin are left behind and there's no more family than the rest of the black brothers. As soon as Jon understood it, I was certain he'd gain loyal friends. He started to help his mates and give them advice about fighting. Meanwhile, I talked with the Lord Commander Mormont and the blind maester, Aemon Targaryen, Daenerys' great-granduncle, and they pleaded with me to convey the Crown the desperate situation in which they were, with insufficient men and scarce supplies to cope with winter. I also became friends with Yoren, a crow recruiter of new members for the Watch. He was one of the few men there who laughed openly. He accompanied me in my return trip, at least until your mother held me prisoner. But that happened later." Sansa moved a bit and accommodated better upon his shoulder. She was toying with the hair on his chest. "Ah, and a message arrived announcing that Bran had awaken of his unconsciousness, what cheered Jon up considerably. Soon afterwards I said goodbye to the boy and departed for the South. I decided to seek asylum in Winterfell, but your brother Robb received me coldly, and moreover I noticed that your mother wasn't there."

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 20

Sansa was startled.

"Rob was rude to you? And my mother had gone, leaving Bran's headboard?"

"Yes, Sansa. Now I know at least partly the reasons of their unusual actions, and later I'll tell you what I know." He did a brief pause. "I saw Bran and gave him the designs of the specialized saddle and instructions on how getting the horse used to obey certain orders. His look lit. The perspective of being able to ride again got his hopes up. For a ten-year-old boy, it has to be terrible to know he won't walk again, but I sensed Bran was a boy with a strong inner resilience, like you."

"It's true. He was always mature for his age," confirmed Sansa, smiling with proud when she recalled her favourite sibling.

"Robb changed his mind when I gave them my gift and he wanted to thank me, rectifying his former cold attitude, but I declined. It had been very clear to me that I wasn't welcome, and I didn't know why. I supposed that was related to your mother's sudden departure and I feared that the Lannister surname may be involved, and I suspected what was it all about."

"What was it? Your family was in Winterfell no more."

"When your brother remained unconscious after the fall, a murderer who carried my Valyryian steel dagger sneaked in his bedroom, but your mother was there and she put up fierce resistance, until Bran's wolf arrived and killed the guy. Your mother then decided to find out what had happened and set off towards King's Landing, accompanied by the fencing instructor, Ser Rodrik. I imagine she wanted to talk directly with your father about the circumstances surrounding Bran's mishap. At an inn, I crossed paths with her and she, very cunningly, summoned the Tullys' vassals who were present in the establishment, as we were near the Riverlands. They held me prisoner and Catelyn proclaimed that she would take me to Winterfell to be subjected to the Northern justice, but instead she veered East and we headed for the Vale."

Sansa intervened.

"Did my mother believe you had ordered Bran's murder?" asked her, frowning.

"The killer's dagger was indeed mine, but I swear to you, Sansa, I didn't have the slightest idea that someone had plotted that and had stolen my dagger in order to incriminate me. Some time later I put two and two together and I deduced who had schemed that. Someone stupid, a bungler, of course. Nothing less than our dear Joffrey."

Sansa opened her eyes very wide.

"Joffrey? It's not that I'm not surprised, but... Why would Joffrey have wanted to kill my brother?"

"I'm not sure, but I have the impression he did it to please Robert."

She clearly did not understand, and it was logical. His family's behaviour was too twisted for upright and honest people like the Starks.

"See, Sansa. Robert had made a comment about that it would be best for the boy to be dead
because, if he survived, he might remain in a vegetative state, something like that. And I think Joff took literally his comment, and he believed that if he was *merciful* and he ordered Bran killed, he'd please Robert even though this one wouldn't know Joff was the author. Joff admired and yearned for the approval of the man he believed his father, who didn't hide his contempt toward his blond imbecile son."

Sansa stayed silent for several minutes, stunned, but finally the light of understanding lit in her eyes.

"Robert said that? Very compassionate on his part," she said bitterly, with an acid voice. "If it had been his Lyanna, would he also have considered her death *merciful*?" Her question revealed resentment, though she tried to restrain it.

"It was a deplorable comment and totally tactless. Robert didn't distinguish for his prudence. He was abrupt and his brutal sincerity often was offensive. He was no more than an embittered drunkard, honey." He took her hand. "I'm very sorry, Sansa." He kissed it.

She softened.

"Excuse me, my love. It's unfair that you pay the piper due to my anger." She kissed him on the lips.

He sighed, relieved. For a moment he had feared that she turned her resentment against him and believed him involved somehow in that awful issue.

"I guessed all that later, thinking of how my dagger ended up in the hands of a cheap hired killer. Joff and I never had an affectionate relationship, as you observed by yourself. He wanted to kill two birds with one stone: making Robert's words a reality and passing me off as guilty because that was my dagger. Honestly, Sansa, no one who has any brains would use his own weapon to order someone killed, and I explained that to your mother, but she didn't listen to me. Understandable, as the pain for a son turns mothers into beasts, and I couldn't even fathom what she was suffering for Bran. In the inn I met Bronn, who entered my service, and he came with us to the Eyrie. By the way the clans of the mountains attacked us. Your mother cut the ropes tied to my wrists so I could fight and I saved her life. I respected and admired her, Sansa, as I told you in King's Landing. Afterwards, we arrived at the Eyrie and I was face to face with your aunt Lysa and your cousin Robin. As you know, your aunt wasn't holding together well. She wasn't right in the head."

Sansa caressed his chest.

"Oh, Tyrion. I apologize on behalf of my mother. I know she did what she believed she must do, but I regret you were through all that."

He played down the importance of that with a gesture of his hand.

"Don't worry, Sansa. I didn't have a very bad time," joked him. "The story is long and Mhyraz will come very soon. We have to get dressed for dinner," said him, reluctantly. "We'll go on later, if you fancy it."

"Very well," affirmed her. She sat up and the sight of her back, her bottom and the cute dimples on her low back provoked him a full erection, but he restrained himself. It was either that, or that Mhyraz caught them in the middle of the sex act, and he doubted Sansa fancied it.

"Sansa," said him, while they were putting on their clothes. She turned around to look at him. "Many times I've felt ashamed of my surname, and all the matter I've told you about is one of those
times.” His tone was a little dispirited.

She put her hand on his beard.

"Do you remember what you said to me when we had just arrived at Meereen? We aren't our surnames. You are you and what other members of your family do doesn't make you guilty."

The weight that had just placed in his heart lightened.

"Thank you, gorgeous. You're a blessing." He kissed the palm which was resting on his cheek.

"You mustn't fear I doubt you, my love. I haven't done it for a long time now. I stopped doing it completely the day we escaped together." She was knelt before him and was looking at his eyes with such tenderness that he felt the tears struggling to spill.

"I'd never hurt you, Sansa. I'd never do anything which harm you any way." A rebel tear slid down his cheek and got lost in his beard. She dried it.

"I know, Tyrion. I love you." She kissed him with devotion. He took her face in his hands.

"I love you, Sansa." It was the only he could utter, as his throat was too tight with emotion to be able to pronounce any other sound.
Meereen: Day 20

When they were finishing dinner, some bangs at the door that were not produced by Mhyraz startled the couple.

"I'm White Fly, master," identified himself the Unsullied on the other side.

Tyrion and Sansa looked at each other, worried, and he automatically caressed her hand.

"Easy, my love."

She nodded and he went to open the door. The soldier greeted him ceremoniously and conveyed him the motive of his unearthly visit.

"It's Jorah the Andal. He's very bad and he wants to talk with you. One has come to tell you because one knows you appreciate him and tonight's issue is only known by some Second Sons, Green Beetle, Podrick and one. Ser Jorah is in a nearby tavern."

This was going to happen sooner or later.

Tyrion turned to Sansa.

"Be very careful, my love," pleaded her.

"I'll be, darling. Get into bed and don't catch cold." He went close to her to give her a kiss.

"And you try not to get drenched with rain."

"Don't worry. It looks like it has almost stopped raining. The storm has calmed down a bit." He took her face between his hands and gave her another kiss before going out.

His three escorts and a sellsword who was awaiting at the main door of the pyramid accompanied him through the wet streets to one of the taverns of Meereen, where Jorah, sitting by a table in a corner with several Second Sons, had fallen flat on his face upon the dirty wooden surface and his mates were shaking him to awake him. As soon as they saw Tyrion, they told him that Jorah that afternoon had gone mad and, to try to soothe and cheer him up, they took him to the city and they got into that tavern, where the knight asked for jar after jar of wine. The others let him vent himself and at one point he wanted to see Tyrion, so one of them ran to the pyramid to notify him, to see if the little man was capable of making the drunk knight listen to reason.

"We'd better go out and he gets some air," suggested Tyrion. The tavern was full of customers, all them Meereenese, and what they needed least was a bunch of busybodies.

They held Jorah, took him outside and made him sit onto a stone bench attached to the façade. Tyrion patted his cheeks.

"Jorah, it's me. I'm here."

The knight blinked. It cost him an effort to open his eyes. He emitted a groan and suddenly he started to retch. Tyrion jumped away just in time so the contents of his friend's stomach did not splash him. Jorah vomited all the wine over the damp ground.
When I lost Tysha, I also sank into that pitiful state and, as I told Sansa in the reception of our wedding after I threatened Joffrey with the knife, once I vomited on a girl while I was fucking her in a brothel in Lannisport. That night I drank one jar and another until I lost count and I don't even remember how was the whore I chose. I only remember that the poor girl burst screaming in revulsion when I threw up onto her breast and she ran out of the room. I paid a high compensation to the brothel owner and I think I asked him to convey my apologies to the girl. If the procurer didn't kick me out of there forever was because I was Tywin's son, thought him, with a trace of bitterness.

He too had wished to drown his heartbreak in alcohol. He pitied his friend.

This one was sweating after the effort, but his head had cleared enough and could stay awake. He rested on the wall, panting. Pod and the rest of the soldiers kept at a prudent distance, to give them some privacy.

"Are you feeling better, Jorah?" asked Tyrion.

"Yes."

Tyrion waited in silence for Jorah to speak.

"I'm sorry," apologized the knight, with a thick voice. "I've made a scene, but I was desperate and didn't know what else to do."

"I understand you perfectly. I've been through a few similar experiences," said Tyrion, with a tone slightly humorous.

"I hope the khaleesi doesn't know about this." Jorah closed his eyes, sighing.

"For us she won't," assured his friend.

"I understand she feels attracted to Daario; he's one of those men whom women like. She's very young and it's normal she's seduced. But it doesn't stop hurting me like a stab. It's true I'm nearly an old man, at least to her eyes, and I've always known she doesn't love me. But that doesn't make me love her less. Do you know how it feels when the woman you love gives herself to another man?"

"I some time was through something alike," confessed Tyrion. Those guards sullying my Tysha, displacing the caresses I had given her. Erasing my traces off her sweet body, turning my marriage and my happiness into ashes. Don you know how it feels when you see the woman you love fucking more than twenty guards by order of your own father, and leaving without looking at you a single time, with the pockets filled with silver coins?

"I'd have given anything for her love. I'd have been the most devoted of lovers," affirmed Jorah with melancholy.

"And afterwards, what? She wouldn't have married you, Jorah. You know it. She's a Targaryen and you're from a minor house. Sooner or later your affair would come to an end. Like it will happen to her relationship with Daario." Tyrion said it with a tone kind but firm. He had no intention to lie to him with fake and empty words. It was better that he coped with reality and accepted it to carry on.

"Do you think I'm not aware of it? But at least I'd have had her. I'd know how is to possess her, to share my heart with her."

Sometimes is much worse to regret what one hasn't ever had, than to regret what one has lost. It's
hard to think about all the things that never happened.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 133

Meereen: Day 20

"Vent yourself tonight, friend. Cry your sorrows. I'm here for that. But from tomorrow you must remain sober and accept your situation, which is not so bad. Daenerys thinks highly of you, she has given you back her respect and you have the opportunity to be a great soldier at her service, a goal you're fulfilling. You're an excellent city guard. That's much more than others have. You still can aspire to recover her full trust. Don't lose that putting your foot in it, Jorah. You're lucky that you haven't done something unrepairably silly and that you have friends willing to help you."

Jorah nodded, with his head on the wall.

"I promise, Tyrion. I won't make another scene. Thanks for coming."

"You're welcome. I hope you haven't threatened to kill Daario out loud or before witnesses," jested Tyrion.

Jorah hinted a grim smile.

"I haven't gone that far, but I've been about to. If I had seen him in the camp today, I don't guarantee you that I hadn't challenged him to a single combat," said him, ironic. "I know that anyway Daario would have sentenced me to death for insubordination, but I'd have had the pleasure to throw him up what I thought of him."

Tyrion thanked to providence or whatever kept Daario far from Jorah that day, though it was not difficult to imagine what was that had prevented the collision. Today he surely has entertained a long time between the queen's arms.

"I neither guarantee you that I'm going to be very friendly to him. One thing is to swallow my feelings, and another very different is to swallow my pride," replied the knight.

"No one would ask you to go that far, Jorah," conceded Tyrion. "But don't ruin what you have achieved, all right?"

"To be the closest the khaleesi lets me be is the most important goal of my life now. I'm not going to ruin it," asseverated Jorah. "She's all I have left."

"And you'll always have her, Jorah. We very rarely obtain what we wish, but at least you'll look out for her, and you'll be where she is. You'll have the consolation of showing her your devotion, not the way you dream to, but as you best can do it."

Jorah was much more calm and Tyrion felt relieved.

"I'm sorry for having pulled you out of your rooms at these hours and with this weather. I'm well now, truly. I'll go back to the camp and everything will return to normal. You as well must return with Lady Sansa."

Fortunately it had stopped raining, but the wind was heavy with moisture, sticking the hair to the forehead and leaving a sticky sensation over the skin.

"I'll do that. Go rest, Jorah, and tomorrow's another day. Good night, friend."
"Good night." They addressed each other a nod and they left in different directions, Tyrion with Pod and the Unsullied and Jorah with the sellswords.

Sansa was reading in the bed, wearing her robe and covered to her waist, and she left the book on the nightstand when she heard her husband coming in.

"How was it, my love?" asked her, impatient.

"Quite well. Jorah has listened to reason and has gone back to the camp with the mates who were with him in the tavern," informed him. "In some moment of this afternoon he found out about the affair between Daenerys and Daario and he turned mad. His friends took him to the city to distract him and everyone ended drinking, but he was ready to finish all the supplies in the establishment."

"Then, he hasn't come across Daario?"

"Luckily not, Sansa. If he had, who knows how he'd have reacted. He could've provoked the captain and that madness would have cost him his head. Daario wouldn't have allowed a soldier to provoke him, because he's an officer, and the one with the highest ranking in the Second Sons, and a soldier can't insubordinate against his captain without being sentenced to death."

"Thank goodness nothing of that has happened and it only has been a drunkenness," said her, smiling sadly. "Poor Jorah. He must be suffering a lot."

"He'll bear it. Sooner or later it had to happen. Jorah can't expect his khaleesi to remain celibate for the rest of her life."

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 134

Meereen: Day 20

Tyrion was drying his wet hair and got ready for bed. She observed him with concern.

"You haven't got drenched, have you, Tyrion? Has it rained while you were out?"

"No, Sansa, it hasn't rained. What happens is that the air is full of tiny water droplets which wet the
hair and the skin."

"How must be the people in the camps? The storm must have been rough for them," pitied her.
"Portable tents aren't a very proper shelter against rainstorms."

"They'll resist a bit more, until they can move to the houses. In their majority they are tough
people, used to worst conditions. They're managing quite well. But let's hope they don't take long
to have a solid roof above their heads. The builders are working as quickly as possible and they're
the first interested in ending the works as soon as they can."

Tyrion put on his night clothes and got into bed beside Sansa. They accommodated in their usual
position.

"Winter is here at last," sighed Sansa. "Even in Meereen."

"Everywhere, honey. In one way or another, it's noted, in the South too."

"Even in the Summer Sea?," asked her, smiling.

"Even there. It doesn't snow over there, but the islanders are less naked than in more benign
periods," explained him, with his naughty grin. "Ummm. I'd love to see you with the attire of the
Summer Sea female islanders. And without it too," joked him, caressing her back.

"You wouldn't be the only one who would see me with that attire. The others would as well. You
wouldn't have the intention to keep me locked in a tower, would you?"

He pressed her against him, feigning a possessive gesture.

"Oh yes, I would. Your splendid body only would be seen by me." He started to tickle her side. She
let out a squeak of surprise and burst out laughing, trying to escape his playful fingers.

"Stop! All right, all right! Only you would see me."

"That's the way I like it, gorgeous," said him with his mischievous tone.

He loosened his grip and stopped tickling her. He planted a kiss on her lips and moved aside from
her for a moment to look at her, wicked.

"Speaking of light attires, I've remembered a game that occurred to me some days ago and which
I'd love to play with you," proposed him, with his eyes shining with desire. "If you fancy it. I don't
want you to catch cold."

The brazier was fed only twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, to save fuel. Enough to
keep the rooms warm.
"Of course I fancy it, Tyrion. It's barely cold inside of here," accepted her, seductive. "And besides, you heat me up."

He got fully hard in an instant.

"I promise I'll heat you up quite a bit, but before that I want you to do something for me," requested him. "I'd like you to undress provocatively. To be imaginative and take off your clothes in the most suggestive way you can think of." He began to breathe faster, driving himself mad with the mere thought of her doing what he asked her.

She nodded, smiling at him naughtily.

"My lord has a fantasy and I'm here to realize it," whispered Sansa in the way she knew that drove him crazy. The bulge that stood out between his legs, beneath his night pants, was the proof of the success of her erotic actions.

She jumped out of the bed and stood on the carpet. His gaze followed her without a blink.

She moistened her lips with her tongue with full intention. He reacted with a slight panting.

Gods, I like so much that she does that.

Sansa, improvising, raised her arms and slid her hands over her hair, as if she were combing herself. She made her fingers descend over her neck and held the rim of her robe. She started to open it to uncover her shoulders, very slowly. She went on sliding her hands over the robe onto her breast and going down to her waist. She loosened the belt, toyed with it and threw it to Tyrion, who caught it flying.

"You're doing it marvellously, my lady. You're making me very horny," said him, with a hoarse voice.

"Well, this is only the beginning. Do you think you'll be able to hold on?," challenged her.

"Of course, my sassy lady," answered him, with flashing eyes.

"I didn't expect less." She opened her robe completely and took it off from her shoulders, letting it fall onto the floor. She moved her hands to the lace which closed the lowcut of her nightgown and loosened it slowly. Her cleavage was in full sight and Tyrion panted again.

"You have the nicest tits I've seen in all my life, Sansa," declared him with his deep admiration filling his expression.

"Thank you, my lord. I'm glad they're to your liking." She raised a leg and placed her foot on the bed. The nightgown slid up to her thigh and Tyrion stared at it, hypnotized.

"To my liking? They drive me insane, gorgeous. I dream of them all day long."

"My lord will have to be compensated some way." The nightgown was climbing up her waist. She was pulling the fabric backwards to cling it to her figure.

"You're compensating me indeed, gorgeous." He was smiling, captivated.

"The lord settles for little." The waist was uncovered and the roundness of her breasts was appearing. He held his breath for an instant.

Sansa's body was reacting too and she felt herself damp and hot. She felt no cold at all when he
gazed at her with those caressing eyes, which roamed her entirely.

"Looking at you is a banquet, darling."

"Then there will be more courses in this banquet." The breasts were free and she pulled the nightgown off her head, throwing it on a chair. Just then she made a comical bow.

"What does my lord think of the show?"

"Sublime. There is no other view so beautiful." He was devouring her with his eyes, lying on the pillows.

Sansa climbed onto the bed and got on all fours, getting closer to him in a feline posture.

"How does my lord want to take me?"

"Your lord wants you to remain the way you're this very moment," ordered him, moving to join her. He took her face with his hands and kissed her hungrily, introducing his tongue into her mouth. Afterwards, he caressed all the length of her back to the buttocks and stimulated her sex with his fingers. She moaned, throwing her head back.

Tyrion kissed her buttocks, went down to her opening and licked the folds. He applied himself from behind with his tongue to the delight between those silky thighs.

He stood and penetrated her, holding her hips firmly. Both moaned at the same time and she rested her face onto the pillow, searching for her clitoris while he was ramming into her. Tyrion was looking at the perfect back and the round buttocks between which his cock was burying again and again. He awaited to feel the tension in her body until it unleashed and Sansa cried out her culmination, closing and shivering around his manhood. He in turn let himself go and reached his highest point.

Sansa fell onto the mattress and Tyrion lied down by her side, hugging her.

"What you have done has been very hot, gorgeous. That way of undressing for me... For all the gods, Sansa. Now those images will chase me day and night. You have no idea of how glorious you were."

"It has been my pleasure," said her, emphasizing the double meaning.

"Indeed it has been," corroborated him, covering them both with the bedcovers. "You're incredible, Sansa."

"You too, Tyrion," said her, falling asleep.

Tyrion gave her a light kiss on the lips.

"Sleep, my love. Get your rest."

He embraced her for warmth and a few seconds later he too was falling asleep.
Meereen: Day 21

The rains went on intermittently in the early hours of that morning, and at dawn the sky was lead
coloured and heavy, but the precipitations had ceased at least for some hours. Tyrion hoped that
the weather respected the hours of market.

He went out to his usual tasks, visited the sectors of works which corresponded to him that day and
once more he was satisfied with the progress of the constructions. The people who worked in them
were freedmen who were as interested as anyone in the fact that the houses were ended in the
shortest period possible, so they did not skimp on efforts. For a start all the debris in the areas in
ruins had been taken away or reused and all the braced buildings were being reinforced and had
some new walls and added frameworks. Every stone and brick in good condition was reemployed,
and the rest was obtained in the quarry. Every day was carried to the city a consignment of granite
blocks carefully worked and carved by the quarry workers, and Koleos reported in detail to Tyrion
the amounts carried to the city.

The market was more crowded than the previous day and all the stalls were in exhibition. The high
number of guards who patrolled appeased the population and these felt encouraged little by little to
go near the stalls. The haggling between sellers and buyers were music to the ears, as they
resulted in sellings and profits for the freedfolk and the Crown.

Sarik confirmed that, if they continued at that rate, the market would recover before the scheduled
date and the losses would be compensated in barely two or three weeks at the most. Once taken all
his notes, Tyrion asked for Jorah and he was told where he was patrolling that day. Now that the
knight spent most of his time on the inner side of the ramparts, Tyrion did not need to go to the
camps to visit him, and he was intensely interested in his mood after the previous night. He would
not distract him from his work for a long while, just enough to check he was well.

Tyrion greeted him as soon as he saw him and Jorah walked close to exchange some words with
his friend. His appearance gave away the ravages of his excesses, but as soon as he kept healthy
habits for a couple of days, the bags under his eyes would not be so marked. Tyrion ignored if the
knight was one of those who slept soundly or if insomnia pursued him in endless nights, though he
had the impression that, like himself, Jorah did not sleep a lot.

Since Sansa sleeps with me I've acquired the habit of sleeping more, because she gives me peace,
but who gives it to Jorah?

"How are you today?," asked him.

"Better, thanks. Apart from the headache and my upside down stomach, I'm managing well. The
work distracts me and I make sure to make the rounds through the city during even more time than
corresponds to me, simply because I like it."

"How do you perceive the atmosphere? Do you observe unusual things?"

"Do you refer to the Sons of the Harpy?," asked Jorah, in a low voice. "I'm watching the
movements of the Great Masters and of other Meereenese who have a well-off position. I know
there are confidential things you can't tell me about, and I on my part have orders to convey
exclusively any of my superiors, that's to say, Daario, Grey Worm and Ser Barristan, all the
relevant information, so we mustn't speak more abot this topic between us. It suffices to know that
it's really difficult that someone moves in this damned city without the khaleesi knowing about it."

"I agree. These Meereenese are slippery like eels, but Daenerys is clever and has loyal and competent subjects: exiles, fugitives, eunuchs and sellswords, and many of them are made of a tough sort," said Tyrion with a slight smile.

"Viserys would've never gathered such a numerous and devoted cohort and he'd never have been a true king. The dothraki people despised him as much as he despised them. He was weak and arrogant and didn't come to understand that the lords of horses do everything their own way and they don't follow anyone who isn't their khal. He believed he had bought them when he sold his sister to Khal Drogo; he was only interested in numbers. Forty thousand warriors. But it's useless to buy forty thousand warriors if they don't respect you. At last, he obtained a golden crown, though it wasn't the one he wanted, but the one he deserved. I suggested the khaleesi not to look at that scene, when Drogo poured the melted gold onto Viserys' head, but she stared at it impassive, without any visible emotion. That bastard had threatened the baby in her belly with a sword. He had profaned the sacred law of not carrying weapons in Vaes Dothrak and, in front of everyone, he said to his sister he would pull out the child and he'd take her with him, as Drogo hadn't kept his end of the bargain. He was a total stupid. He'd never have invaded Westeros. He wouldn't even have been able to rule a city like Meereen."

"Luckily, his stupidity made way for his sister. The turns of fate are that capricious. Kings and queens follow one another without end, but the centuries pass without a single sovereign who really deserves that title sits on the throne," commented Tyrion. "Serving a cruel, insane, idiot or indolent king, or who is all of that at the same time, it's a nightmare. I'm an expert in that, like Ser Barristan. It's not very gratifying to feel forced to bend he knee before a snot who is only useful for torturing any living creature."

"Joffrey was even worse than the Mad King, from what I hear," said Jorah.

"Yes, if such a thing was possible. And it was, seemingly. At least Aerys wasn't a bad king during the decades he was sane. Joff was simply a sadistic by nature."

"It must be very satisfying for you to serve the khaleesi. You've gone from worst to best."

"I love the game of thrones, Jorah. But not for power in itself, which I consider empty without a purpose; or for any secret wish to sit on an awful iron chair, as my thing is ruling in the shadows, a hobby I share with my father, unluckily, though our motives have been radically different. The game of thrones delights me because of the enormous challenge it is. Because I like to put on the board all my ability and contribute with it to achieve something which makes me believe that the whole world isn't lost. Because it offers me the chance to try to change some things. And since I have Sansa, my fondness for the game of thrones has revitalized, because with her I have something very beautiful to fight for. And Daenerys lets me develop my potential to help building something better."

"That's because she extracts the best in us. She manages to make us want to contribute with whatever we do well. Some people offer their skill with a sword, others their manual jobs, others their brains... We all have some usefulness she knows how to make use of."

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 136

Meereen: Day 21

"Yes. For example, my sister and Joff made my wife believe she was useless and the poor girl spent many days humiliated, harassed and sad, with her self-esteem very low. And since she's here she has discovered her talents, which are sewing and teaching. She's filled with satisfaction sewing winter clothes for people and teaching the orphans of the pyramid. You get much more with empathy than with fear."

"I'm very glad for Lady Sansa. Her father would be proud of her."

"You think he'd be very proud of having me as a son-in-law, and of the fact that Sansa has felt compelled to flee with nothing but the clothes she was wearing?," inquired Tyrion, doubtful.

"Maybe he at the beginning would be reluctant to accept you as his daughter's husband, and to assume you're two outlaws in the eyes of Westeros, but as soon as he saw how much you love her and how happy she's with you, he'd change his mind, I'm sure. He was a stubborn but reasonable man."

"Well, anyway he'd have to put up with me, because I'm in love with his daughter and she's in love with me, and I'll stay beside her," affirmed Tyrion, smiling.

"I don't know which of the two would be more stubborn, if the father-in-law or the son-in-law," joked Jorah.

"For a start, I keep my head upon my shoulders. I think that weigh in my favour." Tyrion smiled maliciously.

It was starting to drizzle.

"Well, Jorah. I won't detain you any longer, as you must continue to patrol. It has been a good chat. See you soon, friend."

"See you soon. Convey my greetings to your wife and the khaleesi, if you can."

"I'll do it, Jorah."

They bent in a sign of respect and Tyrion went away with his escorts to seek shelter from the drizzle.

When Mhyraz brought lunch, he informed Tyrion that the next morning he was required in the public audience. He nodded and talked a little with the boy.

"How are your two new brothers? Have they adapted?"

"They cry every night, but all of us did it at the beginning, when we had just lost our families. They'll get used. During the day they're quite cheerful and their activities and games help them not to keep thinking so much about their parents."

"Your company is the best comfort, Mhyraz. And they'll be quite busy with Ser Barristan's trainings and yours with the slingshot. By the way... When the freedfolk have moved to the city,
you'll have the chance to start as apprentices in the brotherhoods. Which one would you like to choose? Have you thought of it already?"

"Apart from shooting with the slingshot and fighting, I like serving the masters. While I am a child I'll stay in the pyramid as a servant but I'll go on training with Ser Barristan. When I'm older, I'll decide what I'll devote myself to, whether a soldier or a servant, depending on what I prefer and what I'm good at. I like to do both things."

Tyrion looked at him, surprised.

"You're a very singular boy, Mhyraz. Almost no children wish to be servants. How is it that you like it so much?"

"It's pleasant to serve the master Tyrion and the mistress Sansa. I do it with pleasure."

"All the boys serve in the pyramid because thus they are educated in humility. But surely the majority don't feel inclined to it as a job. On the contrary you are willing to choose the domestic service as well as you'd choose to be a soldier. Truly you're special, Mhyraz," praised Tyrion, moved. "But serving is not always pleasant. Neither all the masters are kind."

"When I was a slave, the masters I met weren't kind. But here they truly are. I want to serve the Mother as a soldier or as a servant. The masters who live with her are good to me."

It's true that she's not surrounded by low ilk rabble. Totally opposed to my dear sister. She's turning the Court into a parade of monstrosities.

"It pleases me to know that I can count on you and not because you consider it a duty or an obligation, but because you like to help me. The servants and the service in general are a fundamental part of a house. How would the masters manage, not knowing how to cook or do the washing or do so many other domestic tasks? We need you. Your labour is very important, so you can feel proud of what you do."

"I feel proud, master," affirmed him, timidly puffed up by the praise.

The boy bent to retire, but Tyrion chose that moment to give him a little surprise he had ready.

"Wait a moment, Mhyraz. I think I have something for you and your brothers and sisters." He pulled out some bags of candies he had purchased in the market, thinking of gifting them to the children of the pyramid. The boy looked at them, popeyed.

"Are they for us?"

"Of course. As a child, I was crazy for these candies, though it wasn't my father who gifted me them, but my uncle," told Tyrion.

"Your father didn't love you?," asked the kid, puzzled.

"No, Mhyraz. He didn't love me because I'm this way. A dwarf."

"You're a good man, master Tyrion. I think your father was wrong."

"You're right. He was wrong in lots of things. Thanks for your words, Mhyraz. You've made me feel very good."

"You also make me feel good, master."
Tyrion smiled at him tenderly.

"Well, go now to rest or what you want to do. You've earned it."

"Have a good afternoon, master and mistress."

"The same for you, Mhyraz."

The boy made a bow and left.

Sansa had followed all the conversation and she was gazing at Tyrion with such love that he was sure he was going to melt under the blue transparency of those big eyes.

"That boy really loves you, Tyrion. I understand him perfectly." She caressed his hand.

"Sansa... I've thought that Mhyraz might continue indefinitely to be a part of our service, if he wants. If we go back to Westeros and he wishes to accompany us, I'll ask him if he's interested in remaining with us, as a servant, or as a soldier, as a knight or whatever he fancies."

Her eyes lit up.

"Oh, Tyrion." She gave him a kiss, at a lack for words. "You deserve a reward as well, my love. But the candies I have for you aren't kept in a bag."

He addressed her his malicious grin.

"I know. They're kept in your gorgeous body. And I adore tasting them."

"Well, just now it's a good moment. They're warmed up."

"Then let's savor them." He pushed her softly to the bed and devoured the sweet dessert she was offering him.
Chapter 137

Meereen: Day 21

Tyrion made a clean copy of the pieces of information of that day while Sansa and Leena were applying the last stitches to the wedding garments. They showed them to him, very self-satisfied, and Tyrion admired sincerely the quality of the articles of clothing. Sansa had made for him a scarlet velvet doublet, and he loved the embroidery she had sewed on it. On the right front half of the garment the Lannister's golden lion could be seen, and on the left front, the Stark's direwolf. The buttons were golden too, as well as the ones on the cuffs of the white shirt with loose-fitting sleeves he would wear under the doublet. The trousers were dark red.

"It's a lovely outfit, my love. I'll almost feel handsome when I put it on," joked him, drawing her face to give her a kiss.

He turned to examine Sansa's dress. It was made of white and grey sateen, the Stark's colours, with very long sleeves which enlarged as they descended, like the ones in the dresses she used to wear in King's Landing. The lowcut fell in peak from the ends of both shoulders and would expose to view the beginning of her breasts, and he thought of how they would jut out. A wide belt, also made of white sateen, had been embroidered with the direwolf in silver thread and the lion in golden thread, both face to face like in his doublet. It was simply a superb dress, and she would show off proudly the colours and the blazon of her house, as well as he would show off the ones of his house, with the touch she had added, matching both houses and placing together the symbolic animals of their lineages. A concession to what they had left in Westeros, but also to their union in body and soul.

Moreover, there were two capes, one of the same red velvet than the doublet, with another lion embroidered, and one of fine white wool with a silver direwolf.

"Oh, Sansa. These clothes are wonderful. Have you done all this in such a short time?"

"Yes. Remember I've had many free hours in the afternoons, and I haven't spent them idly," said her, pleased with the compliments. "Besides, Leena has helped me. She has learnt a lot and thanks to her I've worked faster. I've made the embroidery and the complicated needlework, and she has sewn the simple parts." She smiled at her friend, who corresponded to the gesture.

Leena's wedding gown was completely white and made of tulle over a sateen lining which would prevent Leena's body from being exposed to view beneath the semitransparent fabric. It lacked sleeves and the lowcut was straight, with the shoulders covered with two wide tulle suspenders. The skirt ended on a small tail. The ornaments were embroidered with golden and silver threads. They consisted on a flower on the waist of the bodice and some more scattered over the skirt.

For Pod there was a doublet of shiny brown leather, a white shirt similar to Tyrion's one and trousers matching the doublet.

"You have made a great work, girls. Congratulations." He bent before them comically. Leena laughed, blushed by the praise. "We'll be the envy of the pyramid. How many guests there will be?"

"Both of you, Jorah, the queen, Missandei, Ser Barristan, Grey Worm, Daario, Hizdhar and Kerro and his wife. We've thought it fair to invite all the queen's counselors, as they are the closest to the queen as well as to us. We hesitated with Hizdhar, but leaving him out would have been an insult, so we included him."
"Very well thought, but we'd better keeping an eye on Jorah. Though he has promised to keep his composure, who knows what might happen in a feast which will last several hours and where everyone will drink wine. I don't think Daenerys will allow us to drink too much, but even so, we must watch carefully him and Daario," advised Tyrion.

"We will," assured Leena. And she added: "The children will serve food and drink and we have said to them that afterwards they can stay to eat and to play music and dance. Some of them can play instruments and they have offered themselves to do it."

"Great," applauded Tyrion. "It's going to be an unforgettable wedding, Leena. We all will feel good with a day of amusement, in which we join not to discuss political or state matters, but simply to deepen the bonds of friendship."

"I'm going to marry the man I love and I'll be surrounded by my friends. It'll be the happiest day of my life," declared Leena, moved.

Sansa took her hands.

"You deserve it, sweetie," she said to her friend. Leena was about to burst in tears, but she managed to settle down and addressed them a radiant smile.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 21

"I'm leaving now," announced Leena. She stood up and Tyrion and Sansa accompanied her to the door.

"Thank you very much for all you do for me," said her, squeezing Sansa's hands.

"We do it with pleasure," answered Sansa.

They bade farewell until the next day and Leena went out.

The couple looked at each other with such tenderness that the air seemed on the verge of melting between them. Tyrion caressed her cheek, as if he needed to assure himself again that his wife was real. She placed her hand upon his, moved her face a little and kissed his palm.

"How about getting into bed, making love and later you go on telling me the story of your travel?," proposed her. "You stopped in the part of the Eyrie."

"I cannot agree more to your plans, my love," said him, smiling naughtily. He took her hand and got ready happily to please her until hearing her shout his name in the middle of the sunset silence.

"There I was, before your aunt. By her side, the boy suckled her breast at everyone's sight. The legitimate Lord of the Vale and Warden of the East was around eight years old and he still was breastfed like a baby. You can form by yourself an idea of the bizarre scene. And it was supposed that she was who must judge me for my presumed crimes," commented Tyrion, sarcastic. "Your mother's puzzled face showed me that she ignored to what extent her sister was nuts. Catelyn almost seemed to regret having taken us to that inhospitable place ruled by a lunatic with a feeble-minded son."

Outside the rain was falling persistently, washing the city and banishing the brick dust temporarily.

"The boy wanted to see me fly through the Moon Door, how not. The poor creature must get terribly bored in that sinister place and one of his favourite hobbies was to see how any wretched was thrown out to the void. He had no other thing to do apart from being spoilt to absurdity. It was clear that to Lysa's eyes and those honourable knights' and lords' eyes too, I was guilty of anything they wanted to accuse me of and I wouldn't have a fair trial, so, if I wanted to escape from tasting the justice of the Vale, I'd have to work it out. Disappointed for not having obtained the answers she was waiting for, Lysa locked me in a sky cell for several days."

"A sky cell? Oh, gods," regretted Sansa, caressing his chest.

"At least the air circulation was unbeatable," jested him. "And the view was spectacular." He tickled her cheek with his beard and she laughed, sliding her fingers through his blond locks.

"Oh, come on, you goofy. As a child Old Nan told us stories about the sky cells. She said that the captives sometimes ended up throwing themselves to the void, desperate with hunger and cold, and that some of them fell out while they were sleeping, due to the slope of the ground," recalled her, shivering.

"I once woke up on the edge. When I opened my eyes, there was a pretty scenery beneath my head,
hundreds of yards below. That was the last straw that broke my patience and I bribed the jailer so he took me to Lysa with the promise of a confession. She was going to be disappointed again because she wasn't going to hear what she wanted, as I have the fault of not adjudging myself guilty for crimes I haven't committed. But if she wanted a confession, that was what she'd have." He was smiling with retrospective malice. Sansa, knowing him, imagined what sort of confessions he had ready and she too hinted an amused grin.

"If they had possessed some sense of humour, those people would have appreciated my tale, but it wasn't very funny that I robbed the handmaidens' clothes to see them naked, that I wrote insults on my sister's dresses, that I jerked off over the cauldron of stew I expected Cersei to eat..."

"Eh! You masturbated onto the food?," asked Sansa, aghast. "What a scoundrel." She tugged some hairs of his beard in a fake attitude of reproach, without helping the smile that was spreading on her lips.

"That was for the time when I started to discover the delights of having a good wank. Surely my seed provided the meals with flavour and nutrients."

"Oh, for all the gods," exclaimed her, covering her ears.

"Well, I know a girl who doesn't dislike tasting it," whispered him. He was already hard and Sansa felt his erection on the leg she had rested lazily upon him. She blushed, as always he said very heated things. He worshipped that she kept that feature of innocence and shyness, no matter how far they had gone in their sexual intimacy.

Sansa's response to his palpable desire was automatic and she got wet when the familiar heat descended down her belly. She grabbed his manhood and he moaned.

"Would you like to taste it again, my lady?," asked him, imploring, with his eyes flashing with lewdness.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 21

"I'd like it very much, my lord," answered her. "But I want you to do something for me. Masturbate like you did when you were barely a boy and I'll receive your seed, as if I were the women you envisioned by then, when you did it."

"Oh, Sansa. You're a wicked girl. All my fantasies come to reality with you," said him, enraptured, standing up on the mattress and stimulating himself slowly, resting against the headboard not to lose his balance. She laid down aside on an elbow, just before him, and was staring at him with ardent eyes.

"At what age did you begin to masturbate, Tyrion?"

"At eleven. Once, in the early morning, I woke up from an erotic dream in which one of the handmaidens intervened and I was all sticky between my legs. It was the first time I spilled my seed and from that moment I jerked off daily."

Sansa felt aroused imagining such a young and innocent Tyrion, still a virgin.

"When you envisioned the handmaidens while you pleasured yourself... What did they do in your fantasies?"

"Well, for example, they opened their legs and touched themselves," said him, keeping the steady pace of his hand.

She raised a leg, resting the foot upon the other leg, and touched her sex with her free hand.

"Like this, Tyrion?"

He opened his eyes more.

"Oh, yes, Sansa. Exactly like that. But they weren't beautiful like you. You're a goddess who exceeds all my poor fantasies."

Both of them were stimulating themselves and devoured one another with their gazes.

"In what places did you do it, apart from the cauldron of stew?," asked her, with her suggestive smile. The effect of her own fingers over her most sensitive parts was starting to raise her and she moaned slightly.

"That's it, darling. Moan for me. It drives me crazy when you do it," whispered him, with a hoarse voice. "You're prettier than ever when you get aroused." His hand sped up over his manhood.

"Finish for me, Sansa," pleaded him.

"Before that tell me what other places you did it in," insisted her, slowing down the rhythm of her fingers.

He fought to control himself to focus on what she was requesting him. *Gods. This girl turns me on from head to toe.*

"In my sister's bedroom, to bother her, though she rarely noticed because I did it in places which
 weren't visible. Sometimes in a drawer of the wardrobe or the chest of drawers, under the folded clothes. Once I did it onto the hair of her favourite doll and I combed it carefully. Its hair got a little sticky but Cersei didn't realize the true reason, thinking that the hair had got that way due to the sea breeze. In Casterly Rock the air was loaded with moisture from the sea and it was natural that the hair stuck to the skin. I spent several days laughing every time she took her doll."

"You were a very nasty boy," scolded Sansa.

Her hand between her folds was making him lose the ability to think coherently.

"In what other places?" Sansa too was very near the edge and she panted.

"In the corridors, where I could be caught at any moment. In the gardens. Sometimes hidden near the river, watching how the handmaidens washed the clothes or they bathed naked... Sansa, I'm on the very edge."

She at last pitied him and let loose her own release, melting under her own fingers. She got closer to him, with the ecstasy reflected on her face.

"Finish on me, Tyrion."

He did not have to be asked twice and his seed fell upon her face and mouth, and she licked the traces of seed on her lips and cleaned his manhood.

"It has been one of the best wanks of my life, Sansa. Thanks to you." He had lied down on the mattress, with a panting breathing, and was drawing her to him with his arms. He covered both of them with the sheet and the blanket.

"As always, it's been a pleasure," said her, kissing him.

"You can say that again," corroborated him.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 140

Meereen: Day 21

"We were in the moment of the confession. What happened?"

"Those people had no idea of how to enjoy funny anecdotes. Lysa got infuriated, but in Robin's honor I must say that he was truly interested in my stories."

"He listened to those things? For the gods' sake." She covered her face with her hands, smiling behind her fingers.

"Indeed he did. At least he appreciated my sense of humour. But unluckily, his mother didn't. She wanted to lock me in a narrower and steeper cell, but I demanded a trial by combat. Yes, I had it a little complicated, I know. My brother Jaime was many leagues far away, and I didn't have precisely a crowd of supporters in the Vale."

"Only you come up with those ideas. How did you get out of that mess?"

"Bronn offered to be my champion and defeated Lysa's, a very honourable knight. Little Robin satisfied his desire to see someone fly through the Moon Door, because Ser Vardys fell down the gap when he died. I had won, so I was acquitted of all charges. I gave the jailer the purse of coins I had promised him, and got away from there with Bronn."

"You're a big deal, my love."

"I'm a lucky dwarf."

"Have you now adopted that phrase as your tag line? I think it has surpassed the one of the debts," mocked Sansa.

"It's true. I'm very lucky. I have you." He caressed her back and pressed her against himself.

She kissed him with tenderness. He got ready to go on with the narration. The sound of his voice lulled Sansa to sleep.

"We were walking along the paths of the Vale, as we lacked mounts. I knew that the clans of the mountains were stalking us, and one morning they surrounded us. Their intentions were to kill us and steal our weapons and my ring, but I convinced them to join my cause. I was heading for my father's military camp. He had summoned his armies when your mother took me as a prisoner, and I promised the clansmen that if they fought for my father they'd obtain all they dreamed of and more: gold, weapons, to be the owners of their mountains... Tywin's fame was known everywhere and those seasoned but poorly supplied men didn't underestimate it. They detested the lords of the Vale, because these had always despised them, and they at last had the chance to get even. I had to contrive that in order to save my own neck."

"I see. And they followed you. A very funny group."

"Indeed. Rarely such an odd company has been seen. We arrived at the camp and you can figure out my father's joy to see me appear safe and sound," said him, acidly. "All that display of his armies wasn't out of fatherly love, it was because the Lannister's honour was at stake. Soon his lack of affection for me was obvious when he sent me to the vanguard of the battle along with my new friends. He wasn't very subtle in his intentions of getting rid of me." He did a pause. "I ignore
if you were told about that battle. It was a brilliant strategy on your brother's part, even though it resulted in the sacrifice of more than two thousand of his men. The authentic battle was developed in the Whispering Wood, where Jaime was captured. It was a hard blow for my father, of course. His favourite son was in his enemies' claws." He looked her in the eye. "I'm very sorry for all that, Sansa. I'm sorry for that war between our families which led to so many deaths." He caressed her hand.

"I know, my love. I'm sorry too."

"I didn't distinguish myself as a warrior. One of my own men hit my head accidentally while we were running to the front line and I remained unconscious. When I recovered the conscience, we had won, but we quickly discovered your brother's trick and who was the prisoner of honour he had collected. I've rarely seen my father so angry. He decided to stay there to go on fighting, and he appointed me Hand of the King to replace him. He despised me, but he knew I'm not stupid. He at least trusted me regarding my capacity to rule, and that was much more credit than he had ever conceded me. He did it because he had no choice. While he was developing his war against Robb he couldn't practice as Hand, and he feared the excesses that could happen in the Red Keep. He designated me because of that."

Sansa was falling asleep with his soothing voice.

"And very soon Mhyraz will come with dinner. Unless you don't mind he sees you naked in my arms, we should get dressed," said him, sighing.

"Mmm, I'd drop off this very moment. I feel so good in your arms, my love... "

"And I in yours, my love. Don't tempt me or Mhyraz will see something more than his masters in light clothing," threatened Tyrion, smiling maliciously.

"No way!" She jumped and ran to pick up her clothes, laughing.
Meereen: Day 21

Tyrion asked Mhyraz, winking at him, if they had eaten the candies.

"Yes, master. They were delicious," answered the boy, smiling. "All my brothers and sisters thank you."

"I'm glad you all liked it. I as a child awaited impatiently the moment when my uncle brought them to me."

"Almost not one of them had tasted them before."

"Then it was time to change the situation. Tell your brothers and sisters there will be more, as a reward for being such good boys and girls."

"I'll tell them, master." He bent in a bow. "I'll bring the bucket of hot water and the towels for your cleanliness."

The days they did not bathe in the bathtub, they tidied themselves up before going to bed.

"Great, Mhyraz."

The boy took away the dinner items and went to fetch the ones for washing.

"I think my moon period is coming very soon," commented Sansa. "I've started to feel the slight discomforts in my belly and my breast."

Tyrion made the calculations, remembering the last time it had come to her, and they were correct. More than three weeks had passed, and women's normal period used to come every twenty-odd or thirty-something days.

"The moon tea goes on working perfectly. We can breathe easily for another month, fucking endlessly without worrying about a pregnancy," said him, with his suggestive voice.

"Do you think it will fail some time?"

"It might be. Nothing is infallible. I wouldn't like that you get pregnant so soon but, if it happens, we'll cope with it. Anyway, if you continue to drink the infusion punctually every night, in principle there must be no problem. As long as we don't skip it a single time, I doubt you conceive."

He was already getting excited due to that conversation but, as Mhyraz had to come back, he did not dare to pounce on her. If I do I won't be able to stop, thought him, wicked.

"The first time I had the moon cycle was short after the riot in King's Landing," remembered Sansa. "Every night I dreamt of those three men chasing me. I had been left alone in the mob and they started to pester me. Terror barely let me breathe. There was no one left there who loved me or protected me. My mother and my brother were very far."

Tyrion took her hand.

"I soon noticed you had disappeared, and I feared the worst. I insisted on trying to send someone to
search for you, but Joffrey refused to give the order to the guards and I was very worried. All right, I confess that above all I feared for my brother. If you died or were badly injured or sullied, Robb's reprisal might be implacable. I also feared for you, of course, because I didn't wish more harm for you, with all you were suffering already, and because I didn't want any terrible thing to happen to you. I'm not a monster and I feel sorry for a girl's death or misfortune. But truly, Sansa, I didn't wish you any harm, and that was not only because my brother's life depended on yours."

"I know, Tyrion. You were the only one who stood up for me when Joffrey mistreated me and you prevented him from going on beating me. You simply could have looked the other way or taken it as a show, like everyone else. The traitor's daughter with her dressed ripped and beaten and humiliated in front of the whole Court. Certainly many enjoyed that," commented her, bitterly.

"I couldn't allow a helpless lady to be a victim of such poor treatment, honey. I didn't care that who did it were the king himself. No one laid a single finger on a girl before me."

"You were my hero." Sansa smiled at him and put her hand onto his beard.

"No, darling. Don't say that. I was not." Guilt surfaced when they returned to the time when she was a puppet at the Lannisters' mercy. No matter how many times she had emphasized that she did not blame him for anything, he did not have a clear conscience regarding that issue.

*I didn't protect her as I should have done it. Even when she wasn't yet my wife or my fiancé, I should have cared more for her, impeded the constant harassment to which Joffrey subjected her.*

She looked at him loaded with patience.

"I know it's useless I plead with you for not being so hard on yourself, but at least listen to me when I say to you that you were the only one who was good to me apart from Shae. And I was so desperate that to my eyes you became a hero in those moments. You were a Lannister and I couldn't trust you, but... You stopped Joffrey from ordering me beaten again. And, whatever the reason was, you remembered the insignificant Stark girl when the crowd attacked Joffrey. No one listened to you, but it turned out that there was another who thought of me."

"The Hound," recalled Tyrion. "He did it at his own risk. I think that brute harboured some sort of feelings for you, Sansa. Do you know what he replied to me when I thanked him for having saved you? That he didn't do it for me. He did it because he wished to, because you surely weren't indifferent to him. I observed that he sometimes softened a bit when you were around, and he felt uneasy when Joffrey humiliated you. Perhaps you made the little good in him surface."

*(Part 1 of a longer chapter)*
Chapter 142

Meereen: Day 21

Mhyraz knocked on the door and the conversation was interrupted momentarily. The boy put the items in the bedroom. Tyrion said to him that he could return to collect them the following morning, thanked him and wished him goodnight.

He sat in the adjacent hall while Sansa washed herself in the bedroom. However strongly he wished to be always close to her, he respected her space and, except for the times they made love during their bathing, she preferred to wash herself up in solitary, as she felt embarrassed of relieving herself in his presence. He neither relieved himself before her because those activities were too vulgar and he understood his wife's shyness.

Every time she washed in the bedroom, he entertained himself visualizing her bare skin, covered with water droplets, her soft hands scrubbing all the skin, the water scented with some drops of lemon essence... His erection was pressing him painfully. In order to distract himself from his lust, he thought of the lemon... And that gave him an idea. He smiled widely. The next day he'd speak to Mhyraz secretly and would make him a special request: to ask on his part to the cooks to prepare lemon cakes for Lady Sansa. Those cakes were her soft spot and she had not eaten them in months.

Later she called him to wash himself and, when he entered the bedroom, Sansa was drying herself with the towel. He let his eyes roam around her perfect figure and stood still in the middle of the room, looking at her in awe, so hardened against his breeches that he would have to relieve that pressure either way. She smiled at him with fake innocence, as if she did not notice her husband's ardent gaze over her, and that turned him on even more.

For the seven hells, this woman is going to be the death of me. Seeing her naked is too good.

She pretended that she was not noticing his urgent desire and she walked around the chamber, offering him a magnificent view of her back, the dimples on her low back, her bottom and her legs. Little provocative girl... Just wait and see.

He washed as fast as he could and when he finished she had just sat on the bed, concealing her goddess' cocky smile, perfectly conscious that she had her man completely heated up.

Without a word, he reached the bed in three leaps and immobilized her on the mattress, straddling her and holding her wrists, while she laughed joyfully and tried vainly to get out of his claws. His strength caused a tingle of lewdness in the pit of her stomach and got her wet between her legs. Sansa breathed faster, with her pupils dilated. Tyrion submerged himself in her mouth with a totally hungry kiss, without control or restrictions, devouring her tongue and biting her lips until turning them swollen. The moans which went out of that giddily soft throat drove him to the edge of rapture and he wanted to encompass her whole body without leaving a single spot untouched or not kissed, yearning for being in each of her parts, in all the corners of her body and her soul, absorbing once and for all that young woman who had him completely crazy with love and lust.

He penetrated her fiercely, not being able to bear his tremendous tension for more time, longing for feeling her to her most intimate depths. He applied himself to her clit with his expert fingers which instinctively knew how to pluck the strings of her delight and in scarcely a minute he raised her to the top of pleasure, he heard her shout his name and felt her pressing him against her, and then he followed her to the heights and he flew so high that his being seemed to expand beyond its
limits. He went back from the summit gasping upon her, and she was smiling at him with happiness and satiety and his own expression must be a reflection of hers.

"I love you, Sansa," said him emphatically, embracing her waist.

"I love you, Tyrion." Sansa still was wrapping him with her legs and pressed him against her, with her arms encircling his back. "It's been amazing."

"You always make me want to fuck you with the surprise of a first time, Sansa. Each time with you is sublime."

"And with you. You're an outstanding lover, my love. I doubt that many men are able to drive their women to ecstasy the way you drive me." She kissed his head, over the tangled blond hair.

"Having you to waste your gorgeous body would be a big sin, my love," said him, with his cheek languidly resting between her breasts. "My duty as your husband is to make the most of this delight I have beneath me."

"Oh, you fulfill it, I can confirm you."

They laughed and she stroked his hair, disentangling some rebel locks.

"I love your hair, Tyrion," commented her.

"And I love yours, gorgeous. Redheads definitely drive me nuts."

"Eh! What redheads?" She tugged his hair. "Here there's only a redhead and she's the one you have to be interested in."

"Of course, of course, my love," assured him, mockingly. "I adore having in my arms a red-haired girl who tugs my hair and threatens me. I've always liked girls a bit fierce and possessive."

"You'd better. Because you're mine," declared her, playing along with him. But, even though they were playing, Sansa felt an intense emotion inside of her. That longing for possessing him entirely, which never satiated, and which invariably left her yearning for more, longing for him. In her voice there was a light teasing tone, but the meaning of her words was totally sincere.

He knew it. And that moved him deeply. Because he felt exactly the same.

"And you're mine too." He kissed her on her stomach, very close to her side, and she laughed with the tickling sensation.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 21

"Well, tell me. The Hound wandered around you, then?," he inquired, comically jealous. "Was he after you like a dazzled teenager?"

She reflected.

"No. It was more like I awoke in him rudimentary paternal feelings. I have the impression that he wanted to protect me in his own way, to help me survive and shake off my naivety of a silly girl who still believed in songs and fairy tales. Since Joffrey ordered my father executed, the Hound was just as likely to help me with hidden gestures, as to talk to me rudely. He was very contradictory and sometimes infuriating, but he consoled me. At the bottom I knew he wouldn't hurt me."

"A singular dude. Another moment I'll talk to you about him in the Battle of Blackwater," interspersed Tyrion.

"In the riot I felt more abandoned than ever and I was surrounded by a crowd maddened with hunger and death, and I was sure that would be my end. More than fear to death, what made me feel panicked was the way I was going to die. I saw what was in those three men's eyes and I knew what they'd do to me. I had heard stories of rapes when the cities were sacked or when people rose up. I heard that men's blood... boils in the clash of fight because they're desperate, and they force themselves upon any woman or girl in their path... I saw what they wanted to do to me and I'd rather having a knife at hand to kill myself and thus not having to endure that torture. As I lacked weapons, I started to run and went into a dead end."

Tyrion squeezed her hand, compassionate.

"I turned against them and tried to stand up to them, and I even slapped one of them, but it was useless. The one I had slapped hit me much stronger and threw me to the ground. The three grasped me, and another who was there joined the group. They began to rip my clothes. One placed himself between my legs and in that moment a shadow loomed over us and the man who was going to ravish me fell dead. The Hound grabbed the other two and disemboweled them and cut their throats in the blink of an eye. The fourth man escaped. The Hound turned to me with a soothing expression, swung me up onto his shoulder and carried me back to the Keep."

"I'm so, so sorry, Sansa," regretted Tyrion, with his eyes full of sympathy for her. "I wish I had spared you all that."

"You tried, Tyrion. You cared about me in the middle of the brawl, when no one apart from the Hound gave a copper for me."

"I myself should've gone out to seek you. I should've grabbed an axe and a shield and moved heaven and earth to find you in time. But I stayed in the Keep, impotent and useless. No matter what you say, I will not forgive myself for my own cowardice, Sansa."

She lifted his face firmly, to make him look at her.

"What could you do you alone in the middle of that hysterical multitude? Let them kill you? What use would have you been to me, then? You did well remaining inside, trying to decide the best way
to proceed. I don't reproach you anything, and neither I want you to do it to yourself, you understand me? My love, you're not infallible. That overwhelmed us. But I was rescued and nothing serious happened to me, only the fright of the moment. Be grateful for that, all right? I'm here with you and that's what matters."

He smiled at her sadly and kissed her hand.

"All right, my love."

"Then that's it. Don't give this thing another thought." She slipped her hand through his hair, and calm enveloped him like a balm. Little by little his peace returned to him along with her hands in his locks. "After that incident, I had nightmares every night, but in my dreams the men stabbed the dagger in my chest before raping me, as I had secretly wished, and I woke up at that instant. Once I felt my legs sticky and when I moved the covers away, there was blood. My first moon period. A new certainty fell upon me. Joffrey at last could marry me and get me pregnant."

"Oh, Sansa," he said softly.

"Shae tried to help me to conceal the evidence, because I wanted to delay the moment when all the Court would know about it. It was madness, of course, because it would be high treason if Joffrey was reported that his betrothed had been hiding to him that she was a flowered woman. The Hound entered the bedroom, surely alerted by my cry, and observed everything in a glimpse. He looked at me with his eyes full of pity but he said that was something which couldn't be hidden. He was who informed Cersei and she gave me a lecture on the subject. She had one of her rare moments of weakness and offered me good advice. She assured me that, though I couldn't love Joffrey, I'd love my children."

"Yes, sometimes she softens up and shows a bit of humanity," admitted Tyrion. "But it doesn't last long."

"Since then I feared the announcement of the wedding, but Stannis got going with all his troops and his ships and, despite the fear for the invasion, that gave me hope. If Stannis won, he'd free me of Joffrey. My father had supported him and I was confident that he'd spare my life and, maybe, he'd send me home."

"During war men don't usually make distinctions, Sansa."

"That was what Cersei told me when we were in Maegor's Holdfast. That if Stannis took the city, they would rape all of us, and especially I, due to my youth and my virginity, would be like a tasty piece of cake awaiting to be eaten."

"My dear sister always boosting morale at critical moments," pointed Tyrion, resentful. "When I narrate to you the part of the Battle of Blackwater, you'll tell me about everything you did during those hours. But now we have to sleep. You must be tired after this intense day of love, sex and stories of adventures and past anecdotes, and I'll get up early tomorrow." He kissed her and she nodded, smiling at him.

"Good night, gorgeous."

"Good night, my love."

And they let themselves be cradled by the quiet murmurs of silence and oblivion.
The morning dawned clearer than the previous day, with fleeting clouds which crossed the sky swiftly. The temperature dropped noticeably and all trace of summer warmth disappeared, probably for several years.

As he was getting dressed, Tyrion asked Sansa how winter was felt in the North.

"Winterfell remained buried beneath the snow for whole months," explained her. "In the inside the cold wasn't felt. As you know, there was a heating system through the hot springs which rose in a natural way. The hot waters were channeled within the walls. But outside, the blizzards got to accumulate many feet of snow and we often remained cut off. We were well supplied and the village attached to the ramparts depended on the castle for its survival. I was used to that weather, like any Northerner, but after spending such a long time in the South I suppose I lost a part of my capacity to acclimatize to the cold. Before now I wouldn't even have noticed this slight cool in Meereen, but I'm no more that girl who grew up in the snow."

"No. Now you're a strong woman who has defeated things worse than cold," praised him, looking at her with admiration.

She smiled at him tenderly.

"I had a secret I never told my family, though surely my mother suspected it, because there were very little things she missed. A little mischief."

"Really? The little, polite and honourable Lady Sansa Stark committed mischiefs behind her mother's back?," reprimanded him mockingly.

"My best friend Jeyne Poole, the butler's daughter, and I sometimes sneaked out to the pool in the godswood, which never froze. We undressed completely and dove. The water was a little warm and the air in that area wasn't so sharp as outside the godswood. We splashed and played for a long while. The challenge was to come back without anyone noticing that our hair was soaked, because if we were caught we would be seriously reprimanded. We got in through the rear and hid in the shadows of the corridors until arriving at my bedroom. Every time we achieved it, we threw onto the floor laughing without stop and we began to dry our hair. If someone caught us, he or she didn't comment anything, as my parents never scolded me for swimming naked in the pool of the heartree in midwinter."

She smiled at her childish memory and Tyrion felt touched imagining the boldness of the kid Sansa, smaller than the one he met in his visit to Winterfell, without grown breasts and with narrower hips, running around secretly through the snow to go swimming naked while outside pee almost must freeze as soon as it got out of the cock.

"I think Jeyne and I weren't the only ones who did it, and moreover I'm sure that Theon spied on us more than once, though whatever the reason, he decided to shut up. I thought I caught his shape creeping up on us in the thick vegetation, but I never was sure if I was imagining it."

"He was a boy almost as lustful as your husband, Sansa. He wouldn't miss the chance to spy on Ned Stark's beautiful and naked daughter."
"Oh, Tyrion," exclaimed her, disgusted. "I also suspect that he dedicated himself to watch me closely without me noticing it. Just thinking about it makes me shiver. It's... revolting."

Tyrion smiled, understanding.

"He was a teenager who only thought of stabbing his cock into any woman, and you were the most beautiful girl in the castle. You must've been the sexual fantasy of his handjobs."

"Oh, don't say that!," denied Sansa, flushed to her hair roots.

"Come on, darling, it's not as bad," said him, playing it down teasingly. "You must have been the sexual fantasy of lots of men. Have you really looked at yourself the way you are, Sansa? Many would chop their right arm to spend a night with you."

She blushed even more.

"I think you're exaggerating to make me blush," opposed her, laughing with disbelief.

Tyrion took her hand and put it without hesitation upon his hardened manhood. She gasped in surprise.

"You think I'm exaggerating, gorgeous? Is it not enough proof of your beauty the fact that you have me this way all day long?," asked him, with a hoarse voice.

She burst out laughing, scandalized and delighted.

This man never stops astonishing and arousing me. No wonder I'm more and more in love with him every passing day.

She formed a grimace of fake displeasure and rubbed slightly her husband's protruding crotch.

"You don't think all the men who look at me get... this way, do you?"

"I hope not, but I'm afraid most of them do. I'm a man and I know how men think," he said with bated breath. He held her hand and pressed it onto his manhood, panting. "Oh, Sansa. I need to fuck you this very moment."

She quickly took off her undergarment and laid down on the bed. Tyrion lowered his trousers and penetrated her swiftly, with a moan of relief. She put her legs upon his shoulders and he held them with an arm, while he stimulated her clit with the other hand. He moved inside of her controlling his thrusts not to spill himself very soon, and as soon as she convulsed and cried out his name, he let go his restrictions and unleashed his release.

They rested for some seconds in that position and then he, reluctantly as always, pulled himself out of her and put his garments in order, while she did the same.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"There must be scant men who don't wish to do all this with you, Sansa. Only those who have other sexual preferences," said him, grinning maliciously. "But to hell with all them, because you're only mine and your prodigious body belongs to me."

"And you're only mine and other women would better not daring to put a single hand on you," declared her, comically threatening.

He looked at her truly moved, behind the half-serious and half-mocking tone they were using.

"I never dared to hope that a woman as beautiful as you would want me so much, Sansa. You're the greatest blessing of my life and I still don't know why I'm so lucky."

"Perhaps it's because you deserve it. And you too are the greatest blessing of my life and I consider myself as the luckiest of women," said her, putting a hand on his beard.

They shared a knowing look, full of everything that words could not express, and they went to the adjacent hall to wait for Mhyraz, who would not take long to come.

When Mhyraz went back to collect the breakfast items, Tyrion asked him with a very quiet voice, in a moment in which Sansa was not looking at them, to await him outside. The boy smiled conspiratorially, he wished them a good morning and got out. Tyrion, as soon as he gave Sansa the farewell kiss, went to join the kid and explained to him what he wanted.

"When you go to the kitchens, tell the cooks that Lord Tyrion is requesting a special favour. I want to give my wife a gift which only them can make into reality. Lemon cakes are Lady Sansa's favourites and if they include them in today's menu, at lunch or at dinner, I'll reward them. All right, Mhyraz? And by the way, some cakes will be for you, so suggest the cooks to make a generous amount."

The boy was smiling so widely that the gesture lit up the vivacious dark skinned face.

"I'll do it with great pleasure, master." He bent and Tyrion noticed that, if it were not because he was carrying the breakfast utensils, he would have started to run and jump for joy.

*He's a nice boy. I wish he wants to stay with Sansa and me. I'd like to have him beside us for all our lives.*

Happy and with his heart singing, he went to the audience hall, where Grey Worm would be present, apart from Missandei. Hizdhar those days was excused from attending, because he was immersed in the organization of the opening of the fighting arenas and that demanded practically his whole time, as he had to deal with the volunteers who presented themselves to fight and he went to the trainings to ponder each one's skills and decide how they would fight in the events. Planning all that with detail was very arduous, but the nobleman coped with it enthusiastically.

Tyrion greeted those present in the hall. The queen and Missandei had not appeared yet.

*Has Daenerys had plenty of fun with Daario under the sheets? I understand her perfectly. I'm often about to be late,* he thought, smiling for himself.
He entertained his wait guessing what Sansa would be doing.

*Dara must be styling her hair. Sansa also is developing a growing affection for the girl. Perhaps she wants to ask her if she wishes to remain at our service, as I wish to ask the same to Mhyraz.*

Those children were sweethearts and, if they accepted staying with them, Sansa and he would be the most likely to a family they would have, and Sansa and he would look after their happiness.

He knew Sansa would look at him with her big blue eyes showing her love for him, as every time he did something that made her feel proud.

*She makes me want to be a better person each day. It's indescribable the sensation of being stared at with reverence, admiration and desire by those eyes which reflect her beautiful inner being, her generous and kind soul which I have the mission to preserve from the cruelties of this world. I am her shield, her knight who rescues her from the monster's claws and takes her to a realm where there are always flowers, light and laughter, and who makes her happy forever.*

He discovered that for the first time he did not feel as a fool dusting off his youthful dreams. They had come back to him with renewed strength, because Sansa was making them come to reality one after another. She was his soul mate, his heart, her body became one with his in the ecstasy of their union. He missed her every minute his duties as royal counselor and general supervisor claimed him and his mind flew to her, remembering lots of things they had said and done together.

Daenerys went into the hall with Missandei and he awoke from his daydream.

*Anyone who sees me will notice clearly I'm helplessly in love. I suppose all happy lovers have the same expression of walking on the clouds,* thought him, amused, studying the queen, who effectively seemed to have serious trouble to hide that she came from a love session especially intense. Daario must have kept her quite a bit entertained. Tyrion imagined her complaining weakly because she would give a bad image of herself if she was late, but surely Daario had managed to persuade her. The fact that she had walked in a rush and was smoothing down her platinum blond hair, trying to fix it, was quite an evident proof and Tyrion was about to smile openly for the slip-up of the extremely formal and punctual queen of Meereen.

He also observed Missandei, who exchanged a brief glance with Grey Worm. The current between them was palpable and he had no doubt that they too were lovers. How did they manage to have sex, only them both would know, but Tyrion knew a few ways of pleasing a woman with no need to use the cock and probably Grey Worm was learning them. As to how would he obtain his pleasure, it had to be a combination of caresses and kisses and focusing fully on driving her to her highest delight. There were many variations of sexual pleasure which did not imply to peak, and he at least could enjoy those variations, which with experience could be equally satisfying.

*Here I am, interested in the others’ intimate life. I see sex everywhere. That’s because Sansa keeps me hot the whole day and it costs me a great effort to focus on any other thing. I have to settle down. If the audience succeeds in distracting me from my thoughts sufficiently, maybe the bulge between my legs will be less visible and I'll be dying less to plunge my cock into my wife's sensual body.*

*(Part 2 of a longer chapter)*
Meereen: Day 22

Daenerys greeted them ceremoniously with her pale cheeks a little flushed, struggling to put on her mask of composure, and she sat on her bench. Immediately Grey Worm gave the order to open the doors to the petitioners and those entered and formed a straight queue.

She, with Tyrion's and Missandei's occasional advice, resolved the usual cases of property disputes, a Meereenese who accused a neighbour freedman of having robbed him and a Meereenese merchant who complained because the freedfolk's market was stealing business from the city establishments and it was not fair that they had to pay a tax for selling their products.

"The freedfolk's market provides the Crown with incomes as well," clarified Daenerys, "as well as the Meereenese population do. Incomes which are employed in the improvement of the city and that result in collective benefit. And no Meereenese has been forbidden to set stalls in the market. You are in your full right to do it, as long as you contribute to the Crown with a share of your incomes, as the rest of the stalls do."

The merchant remained quiet, in a lack for a reply, and retired after making a bow.

Tyrion took that instant to whisper in her ear.

"That merchant you've just dispatched... Might be involved in the Sons of the Harpy?"

"My spies must be keeping an eye on him. Any merchant who has a thriving business and who possessed slaves might be involved," whispered her on her part, in such a quiet voice that only him could hear her.

The next petitioner walked ahead. She was a priestess of Lhazar who came to propose a deal. The queen seemed puzzled for a moment, but she recovered.

She surely has reminded the other Lhazareen priestess who destroyed her dothraki family and stole away her capacity to conceive more children, reflected Tyrion.

"We are interested in the stone of your quarry to build and remodel our temples and houses. We can't afford to pay you in money, but we can do it in kind: sheep, wool, meat, milk and cheese. Whatever you like."

Daenerys shot a quick glance at Missandei and Tyrion, and these showed their agreement to the deal.

"It's a good exchange, Your Grace," he confirmed. "The sheep and their products we'll suit us very well, facing winter."

The queen agreed to it and settled with the woman the terms of the deal: the amount of stone that would be assigned to them every month and the consignments of cattle and ovine products which would be handed to Meereen as a barter for the granite.

Soon after that, some fugitive slaves who had just arrived from Tolos, asked for asylum and the queen commended them to the Unsullied so they guided them to the camp.

"It's a constant trickle. Every day some more arrive. At this rate I won't be able to house them all in
"We'll have to think of a solution, Your Grace," pointed Tyrion. "We must discuss this, because it's very likely that the issue of housing new freedfolk will overflow."

"And let's remember that the fact that the slaves of Yunkai rebel again is pending. Many of them will leave the city and will come here. We must get ready for that flood."

"Indeed. We have to reflect carefully on how to accommodate them."

"We'll debate it in the next Council meeting. It's a vital subject and we must solve it as soon as possible."

"Of course, Your Grace."

At last the queue ended and Daenerys, as usual, asked him to accompany her to her private hall.

Once sat before their cups of wine, she addressed the matters about which she could not talk in the audience.

"A crow from Bhorash has arrived. Captain Gilean has made profitable business. He has managed to sell a part of our craftpeople's manufactures, and has purchased first need products. The margin of profit has been successful. Later I'll give you the message so you can transcribe the pieces of information on your ledgers."

"Perfect, Your Grace."

"He surely is on his way to Tolos. Until today the security measures he's counting on are effective. Let's hope the journey goes on without incidents."

"Your enemies didn't consider your sense of anticipation. It's not the same to attack a practically defenseless ship that several of them that have well trained and armed guards."

"One of the scarce weapons with which I can fight my enemies is getting ahead of them and foreseeing how they're going to proceed in order to place the patch before the injury occurs. I can't afford to let them overtake me to hurt me."

"And the Dornish fleet, Your Grace?"

"In brief I await a crow from the isle of Elyria, where it's very probable that many of the ships have laid over. I'm waiting for reports on the state of the fleet and the amount of vessels which have left behind safe and sound the influence zone of Valyria. Let's keep the faith in the chance that most of them have accomplished it."

She did a pause and seemed extremely uneasy with the following question.

"I've also received a crow from prince Oberyn Martell. With his brother Doran's consent, he offers me the alternative of wedding me when I decide to march on Westeros. He says that, if I make my entrance through Dorne, all the region will acclaim me and I'll have all their armies at my disposal. And to strengthen the Dornish population's devotion, a marriage with their popular prince Oberyn would be very well seen."

Tyrion was not very stunned by the temperamental Dornishman boldness, but he had not expected at all such a proposal.
"The Red Viper himself is asking for your hand in marriage?" He hushed for some moments, thoughtful. "He's far from a negligible suitor, and Dorne is your best ally. But if you become engaged, you'll have to fulfill the marital agreement at the risk of offending the Dornish people if you break it. Anyway, a categorical refusal wouldn't be advisable either, because it wouldn't be in your interest to get strained your bonds with them."

"But if I answer that I have to think of it for some time... Perhaps it'd be the softest way to offend them, but they might take it as an affront all the same. They have put me in a bind that it's not going to be easy to sort out."

"I'll try to think about a possible solution, Your Grace. In the next Council meeting we'll have to analyze that subject very carefully."

"Daario isn't going to like it in the least," she sighed. That sentence was the same as confessing openly to him her relationship with the sellsword captain. She knew that dissimulation was useless before Tyrion. "I don't know how he'll react, but he isn't going to be very reasonable. Being aware of the lack of a future for our affair won't lessen his jealousy. He'll have to put up with it."

"One day you'll have to marry and he knows it perfectly."

"I don't deceive myself, Lord Tyrion. It's very probable that, if he gets tired of the situation, he'll abandon me and will take with him the Second Sons. He's with me because he feels attracted to adventure and women's conquest. Let's be honest. How may men don't dream of seducing a queen? He's a sellsword and, like all the sellswords, he leans downwind, not upwind. Maybe one day he'll decide he's fed up with being the second course."

"If he doesn't love you, that would happen even though you don't marry and he doesn't have any rival, Your Grace. If he loves you, he'll be willing to stay by your side upwind."

She looked at him sadly.

"He has said he loves me, but I don't know if I must believe him. Perhaps he doesn't love me, but what I represent. Men use to be blinded much more to titles and prestige than to women in themselves. I'm not sure that Daario would have shown me such devotion and loyalty if I weren't a queen."

"I love Sansa with all my heart, Your Grace, and she doesn't have anything. Only a remote pretension on Winterfell, which for now she can't claim. I know that mine is an exceptional case, but with this I want to make you see that it's not impossible that someone loves you for yourself. If Daario truly loves you, he'll show it in many ways and you'll have that certainty. Don't let yourself be blinded by mistrust. In love everything goes out spontaneously."

"I know, Lord Tyrion. I also had my great love story with Drogo. But by then I wasn't a queen, only a khaleesi."

"Trust your instinct and your heart. It's the best advice I can give you."

"And I'll take it into account, like all your advice. Thank you very much for your dedication."

She stood up and Tyrion did the same.

"It's me who has to thank you for giving me the chance to perform what I do best, Your Grace."

"We're even, then," she said smiling, more cheered up. "Good afternoon, Lord Tyrion."
"Good afternoon, Your Grace."
Meereen: Day 22

Tyrion told Sansa all that happened in the audience and the conversation with Daenerys in her private hall.

"Prince Oberyn has proposed marriage to her?" Sansa was perplexed. "He's much older than her and he's never been married. He has only had concubines and paramours."

"When I was a baby, he and his sister Elia were invited to Casterly Rock with the aim of engaging one of them to Jaime or Cersei. But finally my father rejected the betrothal, though in exchange he offered me as a suitor for Elia, what offended the Martells. Oberyn told me that when they arrived at my family's property, they expected me to be a kind of little monster with horns and a spiked cock, but they only found a dwarf baby who didn't have anything in particular and they were disappointed," told Tyrion, sarcastic. "Oberyn is an accomplished warrior, he studied in the Citadel for a while, he has traveled through Essos, he was a sellsword in the Second Sons and he even fought in the arenas of Meereen, so he's not a stranger in these lands. His extensive experience and his widespread fame are very favourable for Daenerys. He loves his family and he's a good father for his numerous bastard daughters. But he also has a quick temper, his sexual appetites are promiscuous and he has fucked half Westeros and part of Essos. I suppose he has talked about the matter with his paramour Ellaria, with whom he has kept a stable relationship for many years and they have five daughters. If the prince has made his proposal to Daenerys, it has been with Ellaria's acquiescence, as both love and respect each other. They agree to all, even to share lovers and participate together in orgies, so they too have agreed to this plan. Of course, Daenerys would have to accept that Ellaria until now has taken up the main place in Oberyn's heart and, if the queen agrees on the wedding, she'll have to share him with the concubine. A situation a bit peculiar," he concluded smiling, aware that Sansa was scandalized with all that.

"You think the queen will accept such conditions?"

"I don't know yet if she'll agree on such conditions. She'll surely negotiate her own conditions until both parts come to an agreement. For example, I doubt she feels very pleased with Ellaria's presence and, although she has to stomach that she continues to be Oberyn's concubine, I think I know her enough to predict that she'll refuse to settle a multiple relationship with the two. As far as I know, Daenerys doesn't feel attracted to women. And I as well think that she won't permit that the paramour sticks her nose directly into the questions of politics and government. Daenerys won't be able to prevent her from influencing Oberyn's decisions, but I don't think the queen will give her a post in the Council unless she proves herself to be worthy of it."

"It would be a tense cohabitation," pointed Sansa.

"Daenerys'll learn to put her in her place. Either way, Dorne is her most powerful ally and will support her completely. They are proud and ambitious people and won't miss the chance to marry one of their princes to the queen conquerer of Westeros, a Targaryen with three dragons. You see that nothing is offered disinterestedly. Dorne's support has its price too."

"But it may take years until she's in a position to claim the Iron Throne."

"The Dornish people will await. They have nothing to lose with this deal now that my family's position in King's Landing has weakened and plummeted after my father's death. They hate the Lannisters and await their chance to crush them definitely. With queen Daenerys, Dorne will
increase its prestige, as its prince will be king of Westeros. They have supported the Targaryen's cause for centuries and they still do, though prince Rhaegar triggered Robert's War when he abandoned Elia and eloped with your aunt Lyanna. Rhaegar isn't very popular for them, but my lineage is even less popular, especially since my father gave the order to slaughter Elia and her children. And to their eyes, Daenerys is a conquerer who is earning with fire and blood her right to the throne, and the Dornish people admire valiants who fight to earn their place in the world, not those for whom everything is made very easy."

Sansa reflected, showing her concentration on her frown. Tyrion longed for kissing the little wrinkle that formed between her thin and outlined copper-coloured eyebrows.

"Then that implies that she wouldn't marry anyone else before. She won't seal the deal in Meereen wedding a Great Master. The Dornish people wouldn't consent to that."

"No, of course not. It'd be an affront. And now the queen has to choose. Or she keeps her current position in Meereen as long as she can, which has quite improved though she's still far from being firmly established, but with her eyes focused on Dorne for her future conquer of Westeros. Or she refuses the marriage proposal and offends the Dornish people, with which it would be expected that, though they wouldn't show an open rejection, because they wouldn't, nevertheless they wouldn't support her so unreservedly. And they know Daenerys needs Dorne as much as the rest of the kingdoms in Westeros. If she wants to rule a united kingdom, she has to keep it united."

"She has her dragons. Dorne won't be able to rebel openly against her at the risk of suffering the consequences that others who defied Aegon the Conquerer suffered."

"They won't rebel openly, I'm sure of it. They're very smart and they generally value their necks. They like to enjoy the pleasures of life without restrictions and don't feel very inclined to sacrifice themselves if they can prevent it. But they know they're the key for Daenerys' entrance in Westeros and with their strong support they'll pave the way for her, as well as they'll make many people lean towards her and will spare her spilling too much blood. She wouldn't enter as a foreign queen, bus as a Mother who cares for her subjects and who at last will bring peace, prosperity and justice."

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter Notes

Happy New Year for everyone!

Meereen: Day 22

"So you're sure that she'll consent."

"Yes, if she thinks about going to Westeros, and that's what she wants. Meereen is a stop on the way. We don't know what will happen in the end, but she doesn't have the intention to stay here forever."

"How will the Great Masters take that she accepts a marriage proposal with a prince of a faraway land, and so they don't have the chance of marrying her to one of their own noblemen?"

"She'll keep it a secret as long as she can. Hizdhar mustn't know about that engagement. Anyway, Daenerys hasn't expressed openly any intention to marry, either a Great Master or a Westerosi nobleman. That subject has only been debated in one Council meeting and the presumption is that whatever is debated in the Council, remains indoors. When we discussed that matter, Hizdhar wasn't yet a counselor. Nothing of that has become known, as far as we know. The Meereenese people won't accuse her of breaking any marriage covenant which doesn't exist."

"Then in the next meeting the queen won't mention prince Oberyn's proposal before Hizdhar," pointed Sansa.

"She won't. She'll deal with it with the rest of us, but not with him. She surely will summon us to her private hall before or after the meeting, taking advantage of the circumstance that Hizdhar is busy with the fighting arenas. She won't summon all of us together in order not to arouse suspicion, but she'll consult us one by one and will listen to our opinions."

"It's going to be more and more difficult to speak in the Council meetings," pointed Sansa.

Tyrion smiled.

"Indeed, darling. We must tread carefully regarding Hizdhar. Before him we only can discuss certain matters, enough to make him be satisfied with his role and see that he too does his bit. But with the rest of the matters, hush."

Sansa observed him, with her amused smile.

"You really enjoy all this, don't you? The game of thrones."

He took her hands and looked her in the eye.

"You already know that I do, gorgeous. It's the second thing I enjoy most. Far, very far behind from how much I enjoy with you. But just be aware of one thing, Sansa. Now I like the game of thrones more than ever because I love you and I at last feel myself fulfilled doing what I do. I can try to change things and build a better world for us and our progeny, where we carry on being so
happy and our children and grandchildren can be happy too, if the legacy is extended."

She knelt before him, with her look overflowing with that love he treasured so much, and she put her hand on his beard.

"You're the best husband a woman can wish, Tyrion. The most beautiful man I've ever known. I love you so much that my feelings for you overflow me." Tears filled the edges of her eyes.

He slid very softly his fingertips over her lower eyelids, drying the tiny droplets before they ran down her cheeks. He took her face between his hands and blended with her in one of the most tender and reverent kisses two lovers could share.

Mhyraz came with lunch and Tyrion got impatient as a child, waiting for her reaction. The boy put the plates and the other utensils onto the table and Sansa in those moments was in the bedroom, getting ready her sewing items for the afternoon. Tyrion winked at the boy when he retired, and Mhyraz smiled at him as if they were plotting to commit a mischief.

Sansa returned from the bedroom and walked close to the table, distracted. He was watching discreetly all her movements. As always, he moved away the chair for her, a daily gallant gesture they repeated invariably, and she sat down thanking him. She unfolded her napkin and he sat down too, making an effort to keep his neutral expression. Tyrion started to serve the food on her dish, another gesture he had adopted with her. Suddenly, she fixed her eyes on the platters and opened her mouth.

"Lemon cakes?" She looked at him like a girl who discovers her favourite candy hidden in her pocket. "You've ordered them for me. Oh, Tyrion." Again Sansa was overcome by her emotions. She stood up, bent before him, took his face between her hands and planted on him a voracious and compelling kiss, which left him breathless and that increased the erection he already had.

"I know you adore them, and you haven't eaten them in months. But spare Mhyraz a few of them, because I've promised that some cakes would be for him," said Tyrion, smiling, with her face mere inches from his. Sansa planted another vigorous kiss on him and he was about to lift her by her waist to carry her to the bed and make love to her wildly. But he restrained himself for later, as the food would get cold and spoilt.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 22

She sat again, with a smile so wide that her face was even more beautiful, if that was possible. When she laughed, and when she enjoyed naked in his arms, Sansa was the most beautiful thing he had seen in all his life. And he had seen many pretty women and sceneries which took anyone's breath away. But nothing that could be compared to her.

"Thank you very much, my love. It's one of the loveliest gifts I've ever been given, along with my direwolf."

"I'm glad you like my little present so much, honey."

"You've had the gesture of remembering what my favourite sweets are and you have bothered yourself to order them. That means a lot for me, Tyrion."

"It's nothing compared to what you deserve, Sansa." He intertwined his fingers with hers over the table.

"Everything that comes from you is like the world for me, my love."

He once again felt moved to the roots of his soul. She had that effect upon him.

"Then imagine how I feel just looking at you, gorgeous. You're the dream of a dwarf's whole life, whose dreams others tried to tear by all means."

She squeezed his hand and caressed it with her fingers among his.

"I'm very real, Tyrion." She smiled at him.

"I know. When I wake up, you're still here." He corresponded to her smile.

They applied themselves to the food, trying to swallow the knot of emotion that was plugging their throats. They were so happy that they enjoyed a very healthy appetite. Tyrion remembered that in King's Landing she had periods in which she scarcely ate or did not eat at all. Her stomach closed when nerves seized her, or when she was frightened or depressed, what happened to her most of the time. After the news of her mother's and Robb's tragedy, Sansa lost weight and her face turned a little gaunt, with the rings round her eyes due to insomnia outlining on her pale skin. He regretted that visible loss of vitality and racked his brains trying to think over a way to persuade her to make the effort to eat. But nothing had any effect.

In Joffrey's wedding, the absurd amount of courses remained untouched before her. She barely nibbled some fruit with lack of appetite, drank merely a cup of wine and sometimes she seemed on the verge of standing up brusquely to go running to vomit on some flower bed of the garden. But she kept her composure without breaking down and Tyrion admired silently her obstinate resilience, in spite of the fact that that day was being miserable for him too. Joffrey had smashed with his Valyrian sword the book Tyrion had gifted him, one of the four copies that were left in the world of the work Lives of Four Kings by Grand Maester Kaeth. He should have foreseen the desecration the snot was going to comit and should have gifted him a Valyrian steel dagger identical to the one Joff had robbed him to frame him for Bran's attempted murder, though he doubted that the imbecile would catch the irony. Or, by the way, he could have put before his nose a cartload of horseshit, and even that was loads more than he deserved.
Afterwards, in the timeout until the celebration of the wedding ceremony in the Great Sept, Shae got into the chambers he shared with Sansa, tempting him to have sex. Tyrion, during the royal breakfast, had caught the whispers between his sister and his father, who were looking at Shae, and he knew he had to send her out of King’s Landing as soon as he could. In his rooms, feeling really low and his heart heavy, he decided he would not delay it another day. The ship to Pentos was ready in the harbour and in the Free City she would have a house and servants who would tend to her. But Shae was stubborn as a mule. When she went to try to attract him once more with no success, he talked to her with all the harshness he could gather and despised himself for it even more than he usually did. He detested himself for the hurt look she gave him. But it was necessary. As every other method of persuasion had failed, he had no other choice left but provoking Shae's hatred, hurting her deeply, making her not to want to see him again. At least that way she at last would leave him, she would go far from King's Landing and would stay alive.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 150

Meereen: Day 22

And that was what she did. Though Tyrion no more desired or loved her like before, she had been the most important person for him during months and he had been in love. Just in the moment she went out of the rooms crying, accompanied by Bronn, an immense emptiness took over him, threatening with swallowing him. Not even the relief of knowing that she was safe consoled him. All he wanted was to throw himself onto the floor and weep bitterly, or grab Joff's Valyrian sword and give it a good use skewering the snot, Tywin, Cersei, the whole fucking Red Keep and the damned King's Landing.

Why in hell had he not got out of there with Shae? Did he achieve something staying in that cursed city?

Sansa.

He had Sansa. A child bride who did not want anything from him. Though it was true what he had said to Shae regarding that he did not love Sansa, not by then, however he felt things for her. He had the duty to care for her and protect her. He could not abandon her. He had to make the effort to build a life in common with her, little by little, with infinite patience.

And besides, you desired her. You were dying to touch her.

And that was the perspective he had ahead of him. An unhappy marriage with a girl he could not reach, no matter how much he yearned for it.

During the ceremony, where the strong wish to strangle his boastful nephew, Tywin and Cersei made his hands itch, he observed Sansa covertly and, despite how much miserable he felt, he was invaded by a strange comforting heat. That sad girl was the only beautiful thing he had left and he would devote himself to take care of her. The vague idea he had been turning over and over in his mind became clear: he would remove her from King's Landing and would take her to Casterly Rock. They would go far from that hell and perhaps, maybe, the traitor's daughter and the Demon Monkey might have something similar to a normal married life.

"What are you thinking about, my love?" she asked, taking him back to reality.

"I was remembering other period in which you didn't even fancy eating lemon cakes. Luckily, the situation is very different now." He smiled at her. Their dishes were already empty and the lemon cakes of dessert were piling up temptingly in the platter.

"Yes. Things have changed a lot. All that was left behind and this very moment I'm dying to taste your gift," she said, with her suggestive smile which gave a double meaning to her sentence.

He felt again the erection against his trousers.

"Honey, I warn you. If you carry on talking to me like that, the cakes will have to wait." He was roaming her with his hungry look and she laughed, blushing. She took a cake and bit it in the most erotic way she managed, provoking him. She emitted an exaggerated moan of pleasure as soon as she tasted with her tongue the delicious flavour she had missed so much.

"I've warned you, Sansa," he murmured, like a predator ready to pounce onto its prey. He stood up with stunning speed and she gave a cry and jumped from the chair, still eating the cake. She started
to run through the room, until he grasped her by the waist and both fell onto the floor struggling and bursting in cackles. Tyrion immobilized her and licked the crumbs on her limps. He had managed to grab a cake while he was running behind her and put it on her mouth so she would bite it. She did and he sank his tongue, tasting in her mouth the sweet dough with the light acid touch of lemon. Sansa moaned on his lips. Tyrion repeated the operation until they ate all the cake between the two. Sansa would have never imagined such an erotic way of sharing a sweet and she was so aroused that she pressed her husband against her, rubbing her hot belly against him. Tyrion immediately took off her undergarment and penetrated her. She encircled him with her legs, stimulated her clitoris and opened her bodice to let loose her breasts, which he caressed with both hands while he thrust into her. With her free hand, Sansa introduced two fingers in his mouth so he tasted the lemon flavour on them.

"Tyrion!," she shouted, arching her back and pressing her legs around him.

He spilled himself inside of his wife with all the fury of his insatiable desire.

"Yes, Sansa, darling!"

He fell upon her, exhausted, and she embraced him around his back.

"It's been the most delicious dessert I've ever eaten, Sansa."

"You're not the only one," she corroborated, with laughter in her voice.

"I'll have to order lemon cakes more often."

They burst out laughing and jerked up when Mhyraz knocked at the door to clear the table. They laughed even louder while Tyrion requested the boy out loud to wait a moment. Sansa ran to the bedroom to tidy up her dishevelled appearance and Tyrion rose his trousers in a rush. In the last instant he remembered to smooth his hair with his fingers and opened the door with the most innocent expression he could manage.
Chapter 151

Meereen: Day 22

Mhyraz had taken with him a handful of cakes but, as there were many, a few were left for dinner still. Sansa covered the platter with a cloth to preserve them from flies and dust, and to prevent them from hardening by the contact with the air.

Sansa and Leena immersed themselves in needlework. They were making winter garments. They had decided that all the afternoons they could, they would sew for the children. They were working already in clothes for Mhyraz, Dara and the girl who tended to Pod and Leena. Tyrion observed that Sansa's fingers were so experienced that the needle barely could be seen, as Sansa handled it with great speed. And her accuracy with the stitches was worthy of applause. Moreover, she had an instinct to give the proper cut to the fabrics and to make the garments have a flawless finishing touch. With good reason the suits for the wedding had been finished so quickly and were so nice.

He made a clean copy of Gilean's message, which listed all he had sold and bought in Bhorash and how much the purchases had cost, though that did not take Tyrion very long. He left the girls with their labours and, to hang out, took one of the books Daenerys had lent to Sansa. It was the one that developed the subject of the Dance of dragons. He always had felt very interested in that part of the Targaryens' history, because it marked the beginning of their decline. He got ready to let himself be submerged in reading, what he had neglected since he did not remember when. The truth was that if he had to choose as a hobby between reading, on the one hand, and fucking with Sansa, on the other hand, he did not doubt for a single second.

Reading occupied my empty hours and my nights of sleeplessness, when I didn't have the woman of my life with me to make me feel realized and to fill all my time. Now I have her... Who in hell is going to think of reading? He smiled, mischievous.

In spite of himself, he was determined that Sansa every day had at her disposal at least a while for herself and for the things she wanted to do on her own. He did not think it was good in the long run to be stuck to her skirts at all hours. He never got tired of her; quite the opposite. He yearned for her presence more and more. But Sansa was very young and needed other distractions and other things to do apart from keeping looking at his scar. Or that was what he thought. So he encouraged her to develop her pastimes, and needlework absorbed her for whole afternoons.

Determined to respect his teenager wife's own space, he also had to resume some of his hobbies. Reading offered him a great solace during his childhood and first youth, and in his adulthood too, but with the passing years he dedicated less time to it. That afternoon was a good moment to resume it, as it did not occur to him another pastime that was very worthy. Strolling along the corridors? Visiting Pod? He would, one of those afternoons. Talking with his squire was more like soliloquizing and listening to the lad's monosyllables or short sentences, but that was better than nothing. He too could go to see Ser Barristan and talk about the present and the possible future that awaited them with Daenerys, and recall old times. What he did not want was to go out of the pyramid, especially because to do that his two escorts and Pod would have to interrupt their tasks or their leisure time to accompany him, and he did not want to steal their hours of privacy or whatever they did. He had promised Sansa he would never go out alone and he had not the slightest intention to break his promise.

He opened the volume carefully, as he always handled books; as if they were Sansa's delicate skin. Though, to tell the truth, he not always had treated his wife's skin with such care. He remembered
to have left small bruises on the areas where he had sucked a little stronger than he should, or where he had squeezed more tightly, enraptured with ecstasy. She had never complained; probably, driven by passion, she had not even felt pain or, if she had felt it, it must have been to a very small extent or it had mixed with pleasure. It was curious how pain and pleasure were two sensations that used to go hand in hand, as both sides of a coin.

And you've already got hardened again thinking of her and the things you do to her. Aren't you able to stop even for a minute? Definitely you are on your way to become a dirty old man and a lustful and insatiable beast. Oh, gods. The more you recriminate yourself, the more you're getting horny and harder.

The truth was that he again had a massive erection and the worst was that he had to rule out to request Sansa to fuck with him. Her private time was sacred.

He would have to resort to the dodge that had helped him in King's Landing whenever he got aroused and could not relieve himself with Shae, because he did not want to be unfaithful to his wife, or with Sansa, because she did not love him.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 152

Meereen: Day 22

He went out quietly and searched for a hideout. He got into the adjoining chamber, rested against a wall, lowered his pants and started to beat himself off urgently, as it would be better to finish quickly so Sansa did not notice his absence. She might get worried if she discovered that he had left without notifying her.

He closed his eyes and imagined himself penetrating her and caressing her magnificent breasts. He recalled her the way she reacted, arching her back, throwing her head back and moaning with surrender. He visualized her long legs encircling him and enveloping him in the possessive gesture he adored.

His hand accelerated. He was very close to the end.

He recalled her finishing around his cock, with her inner walls crushing him in her climax, her lecherous cries filling the air, his name sounding in her sweet voice which had a wild hint when her delight transported her.

Tyrion spilled on his hand with a silent gasp and shook his cock some more times until the waves calmed down and his seed stopped springing up.

He smiled for himself. *For the hells, I need her so much that I have to wank off when I can't fuck her. My hand is a very poor substitute for my wife's body, but I have no other choice. The other alternative would be to throw Leena out the room while I lay Sansa down for a wild session, but I have the impression that my lady would quite scandalize and wouldn't approve my lack of manners.*

He cleaned his hand, fastened his trousers, tidied up his hair and went back to their adjacent hall, being careful not to make any sound with the door.

The girls had not noticed his absence and he smiled wickedly. Relieved, at least for a while, he picked up the book he had left on the table, and sat down to read at last. He knew that story by memory, but he did not mind reading it once more, like the children who re-read their favourite tales hundreds of times.

Viserys I Targaryen was a son of prince Baelon and his sister-wife Alyssa. His father never became a king. He inherited the throne from his grandfather Jaehaerys I, after a Great Council celebrated to decide the issue of succession, and he was chosen. The other pretender was his cousin Laenor Velaryon. As Viserys had no sisters to marry, he had wedded at sixteen years old his cousin Aemma Arryn, with whom he had his daughter Rhaenyra and other two children, but those died very soon.

Viserys I was a good king who provided the realms with prosperity and peace, and house Targaryen was living its height in Westeros. The lineage was numerous and possessed a high number of dragons. Viserys rode Balerion *The Black Dread*, that had been ridden too by Aegon the Conquerer and Maegor the Cruel.

His wife Aemma died on birthgiving and, as none of his sons survived, Viserys trained Rhaenyra to succeed him. He wedded again, the daughter of his Hand of the King, called Alicent Hightower and had four children with her. And just in that moment started the big succession problem which led to
the *Dance of Dragons*. Viserys' wish was that his eldest daughter became a queen after him, but his father-in-law and Hand began to intrigue so the succession went to his grandson Aegon. Two confronted factions were formed: the Greens, who supported Aegon, and the Blacks, who supported Rhaenyra.

When Aerys I died, Ser Criston Cole, the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, crowned Aegon as a king. Rhaenyra was at Dragonstone giving birth to a premature baby who died soon after, and the war between the Targaryens started. The new king Aegon and the candidate Rhaenyra gathered their allies and got into a bloody conflict in which not even the children of the family were safe from the plots and the murders. If he racked his brains, Tyrion even managed to remember the names of most of those who had fought in the Greens and in the Blacks, and also the names of the dragons that had fought and were killed. The historians dilated on that with detail, reciting all kinds of names, biographies, dates and events, but Tyrion did not find boring that long reading. He read very fast and progressed considerably. He nearly knew that part of the past of Westeros like the back of his hand. Actually, he had read since his childhood a great part of all that could be read about the different periods of the Seven Kingdoms and he neither was an ignorant in regard to Essos.

*(Part 2 of a longer chapter)*
Chapter 153

Meereen: Day 22

It had always fascinated him to observe, read and research about the fickle human nature and history books allowed him to verify that almost all people made exactly the same mistakes time after time in an endless cycle. But he too liked to find out about those who tried to do something to change the state of things and try to stop or break the wheel of caprice. Life was constant change and it was impossible that the same situation was kept indefinitely. Everything was ended with an overturn. But at least a few managed to set up many years of peace in a row and those who lived those times of prosperity could consider themselves as very lucky for not having known the dreadful anxiety of war.

That was the most anyone could aspire to, and that was what Tyrion wanted for his wife and his future children. Many years of happy times. The serenity of the days without great worries apart from the normal risks of any ordinary day. Life often was already in charge of complicating things with illnesses, accidents and misfortunes. It did not need the help of human beings to complicate them even more.

He succeeded in getting away sometimes in the book, so that he kept at bay the urgencies of his disobedient body and he did not have to go to release himself any more. That did not change the fact that a single thought aimed to Sansa was enough to make his cock react as a spring.

He heard the girls standing up. It was early still and there were a couple of hours left until Mhyraz brought dinner. Tyrion rubbed his hands in anticipation, imagining all he could do with Sansa in two hours.

She and Leena went into the adjacent hall and Tyrion closed the volume, smiling at them.

"I'm going now. Have a good evening," said her friend as a goodbye, taking Sansa's hand.

"The same to you, Leena." Sansa squeezed her hand and the girl was gone.

"Tyrion," said his wife, with a cuddly voice. "Let's take a bath. I fancy submerging in the hot water with you."

He could not agree more. It was so pleasant to make love in the water, with her perfect skin slippery and rosy...

He went to send word so their bath was got ready.

"Have you sewn very much, darling?" he asked, when he came back after conveying his request.

"Quite a lot. We have the intention to wrap up all the children of the pyramid warm in the shortest time we can. It will take us several months because they're sixty-five altogether, including the noble families' guests."

"Listen, Sansa... Do you remember what I told you about Mhyraz? That if he wishes to remain at our service, we could keep him with us for as long as he wants?"

"I remember, Tyrion."

"Would you like to offer Dara the same? I know you've grown very fond of her."
She again melted him with her big blue eyes. She knelt and threw her arms around his neck.

"Of course I would. She's a very sweet girl. She and Mhyraz could have a new family with us. We'd be for them the closest to their parents and, while we don't have children yet, it's very gratifying to have their child-like company. A place without children is a sadder place. They spread joy."

He drew her to him by her waist, with their faces at the same level.

"Then we'll suggest it to them soon. I wish they choose to stay with us."

"They'll surely do, Tyrion. Have you noticed how they look at us? It's obvious they miss their parents."

"With a mother like you, who wouldn't want to be your son or daughter?" he said against her lips, grazing them slightly to turn her on with the hint of a brush. He slid his hands upwards from her waist and closed them softly around her breasts, rubbing them over the dress. She breathed faster.

"And your son or daughter too, my love. You're going to be an amazing father. I love you even more for that, imagining you with our children in your arms, talking to them with your tender patience and teaching them to discover the world with your vast imagination... Maybe, after all, I'll allow you to plant a few of them in my belly." She smiled at him mischievously, encircled his head with her forearms and held some of his locks, attracting him to her mouth.

He squeezed her against him so she felt the hardness of his cock.

"I feel very aroused with the idea of getting you pregnant, Sansa. And it makes me very happy."

She moved a little away and looked at him with intensity.

"I could get pregnant just now," suggested her, with her voice trembling with emotion. "I know we agreed to wait a year for the events to come, but... I every day wish more to have a child with you. The more days I stay beside you and fall in love with you, the more I want to give you a child, Tyrion."

His expression was filled with emotions. Sansa saw happiness, hope and fear.

"Oh, darling. I also wish more than anything to have children with you. Nothing could make me happiest already. But I'm scared, Sansa. It frightens me to think that..." He did not end his sentence.

She took his face between her hands.

"I'm a strong woman. And we have sworn to each other to carry on together. We've sworn it before the gods, the sun, the moon and the stars. And we're going to achieve it."

He put his palms on her cheeks, reverent.

"Sansa... You're very young. You're not fifteen yet."

"I'll turn fifteen very soon and my body is almost fully developed," argued her.

He kept silent for some moments, doubtful.

"I propose you a deal," he said, caressing her cheeks. "We'll wait until you turn fifteen. Then you can stop drinking the moon tea, if you want."
"Tyrion, I don't want you to be scared. Almost all women go through this and it's the most natural thing. I understand your fear, but I need you to trust our capacity to cope with things and carry on together. I need you to trust my capacity to give children to you. I know what your fears are, my love. But remember that I'm not your mother, and besides I'll love my children no matter how they are."

He released a sob, overcome with emotions, and two thick tears slid down to his beard.

"Oh, Sansa," he managed to say, and he hugged her tightly. She corresponded to his hug drawing his head upon her shoulder and stroking his hair. She let him cry without speaking.

"I love you so much," he said, with his voice strangled.

"And I love you too. Forever," she declared, and in her sweet voice there was not the slightest trace of hesitation or fear.
Chapter 154

Meereen: Day 22

Tyrion washed her hair and later, he knelt in the bathtub between her legs and massaged sensually all her body with his soapy hands. He saved her most intimate parts for the finishing and, when he touched her between her legs, she emitted a gutural moan that drove him completely crazy. Under the water, he introduced two fingers into the eager opening and applied to the clit with his thumb. Sansa gave in to his skilled hands and he entered and pulled out and his thumb made her lose her sense. The other hand neither remained idle on her skin, moving over her thigh, her hip and higher, while he licked her breasts. He felt her on the verge and sped up the swinging of his fingers in her interior and the twirl of his thumb on the clit. He kissed her lips and she finished around his fingers, moaning in his mouth and grabbing his hair. They remained embraced in the water for some moments and shivered slightly. Despite the heat of the intimacy they had just shared, the water had turned almost cold and the air gave them goosebumps, so they stepped out of the tub and Tyrion wrapped Sansa in one of the towels before covering himself with the other one. He dried himself quickly and placed upon her his own towel as a turban so her hair did not drip down her back. She put on her undergarment, the nightgown and the robe and sat on a cushion, upon the carpet. He, naked but without feeling the slightest cold, began the process of drying her hair and untangling it and Sansa closed her eyes, comforted by the delicacy of her husband's hands.

"This feels so good, Tyrion."

"Do you refer to the bath, to the splendid handjob I've made to you or to comb your hair?," he asked, mischievous. After his emotive relief with Sansa a while before, he had settled down and had returned to his usual sense of humour.

"Your modesty honours you," she said with irony.

"Why do you complain? Undoubtedly what I've made to you with my fingers has been a little work of art. You've been very eloquent expressing your opinion regarding that." His eyes shone with amusement.

"I see you a little cocky, my lord. I'll have to take you down a peg or two again."

"Oh. Why? You're cruel, my lady. I haven't said anything that it's not true."

"I think I'm going to punish you a bit, my insolent lord."

He massaged her scalp with his fingertips, a gesture which relaxed her greatly.

"How are you going to do it?," he asked, feeling his mouth dry out of excitement and his cock erect like a mast. He had not got dressed and his erection displayed itself in all its summit.

"Your impatient cock will have to wait. It's necessary to humble it."

*How horny this game turns me, when she acts all heigh and mighty to "reprimand" me for my impertinence, he thought, smiling.*

"Oh, damn," he protested feignedly. "How much time will it wait?"

"If you ask again, more than it'd like." She grinned maliciously.
"It's already waiting more than it'd like. May you forget it and give it an advance?"

"No advances. It's going to stay there alone for a while, so it learns the lesson."

"My impertinent cock and I ask for your forgiveness." He made such a contrite gesture that she had to hold back her great desire to laugh.

"Ummm, I don't know. I have to think of it."

The haircomb he slid carefully made her mane of hair shine.

"Would you forgive us if I say to you that you have the most tasty cunt there is? That I adore it, I worship it, I dream of it, that during all day I want to stab into it my poor and desperate cock which loves it passionately, and sink in it my lips and my tongue and my fingers until driving it to rapture? My cock surrenders before you and it's nothing without that paradise between your legs."

Sansa was wet again.

"You're improving. Go on that way," she said, smiling and flushed, without opening her eyes.

"It's the most delicious thing there is, along with your mouth and the rest of your body, of course. Do you know how it feels to introduce oneself into that hot wonder? It's indescribable. It's an addiction much more powerful than any wine. Due to that my cock becomes so insolent, because the only thing it aspires to is to bury into your flavourful cunt, though it also enjoys a lot inside of your mouth. You think it has any chance to get into some of your tempting orifices short-term? I warn you that either way it's going to relieve itself with you or I'll wank off and off before you until you feel pity."

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 22

She turned around, grabbed him by his waist and drew him between her legs. He panted.

"Will you shut your mouth if I suck it until you finish?," she blurted, closing her hand around his manhood. "I'll make it to you as a payback for what you did to me in the bath, but don't let it go to your head."

"I promise," he assured, with his eyes dilated with lust. "But at least you'll let me talk filth while you do it to me, don't you?"

"Say what you want, if you can," she challenged. She made him sit on the chair, knelt and without delay she licked it from the basement to the tip, making him emit a deep shaky moan.

She again licked all its length, making circles around it with her tongue, and she introduced his glans between her lips.

"Oh, Sansa. Your mouth is divine too. Tell me what flavour my tip has," he pleaded.

She stopped sucking for a moment to answer. "A bit salty. It tastes like you." She went on with the fellatio and introduced his manhood deeper.

"You do it very well, honey. Incredibly well."

Sansa interrupted herself to ask: "Has anyone done this to you this way?" And she again applied herself to the task.

_Tysha did it to me several times but I finished too quickly. Other whores gave me blowjobs with more or less skill, but that wasn't more than a momentary release that I forgot soon afterwards. Shae was an accomplished expert. She made me have very good times. But nothing of that can be compared to what I feel in Sansa's sweet mouth._

"No, darling. No woman has made me feel this before," he said honestly. He took her head in his hands to look at her eyes. "With you it's incomparably more pleasant and beautiful, Sansa."

She smiled with her lips around his cock and increased her rhythm. Tyrion kept his hands on both sides of her head to guide her, casting aside the locks that fell over her face.

"Make me finish, gorgeous. I adore to finish inside of you."

Sansa accelerated and he felt his glans rubbing dizzily against her throat. She restrained some heaves, as she was trying to get it into her almost entirely, and after a few assails he explode with such intensity that his moans with her name should have been heard to the highest level of the pyramid. Sansa swallowed his seed and continued to suck until no more sprang up and then she released the sated manhood.

Sweat was running down his forehead and he was trying to get back his normal breath. He smiled, panting.

"You see how my cock loves you, honey? Don't you feel ashamed to be evil to it?"
"Sometimes I like to provoke it a bit, I admit it," said Sansa.

"Well, you achieve it. With profit."

They laughed, kissed and stood up. Tyrion had to put on his night clothes and his robe. Mhyraz soon would bring dinner.

"Tyrion... If it's not very painful for you or very indiscreet on my part... Will you tell me today about your first girl?," she requested shyly, not wanting him to feel compelled to talk about it.

"Of course, Sansa. After dinner, all right?"

"I know it's not a pleasant subject for you, and you don't have to feel forced to reveal it to me, Tyrion. I want you to know that I'm very glad to listen to whatever you want to tell me, and I understand that there are things you'd rather keeping for yourself," she clarified.

He felt completely disarmed before that sign of maturity. She surprised him almost daily with gestures like that, which often made him forget that she was not fifteen yet. The girl he had married had become all woman.

"I never feel forced with you, darling. I've never felt so good talking with anyone. I'm glad to open my soul to you."

"Neither I have shared my soul with anyone this way before, my love. I kept nearly everything for me."

"I know, Sansa. It makes me very happy and I feel highly honoured that you have allowed me to get into you in every sense."

"No one better than you to get into me." She again imposed a double meaning to her sentence and his blood started to boil as if mere minutes ago he had not peaked gloriously into her mouth.

"Sansa," he said, with a warning tone that made her smile. "I still can get into you once more before dinner. Or during dinner."

"Oh, Tyrion. You're insatiable," she accused, laughing and moving far from his reach, taking advantage of the fact that he was putting on his trousers.

"Some moment I'll catch you," threatened Tyrion, roaming her with his lewd look.

Mhyraz knocked and Sansa opened the door with a wide smile on her face.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 156

Meereen: Day 22

After dinner he had laid her on the bed and had penetrated her with absolute rapture, until both collapsed onto the mattress, with their sexual urgency sated once more. They accommodated, well wrapped up, and he started his narration.

"As I told you, I started to feel my first sexual urges as a child. I felt a strange sensation when I looked at the handmaidens, how their breasts protruded over their lowcuts, how they moved when they walked, the swaying of their hips and bottoms, and soon I began to spy on them when they were naked. At eleven I spilled my seed for the first time while I was sleeping and since then I started to touch myself. I masturbated every day and I was still so inexperienced and scatterbrained that I spilled barely after three or four strokes. I didn't know yet how was to be with a woman or how to pleasure someone. By that time I suspected openly that my siblings committed incest. Jaime never told me anything, but I knew that between them there was much more than a simple fraternal relationship between a brother and a sister. That puzzled me and I preferred not to think about that, but I envied Jaime, not because he fucked Cersei, but because he had someone to fuck. I didn't get my hopes up. What girl was going to lay her eyes on a dwarf?"

Sansa visualized him, with the sparse fuzz of an incipient blond beard and his vivid green eyes still innocent and hungry for a love of which he ignored nearly all.

"Some years passed and I had no other lover than my hand and my imagination. One day, I went for a stroll with Jaime. I was sixteen and Jaime was older, and he already was a kingsguard since the age I was then. He was the youngest in history to enter the institution, during Aerys' reign. He was at Casterly Rock for a visit because Robert, who was king by then, had one of his rare periods in which he listened a little to Cersei and he decided to spend a short period of time in our house. Jaime and I relived old times. I missed him terribly since his departure and we were together almost all the time he didn't sneak with Cersei into any room far from indiscreet eyes." He did a pause. "I had confessed to him I was still a virgin and was trying to resign myself to the fact that women ignored me. Well, one day we went for a stroll. Suddenly, a girl went out running from behind some bushes, shouting and with her dress ripped. Two men were chasing her and Jaime confronted them. Meanwhile, she gripped me, crying with fright, and I didn't know how to react. It was the first time a girl touched me and I was overwhelmed. Her name was Tysha. Jaime came back and we accompanied her, but it got late on the road and I invited her to have dinner in an inn. My brother left us alone."

"Poor girl. They tried to rape her. I know how that feels. How was she?," asked Sansa, unable to help her curiosity.

"Her hair was dark and a little curly and she let it loose. She had brown eyes. She was thin and her cheeks had a few freckles. We got into the inn, had dinner, drank a lot of wine and... We spent the night in a room. There I lost my virginity. We were in that room until the next day, stinky drunk, and we went searching for a septon to marry us. That man was even more drunk than us," pointed Tyrion, sarcastic.

Sansa opened her eyes wide, perplexed.

"You married her the day after meeting her?"

"Yes. It was a complete madness, but I loved her and I believed that she loved me too. I rented a
house and we moved to live there, just like that. I spent fifteen days of happiness, or that was what I thought."

She was looking at him, trying to control her stunned incredulity.

"And after those fifteen days?"

"My father discovered it. He commanded the septon to annul the marriage and compelled Jaime to tell me the truth."

"What truth?"

"Tysha was a whore hired by Jaime to take my virginity. All that had been a farce. The attempt of rape, her kindness to me, our night of love in the inn... Jaime had planned it."

"Oh, Tyrion." Sansa read the retrospective pain in his eyes and put her hand over his beard. "Why did she marry you then, if she knew who you were?"

"I suppose she preferred to set a trap for a rich and naïve dwarf to bed every night a crowd of strangers."

She kept an understanding silence, without moving away her hand from his cheek.

"I loved her and Tysha simply feigned." After so many years, he was not successful yet in getting completely rid of his resentment.

"Don't you think she could come to love you a little?"

"I doubt it, Sansa."

For some reason, she felt guilty. She had been married to him for weeks without seeing the great man beside her. She had not been better than Tysha.

Tyrion sensed her uneasiness.

"What happens, honey?" he caressed her back.

"I wasn't better than her, Tyrion. At the beginning I neither could see how you were."

"Darling, you had been forced to wed a Lannister dwarf."

"But deep down I knew you weren't like the rest. And I didn't want to admit it."

"I'll tell you the same you tell me when I doubt myself, darling: you weren't guilty at all. And I don't reproach you anything." He smiled at her tenderly. She corresponded to his smile.

"What happened when your father ordered the marriage annulled?"

"He didn't limit to let her go. Before that, he forced her to bed all the guards, and each one payed her with a silver coin. When she went away, she had been payed more than she'd had earned practicing her job for half her life. I didn't see her again."

"I'm very sorry, my love." Sansa slid her fingers through his beard and kept her look locked with his.

"She took away my silly hopes and my innocence. And I then convinced myself that love was a
"I'm glad to have made you change your mind," she whispered, with a slight smile.

"I'm also glad for that, Sansa." He kissed her eagerly, as if he still feared she was not real. She knew that fear was deep-seated in him, and she would never get tired of showing him that she lived and breathed for him, that she belonged to him completely.

"Touch me, Tyrion. I love you and I'm yours. I'm here with you."

He clung to her and merged with her flesh to feel once more the joy and the solace of loving her and feeling loved.
Meereen: Day 23

The following day Tyrion made his routine tour through the city, visiting the sectors of the constructions he had marked in his route, talking with Sarik in the market and observing carefully people's comings and goings.

The sellings were recovering and Sarik informed him that soon the market would be enlarged with the addition of Meereenese merchants' stalls.

Accepting that the only way of not losing incomes in their businesses was to move them to the market, some Meereenese sellers were starting to set up their own stalls in which they exhibited a part of the goods of their shops, employing relatives as sellers of the stands. They would have to pair double taxes if they possessed a shop and took up a place in the market, but they too would obtain more profits and in the long run that would balance their accounts.

He went to meet Jorah, who was patrolling in a nearby neighbourhood, and showed his interest for his well being.

"I feel fine, Tyrion. I haven't drunk again since that time," said the knight.

Indeed, his looks, although not glowing, were passable. He had lost some weight and was thinner, and the wrinkles on his forehead and around his eyes were more pronounced, probably due to his quiet suffering. The flower of his youth was over since long ago, but he still had a good appearance and his fibrous muscles reflected the numerous hours of exhausting training. He was in top form and ready for action.

"I'm very glad, Jorah. You have much better look than the last time I saw you," joked Tyrion. "In four days Pod and Leena's wedding will be celebrated. And Daenerys'll be there," he pointed.

"I know. But Daario will be too. I'm not very much looking forward to attending, but all this is for our friends, who have been so kind to invite me."

"That's the least you can do, Jorah. They are fond of you."

"That's the reason why I'll go. Though Daario is going to spoil my day just being there. But anyway, I have to resign myself," sighed the knight. "If not because he gets into the khaleesi's bed, I'd like him, Tyrion. But I can't turn the blind eye to that as if nothing had happened."

"Try to see the wedding as a relaxing day to enjoy with friends and don't pay much attention to Daario's presence. I doubt Daenerys will let him show up their relationship in public, so the sellsword will repress himself."

"I hope so. It'd be too much for me to be a witness of how he puts his hands on her." Jorah made a grimace of displeasure.

"That won't happen. You know Daenerys well. She is perfectly capable of keeping up appearances and won't let him take liberties."

"No, she won't," affirmed Jorah, relieved. "How is she? Emotionally, I mean."

*If you knew that she has to accept a marriage proposal from the Red Viper and she's not jumping*
"She endures everything with self-possession. She's very strong and doesn't frighten off, at least not apparently."

"She's a woman of character. It's not the type that admits defeat." The knight's expression softened when he talked about her. "Ah, Tyrion, yesterday I was informed that I've been selected to be a guard in the Daznak's amphitheatre."

"That sounds great, Jorah. You'll be near her and will safeguard her. And, by the way, you'll safeguard the others who will be in the royal box. All protection is welcome," said Tyrion, slightly mocking.

"I felt happy when I received the news. Daario himself has chosen me."

"He has done it because he's not a fool and he recognizes a great knight when he sees it. The queen's military elite will be in the amphitheatre and you are a part of that elite. You've earned it in your own right."

"Thanks, Tyrion. I'll do all is in my hand to make the amphitheatre a safe place."

"I've pleaded with Sansa not to attend. Don't take it the wrong way, Jorah. It's not because you're not the best army that exists, because it's needless to say that you are indeed. It's because I want to spare her that show and because I'll feel much calmer and I'll be able to devote myself fully to observe and watch the atmosphere to detect any sign of danger. With her by my side I'd get distracted and we'd be more vulnerable, and under no circumstances I want her to expose herself to any risk. If someone has to expose himself, it'll be me, who have lived more than her and I know a few tricks."

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 23

Jorah looked at him with approval.

"You do well, Tyrion. If I were you, I wouldn't want her to attend, either. It's not a place for such a young and sensitive lady. She wasn't trained to witness gruesome scenes. Lord Eddard and Lady Catelyn protected her from the horrors and prepared her for a peaceful domestic life in a northern or Riverlands castle."

"Fate rarely listens to what we wish for our children. But if they are taught to be strong and resilient, they can survive many obstacles. And Sansa has done it. She hasn't had the destiny her parents hoped for her, and it's not like I'm glad for the torment she has endured, because I'd have spared her that if I could, but she has overcome many tragedies and now she's here with me, alive, healthy and happy, and although I have little in common with my dead father-in-law, I'm going to carry on with a part of his legacy, which consists in taking care of his daughter. And I'll do until my last breath."

"You'll do," affirmed Jorah.

They smiled, admitting their mutual respect.

"How is going the city watch? Any progress?," asked Tyrion.

"Here we go. The measures we adopted are efficient. Meereen is much safer than some weeks ago. But we aren't overconfident. You never know where the next stab can come from."

"Therefore, the more eyes and ears, the better. I admire your dedication and I personally thank you for all you do for the queen and the city."

Jorah nodded, in a sign of acknowledgment.

"I leave you with your surveillance. Have a fruitful time, Jorah."

"And you, Tyrion."

They bade goodbye and Tyrion took the way back to the pyramid.

"You haven't seen yet the suit that the girls have made for you, Pod. You're the less curious lad I've ever known. A rare quality in a youngster. Normally, youth and eagerness to gossip are linked," jested Tyrion while they were moving along the streets of Meereen.

"I'll go to see it this afternoon, if you agree, my lord. Leena wants me to try it on in case it's necessary to make some last-minute mending," said Pod.

"Of course you can go to see it. It won't be me who will be to blame if the groom isn't impeccably dressed."

Tyrion had tried on his own suit and it fit him like a glove. It was not narrower or looser than it should, anywhere. Undoubtedly Sansa had a talent with the needle and the thread.

"Leena won't let me see her dress. She says it's bad luck that the groom sees it before the
"Yes, in some places that tradition exists, but you know I saw Sansa's dress before the wedding. I went to talk with her because I felt I had to comfort her some way for the depressing fact of marrying me. And you see, it hasn't been bad luck for me." Tyrion smiled at the young man. "Do you remember all that period, Pod? When you entered my service in King's Landing?"

"As if it were yersterday, my lord. No other person apart from you would have required me as his squire," recalled the youngster, with pride in his voice.

"The majority aren't able to appreciate at first sight an excellent squire if he's shy and quiet like you, but I realized that you were worth your weight in gold and more. You proved it to me more than enough. You have a very developed instinct to react in danger and you've saved my neck several times. That cannot be rewarded even with all the gold I could give you, Pod. Would you like to be a knight?," asked Tyrion.

"I'd like for Leena, because I aspire to more since she's with me. I want to offer her a better position. But if one day I'm a knight, I'd be very honoured that you let me swear my sword to you."

"I'll be who will feel very honoured, Pod. Who might have beside him a more honourable and gifted knight than you? I'll achieve that the queen appoints you."

"But I'll have to strive for recognition. I don't think she will appoint me simply for being your squire and helping Ser Barristan with the children's trainings."

"You'll find the suitable chance, as you've done before. If I could have appointed you as a knight, you'd have been one since a long time ago. The gods know there are too much knights undeserving of that title, but you're one in each fiber of your being."

Pod accepted his praise with a flushed smile.

(Part 2 of longer chapter)
Chapter 159

Meereen: Day 23

Tyrion was looking at him as if he were his little brother. He would not have loved him more if he had been.

"You're going to be very happy with Leena. This travel has brought good luck to both of us, hasn't it? I have Lady Sansa, and you have Leena," said Tyrion, winking at him.

"We're lucky men," nodded Pod. "I used to observe you in the Red Keep, you and Lady Sansa, and felt pity for both. Since the beginning the lady seemed to me as the most proper lady for you, and you seemed as the most proper lord for her, but many adverse circumstances interposed."

"Yes, too many. If I list them I'll need a lot of fingers. For example, I'm a dwarf and a Lannister. My father was Tywin, my sister was Cersei and my nephew, Joffrey. Joff ordered her father beheaded and he mistreated and harassed her all he fancied until I took him down a peg or two, Cersei didn't distinguish herself for being a kind mother-in-law-to-be, my father forced her to marry me and he conducted in the shadows her mother's and brother's murders... I'd say they were enough motives to strangle all trace of marital relationship between us," he commented, ironic. "I'd have understood if she had abandoned me. It'd have hurt me terribly, but I wouldn't blame her. Nevertheless, she didn't do it." There was adoration in his soft voice.

"She was able to see how you are, my lord," said Pod.

"I too had started to see how she was. During Joff's wedding, I admired her truly. Her strength. Her quiet defiance when she picked up the cup Joff had thrown to the ground and she gave it to me. That gesture was like a balm in a dreadful day. You know perfectly how everything turned out to be."

Pod knew it. He had been near his lord all the time. They did not mention Shae, but she was one of the numerous reasons for which that day had been hell. Lord Tyrion had loved her and he had to hurt her in the deepest of her heart to make her go far from King's Landing and be safe from Lord Tywin's revenge.

We're both thinking of Shae. He knew her enough to know she loved me, as I loved her. No, let's be fair. I didn't love her the way she deserved. If I had, I'd have gone with her to the Free Cities when she asked me to. I offered her gold. I insulted her gifting her some golden chains as if her love could be bought. Any other woman would have accepted them, because she'd be only interested in my money. But Shae was in love with me. And I paid her putting her at risk, insulting her and hurting her. I behaved foully with her.

An inner voice was whispering to him that he did not deserve in the least Sansa's love, after what he had done to Shae. That this new chance he had been given to love was lots more than that to what he could aspire. But he had her, and he had sworn to devote himself to her, because she was the most beautiful thing he would have ever dreamt of, and he would not waste his definitive chance. And he would be completely devote to the gift Sansa was, the woman of his life. Yes, that time he would be.

Pod respected his thoughtful silence, as usual. He and Sansa were for Tyrion the only people with whom the silences were fully comforting and eloquent. They understood him without words and they did not utter those which were not strictly necessary to pronounce.
As he knew well, in a conversation often the most important was not what was said, but what was kept quiet.

Sansa was sewing by the window and he stared at her from the door, with his eyes overflowing with love. She rose up her look and smiled at him, sensing that he was gazing at her in a special way. It was not that he did not look at her with devotion constantly along the day, but she had learnt to know him enough to notice when his look transmitted that peculiar flash. She could not know what his exact thoughts had been, but she knew intuitively that his special way of observing her was due to the fact that he persisted in considering himself as unworthy of her and he still believed she was a dream.

Sansa smiled for herself, determined to show him so many times as necessary that she was real, that she was only human and she loved him in all the ways a woman could love a man.

The surrendered devotion he showed her without the slightest alteration made her feel like the most beautiful woman in the world. As if the traitor's daughter were a goddess come down from the divine abodes and she was worth whole kingdoms.

And she would not get tired of showing him the adoration she felt for him. She was aware that nothing she did would be enough for his stubborn husband to convince himself once and for all that he was everything she dreamed and more, but she would never stop trying to put it into that extraordinarily brilliant mind which nevertheless was so blind for certain things. Sansa felt moved when she thought of it. After all, she also had her features of stubbornness. Like anyone.

Lots of times we're blind with what we have deepest inside, because often we don't see well what is just before our noses.

"Hi, my love," greeted Tyrion from the door.

"Hi, my love," she corresponded, casting aside the needlework items and standing up. "How was your morning?" She got closer and knelt to embrace him around his neck and kiss him.

In that moment, Sansa remembered a painful memory.

I didn't knelt in the ceremony of our wedding until he asked me to.

Tyrion, so perspicacious as always, sensed that something worried her. "What is it, honey?"

"I didn't kneel in our wedding, Tyrion. Not until you asked me to." Sorrow was running through her transparent blue eyes.

He caressed her cheek.

"The situation was grotesque and humiliating for you, Sansa. You were a dazed girl, with your dreams broken, who was living a nightmare in that damned sept, before all those people, half of whom made fun of us. You didn't have to kneel before any Lannister. You kept your dignity. Maybe I also felt so miserable as not to value in that moment your proud and defiant gesture, but I repeat again to you: I didn't blame you for anything. Humiliations pursued me almost every day of my life and I knew how that was. I couldn't feel annoyed with you when you were enduring as much mortification as me, darling."

"But I saw how Joffrey took away the stool to denigrate you and I heard how they laughed, and I didn't do anything to alleviate it."
"You didn't have to do anything, Sansa. You owed me nothing. It was me who had to cope with my own humiliation."

She put her hand over his beard.

"I wish I had helped you, Tyrion. If I had knelt before you asked me to, both of us would have felt less mortified and I'd have humbled all those dudes."

"It doesn't matter any more, Sansa. That turned out that way. But there is a proverb which says that the most important is not how something is started, but how something is carried on. Our wedding was a complete mess, but the situation has improved a little eventually, don't you think?" He smiled at her with tenderness.

"Do you want me to show you to what extent I think it?," she asked, with the voice that got him hardened in a second. She drew him to her and felt his erection against her belly. She smiled at him with lechery.

"Of course, gorgeous. I never refuse such a tempting offer," he murmured, with his voice hoarse and his throat dry due to the arousal that was running through his veins.

Sansa pulled him to the bed, they stripped one another and made love without stop until after noontime, nearly forgetting that Mhyraz would knock on the door in short.
Meereen: Day 23

The boy informed Tyrion that the queen requested his presence in her private hall that afternoon, and he worked out that she would ask him for his final opinion about prince Oberyn Martell's marriage proposal.

"As I announced you, she's consulting the question with each one of us in private. I already told her about my opinion, and I haven't changed it. I'm in favour of the wedding. She wants to discuss it carefully and by the way perhaps I'll find out where the other counselors she has sounded out feel inclined to," he explained to Sansa.

"Once the crow has been sent, she couldn't take back," she commented. "So, if you've made that decision, it must be because it's the most suitable and she knows it very well. Surely she'll listen to you, my love."

"I ignore to what extent she'll be influenced by Daario. I doubt he has been whispering in her ear to agree to marry the Dornishman. I hope her feelings for the sellsword haven't diminished her common sense. Love can blind us, and she's very young and is in love," he affirmed, smiling at her and caressing her hand over the table.

"That sounds familiar to me. But I'm not blind. On the contrary, I see better than ever." She corresponded to his caress.

"Are you sure, honey?," he joked.

"Completely," she replied, stubborn. "I stopped being blind when I saw how beautiful you are."

Tyrion kissed her hand and placed it on his own cheek.

"You told me that the prince was a member of the Second Sons. The sellswords who met him by then and who are still in the company must remember him perfectly," said Sansa.

"In fact, I think Daario doesn't like it at all. Oberyn is very respected in the company and maybe Daario considers him as a rival, more than he'd do regarding anyone else. The Dornishman might one day decide to dismiss the young captain and manage to be chosen by the rest of the sellswords. Being a king, and a warrior king, it wouldn't be difficult that it happened. So Daario will have to be very careful if he wants to keep his position."

Sansa was looking at him, thoughtful.

"If Oberyn is going to keep his paramour Ellaria, it would be fair that the queen is allowed to keep her lover Daario. I don't approve any of that, you know it. I'm a Northerner and my education hasn't been liberal like the Southerns'; I'll never feel comfortable in those strange situations in which married couples live together openly with paramours. But... What if Daario may stay with her?"

"It's a good question, Sansa," he praised, appreciatively. "It might be. Daenerys has been educated in Westeros' spirit, but she also has received other influences and her mind is more open to varied alternatives. She has been a guest in several Free Cities, she has lived together with the dothraki, she's now getting to know Slaver's Bay culture, which like every culture has its positive and negative features... Summing up, she has seen the world. Maybe she doesn't feel too bothered by the fact of keeping an open marriage. Perhaps, as you are setting out, she doesn't need to break her
relationship with Daario. In regard to the subjects, if they came to accept that the Targaryens committed incest by law, it won't cost a great effort to them to get used to the fact that their king and queen have renowned paramours, as long as their bellies are full and there is peace."

"Perhaps the situation could be less tense if she doesn't have upon her the pressure of breaking up with Daario. She could establish it as a condition in her marriage covenant," pointed Sansa.

Tyrion smiled at her with admiration. He knew how much that matter of the multiple relationships made her uneasy, but even so she understood the importance of the realm's well-being, above the individual considerations. And that was exactly Daenerys' mission.

"You've given me a great idea, gorgeous," he said, squeezing her hand. "I'll comment it to the queen that way. Surely that will persuade her to the marriage and, if Daario is really as smart as I think he is, he'll resign himself. As long as he's willing to share her, of course. Moreover, she can't have children. The husband and the lover won't have to fight over the paternity of children who won't come."

"I can't even think of another woman hovering around you, Tyrion," she declared vehemently.

He stood up, moved by her passionate declaration. He got closer to her and took her face between his hands.

"That's never going to happen, because for me there isn't any other and won't be. If any one tried, she'd come up against my total indifference. I only have eyes for you, my heart belongs to you, my soul, my whole body. You understand? For me you're the only one who exists. You're the woman of my life, the love of my life, and I don't need anyone else." He was looking intensely into her eyes, to convey her that unbreakable certainty. "Neither I can think of another man hovering around you, what would be much more likely than women did it with me. You're very beautiful and desirable, and I can't help feeling jealous when I imagine a handsome gallant flirting with you."

Sansa put both hands on his beard and smiled at him with her expression of woman in love.

"Let me quote literally your right words, my love. For me there isn't any other and if any one tried, he'd come up against my total indifference. I only have eyes for you, my heart belongs to you, my soul and my whole body. For me you're the only one who exists and you're the man of my life. Does it get into that stubborn head you have, my husband?" Her tone was light but the words were absolutely sincere and he received them as a blessing.

"I'll never stop feeling amazed for having you every day by my side, Sansa. Excuse me if I need you to reaffirm it to me sometimes."

"I'll do it all the times you need it, my love. I'll always show you how much I love you. And now it's going to be one of those times. There's still a long while left for your private meeting with the queen."

He darted his hungry look at her.

"Gods, Sansa, we can do so many things in a long while..."

"Then let's start. You're taking long."

The sensual challenge in her voice drove him helplessly mad.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 161

Meereen: Day 23

Tyrion got into the private hall after having tidied himself up so his aspect did not betray excessively his sex session with Sansa. Barely ten or fifteen minutes ago he had peaked inside of her and had to get dress in a hurry and fix his messy hair. The torrent of lust that was running through his blood with no rest had calmed down momentarily and he attended his meeting with Daenerys in an excellent and relaxed mood.

She, scarcely fond of delays, got to the point.

"Tell me what you have reflected on the issue of my wedding, Lord Tyrion. You've had time to analyze it carefully."

"I've done it, Your Grace. And my initial opinion remains the same. I'm in favour of your consent to the proposal, for varied reasons. Dorne is your best ally and its support will be key to your claim on the Iron Throne. Prince Oberyn is a man with vast experience in many fields, he's still in very good shape, an accomplished warrior, charismatic, respected in Westeros and admired by the folk. Moreover, he has gained fame in Essos and the Second Sons had him in their ranks, so it's to be expected that they'll be loyal to him. And if we analyze more private and personal questions, he is attentive and affectionate to his family and he'll always treat with respect and affection anyone who becomes a part of his family. My niece Myrcella harbours a high esteem for him; she herself told me by means of a crow she sent me some months ago to inform me about how she was doing. There are many advantages in an union with him. He'll be your most proper key to enter the Seven Kingdoms."

"Yes, certainly he's the most favourable suitor I can be offered. But I have to negotiate my conditions."

"Of course, Your Grace. And I have a suggestion."

"Go on," encouraged her.

"If the prince makes it a condition that you consent to his relationship with his paramour, you might demand that you're consented the same. You wouldn't have to break up with Daario. Why would you have to be less than him and give up on what Oberyn is not willing to give up himself?"

She opened her eyes very wide with that audacity.

"Of course I'm not going to debase myself. I like fairness. It will be a... peculiar situation, but Westeros has lived previously similar situations with its kings and queens. My ancestors have married between siblings and there are very few things more... shocking than that before the public eye, depending on the perspective from which one looks."

"An open marriage with official paramours is much less hypocritical than a marriage apparently monogamous that actually isn't. Look at Robert. He laid half Westeros and my sister wasn't faithful either." He did a pause to drink a sip of wine. "The subjects will get used. What they want is bread, peace and prosperity, and what their kings and queens do in their beds only concerns them as a topic for their gossip. As long as they're satisfied, they won't mind if you have a lover or a hundred."
"Who feel concerned about those matters are the sparrow. It's going to be difficult to control that plague to which Cersei has given wings. I wanted to talk with you about that as well, Lord Tyrion. The war between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law has had consequences. Lady Margaery and her brother Ser Loras have been arrested by the Faith, in a ploy of your sister. The Knight of Flowers has been charged with sodomy and the new queen has committed perjury to protect him."

Tyrion got quite perplexed with such extremes. It was what he was fearing. His sister had raised a bundle of fanatics who held more power already than the king himself.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 162

Meereen: Day 23

"Poor Tommen. He must be deeply in love with that girl. She surely has drawn him on and he now must feel powerless without being able to do anything to rescue her. He's too weak to solve the situation."

"The High Sparrow is the supreme authority in Westeros currently, indeed," said Daenerys with patent contempt. "But all that doesn't end there. Your sister believed herself very astute, but her ploy has turned against her. The Court of the Faith doesn't distinguish and she on her part has been charged with committing incest. She's locked in other cell, waiting for the trial."

Tyrion felt the burning fire of revenge making its way throughout his being.

"I never believed such a day would come, in which I'd see my dear sister biting the dust."

"The three of them are waiting for their sentence. Anything might happen. The king has pleaded for mercy and Lady Olenna has interceded for her grandchildren, with no results. It's more and more obvious that chaos is ruling the realm."

_In any case, the only I feel is pity for Tommen and maybe a little for Loras too, but the other two deserve what is happening to them._

"Resuming the subject of my betrothal to prince Oberyn, I'll accept his paramour and, as you suggest, I'll impose mine. Besides, if Ellaria Sand wants to be a part of the Council she'll have to earn her right to it, like the others. And I'll count unconditionally on the loyalty, the resources, the armies and the fleet of Dorne in my campaign. Those will be my conditions."

"Very well, Your Grace. I wouldn't demand less, either," approved him.

"Then the matter is settled," concluded her with a gesture of her hand. "Going on to something else of vital importance, I've received news from the Wall. Jon Snow went in solitary to meet Mance Rayder, to negotiate or to kill him, and Stannis has attacked the Free Folk with some armies of sellswords he has gathered. He obtained a loan from the Iron Bank of Braavos and with the money he has financed that business. He has arrested the King-Beyond-The-Wall and is now a guest in Castle Black. The election for the new Lord Commander of the Night Watch will be carried out soon and I've managed to pull some strings subtly. Jon Snow has a friend totally devoted to him in the Watch, a young man called Samwell Tarly who was disowned by his father, Lord Randyll Tarly of Horn Hill. The boy is very clever and he could weigh in favour of his friend. Jon is reluctant to declare his candidacy, but Tarly will persuade him. I'm fully abreast of those events. I'm keeping in touch secretly with the boy and we're both interested in the fact that Snow is elected."

Tyrion recalled.

"Tarly is a Lannister's vassal, or he has been one of my father's at least. I remember to have heard that he had an obese and peace-loving son, very fond of reading, like me. He was a disappointment for Randyll, who would have wanted a handsome warrior as a son, and he sent him to the Night Watch. The truth is that I identify myself a lot with the boy. I'd like him if I knew him."

"Everyone believed him a coward, he himself more than anyone, but he's showing more guts than
many experienced and arrogant men. The Watch is a ruthless place for the weak, and nevertheless he's carrying on and he's serving as a good black brother. He must have something very strong inside of him." Daenerys admired without doubt the young Tarly. "I too was very frightened when I was a girl, and Viserys made me believe I was weak and I only was useful as a bargaining chip so he could obtain his crown and conquer the Iron Throne. And when I had to be brave, I realized that I was able to do it. I understand the people like that boy and I know how much they fight to survive and earn dignity and respect."

"You've gained a valuable ally in the Wall, Your Grace," affirmed him. "And your uncle Aemon?"

"He's up to date. I've written to him as well, and as it's Tarly who reads his messages, I've killed two birds with one stone, communicate with my uncle and with Samwell. Between the two they are going to carry out the propaganda campaign in favour of Snow."

Tyrion nodded, satisfied with Daenerys cunning plans.

"If it's not an indiscretion to ask it, have you talked with other counselors about Oberyn's issue, Your Grace? I take for granted that Missandei and Daario know about it. What are the opinions regarding it, if it's not very bold on my part to inquire about it?"

"Of course you can ask, Lord Tyrion. This concerns all of us. Missandei agrees with the betrothal, for some of the reasons you have expounded. Daario doesn't. He's certain that I don't need any marriage and with my dragons and my armies it will be enough for me to conquer Westeros, like Aegon the Conquerer. But as soon as I tell him about my plan, maybe he'll change his mind and calm down. I only hope that he doesn't consider all this as a complete madness and doesn't decide that he's tired of it." As always that her lover's stubborness was involved, she sighed.

"I doubt he'll decide to abandon you, Your grace. He's not a fool. And perhaps he loves you, on his own way." He could not be sure of that, but he sensed that the sellsword was not going to give up all of a sudden on what he had achieved simply because she got engaged to another, and maybe the fact that he was allowed to go on being her lover would end up persuading him. Daario knew perfectly what to expect when he seduced her.

"Well, Lord Tyrion. As always, thanks for your invaluable advice. I won't steal you more time. Ah, before I forget it... Might Lady Sansa come to my chambers tomorrow afternoon? I want to ask her opinion on the dress I'll wear in Podrick's and Leena's wedding. It needs some retouchings and I'm afraid that my new personal dressmaker isn't very experienced yet. She's a freed girl who is learning the job and Lady Sansa may help her."

Tyrion smiled widely.

"Of course, Your grace. She'll feel very pleased to be useful to you."

"You can say to her that tomorrow I'll wait for her. Have a good afternoon, Lord Tyrion."

"The same, Your Grace."

He made a bow and left the hall.
When he returned to his rooms, Tyrion heard Sansa's and Leena's voices. They were chatting gaily in the bedroom. Pod was awaiting patiently in the adjacent hall.

"How are things, Pod? How does the suit look on you?," asked Tyrion as a greeting.

"They are making some adjustments and it'll be perfect, my lord," answered the squire.

"But don't be there standing. Come here and sit down. I see Sansa has offered you wine. Are you going to apply yourself to look at the cup or you'll drink some sip?," joked Tyrion.

The boy did what his lord was asking him. He sat down and drank a sip.

"Our women are artists with the needle. Both they'll achieve that this winter half the inhabitants of Meereen dress like princes and princesses," said Tyrion, proud and smiling.

"I've never had a suit as nice as that. I think it's too much for me."

"Nonsense, Pod. It's your wedding with the girl you love. You have to go properly dressed for such an important occasion," objected Tyrion. "You'll dress appropriately to the bride's beauty. You're not expecting to dress anyhow while she gleams by your side, are you?," reproached him, amused.

"She'll gleam any way. Beside her I look like I'm not much, no matter what I wear."

"You're right. Our girls are too beautiful for us. And for anyone, by the way. But bad luck for the others, as they have chosen us." Tyrion had served himself a cup to match Pod, but he had filled it scarcely to the half. It was curious how in a matter of several weeks his addiction to alcohol had lessened to the point that he needed it no more. Some time ago he spent almost all the day stuck to a bottle or to a jar, and currently he only served himself liquors with meals and in his conversations with Daenerys, and little more.

"It must be because I've changed one addiction for another. Sansa is my wine and I need to drink from her all the time.

"I remember the wedding dress my sister chose for Sansa, flamboyant and ostentatious. She was spectacular, because she always is, but I know her well and I'm sure that, if she had had the chance to give her opinion, she'd have chosen something radically different. Much more simple and with the colours of her house, white with some detail in grey. Cersei denied her even that little concession, when the proper thing would have been that she had been permitted to dress as a Stark for the last time." As always he mentioned his dear sister, his voice was loaded with resentment. "I couldn't feel more ridiculous. Not because my clothes were ugly, but that day I felt ashamed of being a dwarf and a Lannister, more than I often felt ashamed. My elegant red leather doublet with the golden dragons couldn't cover the fact that my bride was almost twice as high as I was and she was terrified. All that was awful, but at least I had still the little consolation that I could try to protect her from my family. But, to complete the arduous situation, there was Shae," said him in a very low voice, so he could not be heard in the bedroom. "It was a mess of ten pairs of hells. Do you think she'll be well, Pod?" The lad was the only person with whom he could raise that issue.

"I saw how Bronn escorted her along the corridors of the Red Keep, but I don't know any more."
She surely embarked, my lord,” said the squire in whispers, to try to soothe his lord.

"I behaved very badly to her. I never should have taken her to King's Landing, but I was selfish. I was very conscious of the risk at which I was exposing her, and even so I was weak and I took her with me. Do you know I could have ran away with Shae after being hurt in the Battle of Blackwater? She pleaded with me. And I wasted the chance. Now I'm not sorry for it in the least and I don't regret to have refused her proposal, but I'll always feel guilty for what I did to Shae." He sighed. "All I gained staying in King's Landing was a terrible sword slash on the face which wasn't inflicted by any Stannis's soldier, but by a kingsguard at my sister's and my nephew's command, and I also gained that my effort in the battle was annulled by my father's crushing victory with the Tyrell's armies. I was set aside into a hovel where I rotted for weeks and hardly anyone went to visit me. Only you remained by my headboard. Shae went when her duties as a handmaiden let her, Bronn dropped in a couple of times and Varys deigned to show his face, too. And that was all."

"Lady Sansa was there, my lord," confessed Pod, for Tyrion's surprise. He turned to look at the young man with his eyes widely opened. "She went to see you the first days, when you were unconscious, and she stood in for me a few times. I assured her it wasn't necessary, but she showed steadfast determination and told me to go to get a little rest and she would stay, taking care of you. She was many hours sat on the armchair and embroidered while she kept an eye on you."
Meereen: Day 23

Tyrion felt full of joy because of that new piece of information. He realized that Sansa by then had felt esteem for him, enough to worry about his health and look after him. She, a Stark who was a Lannisters’ prisoner, who owed nothing to him, had seated close to his pallet when not even a single member of his family had had the decency to remember his existence.

For that reason sometimes, when I was half conscious, a sensation of peace enveloped me, as if I perceived her presence.

Besides, if he made an effort to pull out some blurry memories of those fateful days, he believed he had felt the brush of a pair of soft hands on his forehead and how those hands put the sheets and the blanket in order around him so he did not uncover himself.

He was sure he had dreamed it.

It was her.

Of course, everything suited. While Sansa visited him, Shae did not dare to get near there, for fear of being discovered. But when he regained consciousness, Sansa had gone already and Shae was there instead of her.

She looked after me. She didn't have to do it, but she did it. Her hopes of being given back by Stannis to her family had vanished. She had just got rid of her betrothal to Joff but that didn't safeguard her against his cruelty. She continued to be an unhappy and defenseless girl. And in the middle of all that she found compassion to remember the Lannister dwarf. And in her modesty she has never told me. Perhaps by then she didn't want me to know about her generous action. After all, in that period she couldn't trust me.

He was intensely grateful to her. So grateful that he could never repay her enough for it.

Her nameday will be soon. It has to be a really special day, a day in which we celebrate much more than her fifteen years.

He smiled to himself. He'd come up with a way of surprising her and trying poorly to give her back a bit of the immense good she did him.

Pod was hinting his shy smile, pleased with his lord's joy.

In that moment Leena appeared in the hall.

"Ah, good afternoon, Tyrion," greeted her, with a bend.

"Good afternoon, Leena," answered him.

The young woman turned to her fiancé.

"You have to try on the suit again," demanded her. "Let's see if it fits you properly."

Pod stood up and headed for the bedroom, shooting Tyrion a look of amused resignation.

Sansa went out to greet her husband, kissing him. This one observed her with his eyes shining in
delight, due to the revelation Pod had just made him about her. Sansa sensed it.

"I know its nonsense to ask for it, but... Why are you looking at me like that?" That expression in his green eyes melted her.

"Because I love you more than ever, if that's possible," answered him honestly.

"So do I, Tyrion." She looked at him inquisitively, sensing that something had made him greatly happy. It probably was because of some news he had received, or it was something that involved her. She smiled at him provocatively, knowing that he would join the game of letting her seduce him and he would delay to tell her whatever had raised his mood to euphoria, sweeping her off to another sex session before he opened his mouth. His corporal reaction was automatic and his erection pressed against his pants.

Little wicked. She knows I've found out something good and drives me crazy to worm it out of me, but she knows as well that I won't tell her yet. I can get used easily to play hard to get this way so she seduces me until I tell her what she wants to know. He was smiling naughtily.

"What do you have to say to me, my lord?" she was beginning with her sensual seduction and his crotch was becoming inflamed by the minute.

Sansa was being very bold. Their friends were on the other side of the door, while Pod was trying on his suit.

"You're a little eager, my lady. All in good time."

Sansa knelt before him and moved her lips close to his, stopping some inches away. Tyrion felt her proximity and her sweet breath upon him tickled his skin. His cock jerked up.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 23

"You're cruel to your poor wife," murmured her on his lips, making a gesture of fake reproach.

"She's more cruel to me. She has my poor cock tormented inside my pants." He slid his hands over the shapely waist and went upwards until grazing the breasts very lightly. She held her breath for a second.

Just then they heard Pod's and Leena's steps and they moved away brusquely, suffocated and smiling. Sansa's pale cheeks were flushed with her excitement and Tyrion felt the torrent of lust invading all his body.

*Practicing these games makes one very horny when there are people very near. The worst is that or they leave immediately or I'll have to kick them out unceremoniously,* thought him, malicious.

Pod was wearing his suit and it fitted him marvellously. It wasn't narrower or more loose than it should be. Tyrion emitted an admiring whistle, hiding the lust for his wife that made a bulge between his legs.

"Dear me, Pod. I hardly recognize you," joked him.

"It fits him perfectly, doesn't it?," asked Leena, almost drooling upon her fiancé.

"Nothing would fit him best," praised Tyrion, squeezing Sansa's hand and exchanging with her a knowing and ardent look.

"Do you feel comfortable, Pod? If you think it's necessary to make any other mend, say it. There's still some time left for the wedding," requested Sansa.

"It fits me very well, my lady. Thank you very much for all the work you've made." He made a courteous bow before her.

"I've made it gladly. And Leena has been a valuable help."

Pod addressed his fiancé a tender look.

"Well, Pod, go to change your clothes," commanded Leena. "It's time to go."

The girl with no doubt perceived the intense current between Sansa and Tyrion and she knew they preferred to be alone. Pod went back to the bedroom to change clothes.

"Oh, Sansa, this is a dream. Pod is so good-looking with his clothes, and my dress is so cute... I'm impatient for him to see it."

"It's our gift for you, Leena," said Sansa.

"It's incredible how much you do for me." The moved girl was on the verge of tears.

"You deserve everything, sweetheart." Sansa took her hand and Leena squeezed Sansa's.

Tyrion observed them, touched, and felt a little guilty for having thought of kicking the couple out.
Well, I haven't thought it very seriously, though my cock doesn't listen to me at all.

Pod reappeared with his usual clothes. He thanked Sansa again and the four of them bade goodnight.

As soon as they were alone, Tyrion attracted his wife to his body and kissed her deeply until they were breathless. He took her to the bed and made to her all he was longing to do since he had returned from his meeting with Daenerys.

"Tell me everything, my love. From your conversation with the queen to whatever had you so happy this afternoon," urged her, resting on his shoulder and with her arm on his chest. Since the cold had fell upon Meereen, they covered themselves just when they ended making love. The brazier warmed the room but, once passed the fever of their sexual encounters, they were more comfortable under the sheets.

"You're very perceptive, Sansa. Or I am an open book," said him, mocking.

"You're not very subtle when you feel so happy, Tyrion. In that moment you look like a child with a new toy. Do you know that when you smile at me like that you look as if you were ten years younger? I love that you smile at me that way." Her fingers were tangled in the blond hair of his chest.

"You always make me smile, my love. With you I'm a youngster once more."

"Because you usually are an oldie, of course." She was referring to one of their usual jokes.

"If you want, I'll show you right now how oldie I am, Sansa," threatened him, pressing her against him and getting hard.

"All right. But before that, tell me. You've played hard to get as much as you've fancied and I've given to you all you wanted. So spit it now, my love." She was smiling at him, authoritative.

"You're turning me very horny. Your bossy streak gets my cock very stiff," insinuated him in her ear.

Sansa could not resist that low voice, hoarse with desire. But she decided to go on playing.

"You aren't going to entrap me this time. Shoot it."

Tyrion made a fast movement and knelt between her legs. He took her thighs and put them upon his shoulders. He slid his hands upwards over her belly until closing them around the breasts. He made his fingertips revolve around the erect nipples.

Sansa arched and released a moan.

"All right, darling. I'll shoot it." He bent over her belly and licked it, still caressing the breasts. "I proposed to Daenerys what you said about her keeping Daario as a lover," murmured him on the skin of the stomach and massaging higher with his hands.

"What did she say to you?," panted her.

"She thought it a good idea. She sees it's fair that, if Oberyn has his paramour, she too has hers." The vibration of his voice reverberated throughout her body. Tyrion made his right hand go down and introduced two fingers into her.
"Oh!," exclaimed her, letting herself go. He sped up the movement and stimulated the clitoris. "Fuck me, Tyrion."

Oh, gods. How horny she turns me when she asks me for it.

"Your wish is my command, my lady." He penetrated her and she enclosed him in her legs. Sansa threw her arms up and grasped the iron bars of the headboard, because that way she could arch her back more and receive his thrusts deeper inside.

"That's it, honey. Give yourself to me completely. You're mine." He rubbed her clit on the exact spot and she crushed him in her ecstasy.

"Tyrion!," cried her several times, without the slightest restriction.

"Yes, Sansa. Cry all you want. Shout for me. Give me your pleasure," said him to drive her higher. The spasms of her inner muscles guided him to his own explosion.

"Oh, Sansa! You have me so hot," moaned him, spilling. "You're a wonderful lover, darling." He fell upon her and embraced her around her waist, closing his eyes, gloriously tired.

She encircled him with her arms around his back and her legs were still wrapping him.

"You're a little trickster. You've drawn me on again," accused her, with a sleepy voice.

"You've sussed me, gorgeous. I use all sorts of tricks in order to drive you to pleasure." He kissed her between her breasts with lassitude.

They fell asleep immediately, and later they were awoken by Mhyraz's discreet knocks on the door. They had forgotten about dinner and both of them jerked out of the bed, laughing with their eyes swollen with sleep. Tyrion put on his trousers in a rush and his shirt and ran to open to the boy.
Chapter 166

Meereen: Day 23

"Daenerys'll respect Oberyn's relationship with his concubine but she'll impose as her conditions to keep Daario beside her, in addition to count on the unimpeded support of Dorne. Moreover, if Ellaria wants to be a part of the Council, she'll have to be worthy of it, like the rest," explained Tyrion in the bed, after having dinner.

"They're very reasonable demands,"

"And, as it was to be expected, there's more news. Excuse me, my love, because with one of them I have a strong sensation of vengeance, but it's useless to deny what I feel." He caressed her back, as he liked so much to do whenever they were lying.

"Don't worry, my love. Tell me," encouraged her, tickling his chest with her nails.

"The rivalry between my sister and Margaery has exploded before their noses. Cersei has intrigued so her daughter-in-law and Loras were summoned by the Court of the Faith to answer for their crimes against morality. The Knight of Flowers has been charged with committing sodomy and his sister lied to protect him and so she too has been arrested. They have been locked in the dungeons of the Red Keep."

Sansa raised her head a little, shaken.

"Oh, gods help us! It's totally unfair. But... That can't be what has caused you the sensation of payback. You don't despise them to that extent," said her, puzzled.

"No, of course it's not for them, darling. It's because Cersei has been arrested too," declared him, with flashing eyes.

"How? But it was her who promoted the sparrows."

"You see that those sparrows have taken the power and don't kneel before kings or queens. My stupid sister believed she had gained an efficient weapon when she strengthened and encouraged them, and in her infinite arrogance she didn't even think that the high sparrow wouldn't make distinctions with her."

"What reason have they arrested her for?"

"For incest with our brother. Jaime seemingly hasn't been caught yet. His whereabouts are unknown and besides he won't let anyone lay his claws on him without running at least a dozen dudes over, even being a cripple."

Sansa kept quiet, taking in the information.

"And what has Tommen done?," asked her, obviously feeling sympathy for the boy.

"He has appealed in the name of his mother and his wife, and Lady Olenna has gone as well to intercede for her grandchildren, but the Court insists in that they'll be dispensed justice in conformity with their sins. If they show signs of repentance and contrition, their punishment will be lessened."
"Poor Margaery and Loras. They're condemned simply because he likes men and she loves her brother and tried to protect him. That faith is terrible, Tyrion." Sansa shivered in his arms and he embraced her tightly.

"They're fanatics who preach poverty, chastity and moral rectitude. If they have the intention to bring to justice to everyone who commits an outrage against those virtues, they won't have cells to lock nearly all Westeros. But they have led that divine mission and they want to set an example with the royalty, the nobility and the other powerful people. No one is exempt from their accusing finger."

"Oh, Tyrion. That's a very bad perspective. If they spread throughout Westeros it's going to be very difficult to subdue them."

"That has been my sister's great deed. She wanted them to use them but she has lost control of them. Now that plague is feeding with the folk's ignorance, misery, hunger and resentment and it's converting thousands of people to their fanaticism. It's going to be unstoppable, Sansa."

"They're passing over to the opposite end. From excesses to too much virtue," reflected her.

"That's it, darling. And no end is good."

They remained in thoughtful silence for some minutes. Tyrion drew her over his chest and kissed her forehead. She placed a leg upon him and he immediately hardened, in spite of being distracted with his thoughts.

"Talking about other things, your brother Jon went alone to the north of the Wall to negotiate or kill Mance Rayder, the King-Beyond-The-Wall, but Stannis has attacked the wildlings with an army of sellswords he has hired. It seems he has responded to the desperate call of the Night Watch, pleading with any king to offer them his help. Stannis has made Mance his prisoner and is now a guest in Castle Black, along with his wife, his daughter and his red priestess. Very soon the election for the new Lord Commander will be carried out and Daenerys has written to her uncle Aemon and Jon's best friend," commented Tyrion.

"Stannis has gathered another army? How has he managed to do it, after his crushing defeat on the Blackwater?"

"He has persuaded the Iron Bank of Braavos to grant him a credit. His Hand of the King is a very smart and loquacious man, Ser Davos Seaworth, The Onion Knight."

"Why has he gone to the Wall? It's very far from the Iron Throne," signaled Sansa.

"Stannis isn't a complete fool and his intention is to win the allegiance of the Night Watch. His plans consist on attacking Roose Bolton and free the North from his yoke. I wouldn't be surprised if he tries to tempt Jon offering him the lordship of Winterfell. Stannis respects your father and by extension he surely respects Jon too, because he's as honourable as your father."

"I doubt he'll renounce to the oaths he has pronounced," objected her. "Indeed, it can be very tempting for him to be served on a silver platter the possibility to be the Lord of Winterfell. But Jon is not the sort who chooses the easy way. He'll keep loyal to the Watch, I know it," predicted her. "And believe me, I'd be greatly glad that the Boltons were wiped off the map. I wish Stannis defeats them and executes them." In Sansa's sweet eyes was shining a vengeful look, too.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"Yes, my love, let's hope that the vile Boltons are eliminated." He kissed her. "Daenerys too is of the opinion that Jon'll be immune to temptation and she has made contact with his best friend, a young man called Samwell Tarly, from house Tarly of Horn Hill, actually a vassal of the Tyrells but conveniently supportive of the Lannisters as well, because the Tarlys hang around the strong ones. His father forced the boy to join the Watch because he wasn't like his father wanted him to be, and he got rid of the poor boy. According to what Daenerys has told me, he's a good boy, not physically gifted but he's intelligent and erudite. He must arrive at the Wall soon after my visit."

"Poor boy. Then, Daenerys has written to him so he'll carry out a campaign in favour of Jon?," guessed her.

"Exactly. Between him and maester Aemon may tip the balance in favour of your brother."

"I wish they're successful. Jon would be the best Lord Commander the Watch might have. And he all his life has wanted to devote himself to something that made my father feel proud."

"I'm sure that he'd feel proud any way, Sansa. Your father wasn't like mine in the least. He loved you simply for the fact of having been born."

"It's true, he loved all of us as we were. He made us feel unique and special. We sometimes competed for finding out who was the most loved, but no one won the challenge."

"As a father must be, my love." He caressed the lengthy hair, that was spread over his chest and tickled him pleasantly. She kissed his neck.

Tyrion's erection revived and Sansa smiled naughtily, feeling the bulge pressing against her leg. She suddenly straddled him and Tyrion panted with surprise. She lowered her head and caressed him with her hair all over his torso and below.

"Your hair is like silk, Sansa," murmured him, with his mouth dry. "Fire silk."

She lowered and kissed him, darting her tongue into his mouth, resting her elbows near both sides of his head. Tyrion held her by her nape and attracted her firmly to taste fully her lips and the sweet fleshiness of her voracious tongue. He slipped his hands and gripped the breasts. Sansa stopped the kiss and threw her head back, moaning. Then he put his hands on her bottom and moved her a little until he had her breasts at the height of his face. He grasped them strongly and sank his face between them. He sucked, licked and bit and Sansa rocked, rubbing herself against him, with the flame between her legs burning her.

"Oh, Tyrion," moaned her, with her eyes closed.

"Tell me what you want me to make to you, gorgeous," offered him against her nipples.

As an answer she raised herself a little and moved upwards, until straddling his face.

"You want to ride my mouth, don't you? You love when I devour your delicious slit." Tyrion put his hands on her hips and made her move down until her folds where in the reach of his tongue. He gave her a pass and she trembled.
"Yes, my love. I love when you make it to me," moaned Sansa, looking him in the eye.

She accommodated herself upon her husband and he applied himself with fully concentration to that rosy flesh, arousing and succulent, helping her with his hands to move the hips upon him. He had a magnificent view of her breasts above, that she herself started to stimulate.

*Oh, this is glorious. To any god, thanks for the gift of this marvellous woman.* The intense flavour and musky scent of her folds was intoxicating.

She went on and on and Tyrion licked and devoured without a rest until he sensed the tension prior to her climax. He accelerated and Sansa convulsed on his face and cried his name, with her back arched and her hands squeezing her own breasts like he'd do. Once calmed her spasms, she got away from above his head and surprised him moving below and, without any transition, she mounted his cock. She dropped upon it and introduced it to her depths. Tyrion was sure that in that moment his frenzied heart was going to stop.

"Oh, honey, you haven't had enough yet, do you? You want more. Take it, my love. Take of me what you want," offered him, enraptured.

She propelled herself, rubbing her inner walls against his attentive cock. He raised his hands to caress her tempting breasts which were wagging at the pace of her ride.

Sansa moved up and down fiercely and rubbed her clitoris, determined to peak again. He was staring at her with dilated eyes, absolutely surrendered to his wife. He made a great effort to control himself and wait for her. She, perceiving that her pace was too fast, slowed it down, to let him finish after her, as he preferred. Her own climax, the second one in a few minutes, raised like lava in a volcano, unleashed and razed her like a giant wave in a storm. For a moment she only saw a light so brilliant that her eyesight became fuzzy, and a moment later he accompanied her and followed her to the brightness, crying her name hoarsely. His hot seed flooded her cozy insides and both let themselves float on that limb of unblemished pleasure. Later, they descended again to the earth and Sansa fell onto Tyrion, both struggling to recover the normal rhythm of their breath.

"And you haven't told me yet what made you so happy this afternoon, my love," scolded her, panting. They burst out laughing and covered themselves with the sheets and the blankets.

"To come to that part I have to carry on with the narration about my adventures from my travel to Winterfell, because that's involved. If you promise not getting very angry with me, you'll know in the moment in which it has to appear in the story," said him, with a conciliatory smile.

*(Part 2 of a longer chapter)*
Sansa tugged his beard, with feigned exasperation.

"Ah, then, you're telling me that all my maneuvers of seduction have been useless?"

His pupils shone with sparkles of amusement. Those games of give and take with Sansa were irresistible.

"Useless, you say? I think I recall a red-haired girl who has cried out with pleasure several times, and I recall too her helplessly infatuated and driven with desire man getting lost in her body," signaled him, teasing. "I'd say that the horny girl's maneuvers have been useful." He looked at her with his insolent and lewd expression, roaming her with his eyes. "Ummm, certainly such a fine body has to be useful for something."

"I have a trickster husband. I'll punish him later, but now he has to make up for his affront and go on narrating his travel."

"Alright, alright. But if I please the lady and offer her the compensation... Will she lessen my punishment?"

"We'll see. It depends on how satisfied I am." She had her fingers in his beard and was tugging it lightly.

Tyrion was starting to harden again. Just when the words please and satisfy were mentioned, his cock jumped.

"But it's probable that the story doesn't finish today. If it's so and we have to postpone the rest, I hope that the lady doesn't retaliate."

"If the lord doesn't start now, she will indeed."

"Very well, very well. This lady is a bit impatient, she's in such a hurry..." She grabbed two thick handfuls of his hair, threatening. "Alright, I begin now. Let's see, I was in the part when my father appointed me substitute Hand of the King, wasn't I?" Sansa nodded, loosening her grip in his hair. "I went back to King's Landing with Bronn and my refined men of the mountain clans, who in a blink killed one another for a sausage." And with Shae. My father spat me that he'd hang the next whore he caught in my bed, but I took her with me, as if I didn't know too well where Tywin's threats led to. The events of the Reynes of Castamere should have been sufficient warning. "I arrived at the Keep on Joffrey's seventeenth nameday. He was celebrating it with some pleasant deathmatches and you were there, pale, hollow-eyed, disappointed and unhappy, forced to bear your sadistic betrothed and his cute shows. I felt I had to offer you a little consolation and empathy, because seeing you so sad shrunk my soul."

"I thanked you for it inwardly, Tyrion. I noticed that you were sincere. But I had to perform my role."

"I admired you for that, Sansa. I understood what you were doing and I praised silently your quiet resilience, the courage you concealed behind your impeccable manners."

"No one apart from you saw courage in me, my love. Almost all lumbered me with the label of
coward and stupid, and I believed it." She caressed his beard.

"They were the coward and stupid, darling. I found out about what you did for Ser Dontos and only for that, for saving the life of a knight who came down in the world, I'd have knelt before you. I thought of how clever you were manipulating Joff."

"It wasn't necessary to be very clever for that, Tyrion," said Sansa, trying to diminish the merit he attributed to her, but she was pleased nonetheless. "Joffrey wasn't the keenest of men and even a scarcely sharp girl like me sometimes could defeat him in astuteness."

"Don't undervalue yourself, I've told you several times," scolded him softly, putting his palm on her cheek. "You always looked like one hell of a girl for me, Sansa. Because of your many qualities. I saw them. And I observed guiltily how much you had grown and blossomed since the last time I had seen you, in Winterfell. I didn't want to look too much at your voluptuous and so womanly curves, that had stopped being a girl's. My physical reaction before your beauty contradicted the protests of my conscience, which attacked me constantly reminding me that, even though your figure had grown up so much, in other aspects you weren't mature yet. And I didn't let my rebel body reveal in the least its inclination to you. I didn't want to be a pervert, Sansa, although sometimes I felt as if I was one." He again was expressing his inner conflict regarding that delicate issue. And he then made a confession that did not surprise her, but made her smile with satisfaction. That was pure vanity of her ego, she knew it well, but the fact that such an experienced man as Tyrion, who had met so many women, turned crazy, captivated and aroused for the traitor's daughter caused her an intense tingle of delight in her stomach.

"I hardened whenever I saw you. Even then," admitted him. He had his eyes downcast.

"Afterwards I didn't see you again in hours or days and that was a relief, because as long as I didn't observe you or think about you, my body didn't betray me." Luckily, Shae helped me to get out of my head temporarily her harmonious face, her pure white skin, her tall and slender figure, her copper-coloured hair and her sweet scent. But, as soon as Shae finished distracting my body, it backslid to Sansa.

She did not comment anything else, because he was very hard on himself in that matter and she did not want to make him feel uneasy. But the certainty that very smart and refined Tyrion Lannister respected and wanted her even in that period, made her feel proud. It raised her self-esteem.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Tyrion changed topic, obviously relieved for talking about another subject.

"I settled in the Tower of the Hand and got ready for giving a radical turnabout to the way things worked in the Keep. To begin with, I made a detailed research into whom had collaborated with my sister in your father's fall, because I wasn't willing at all to follow his steps to the scaffold. I dismissed Janos Slynt, the Commander of the City Guard. He was a Joff's and Cersei's arse-licker and he didn't keep awake or it wasn't in any way beneath his dignity when he was commanded to kill all the Robert's bastard sons and daughters he found."

"I heard comments about the slaughter, yes," said her, with a horrified expression. "I wished for Joffrey's death for the umpteenth time. A slow and terrible death," admitted her, with a hard flash in her pupils.

"You and nearly all wished for that, Sansa. I divested Slynt of his posts and privileges, among them his lordship of Harrenhal, and I sent him to the Wall without the slightest remorse. He must be a mediocre and coward black brother, a dishonour to the honourable institution formed to a great extent by killers, rapists and thieves. And he surely is wishing for a slow and terrible death for me," said Tyrion, ironic. "I couldn't trust a good-for-nothing who sold himself to Cersei, betrayed the former Hand and was responsible for a children's slaughter."

"You did the right thing when you punished him, my love."

"I appointed Bronn new Commander of the City Guard. And I thought up a plan to uncover more possible henchmen of my sister. It was a little twisted scheme, but it worked."

Sansa smiled on his chest.

"What did you do, my wicked husband?"

"I required a private conversation about a matrimonial alliance I was planning to carry out. It was necessary to seek a suitor for Myrcella, in order to strengthen the bonds between the Crown and the house selected to take my niece in. The trick consisted on suggesting three different suitors to three members of the Court without any of them knowing that I had spoken to the three of them separately. That tactic had two goals: as I've said to you, strengthen the alliance between the Lannisters and another of the major houses, and find out who of the three was a stool pigeon of my sister's."

Sansa looked at him with a mocking expression.

"Who were the members of the Court and the suitors?"

"To Grand Maester Pycelle, an official incompetent and arse-licker, I entrusted that I was planning to send Myrcella to Dorne and wed her to Trystane Martell. To Varys, that the chosen one was your former hostage Theon Greyjoy of the Iron Islands. And I ordered Littlefinger to inform Lysa Arryn about the engagement of his son Robin to Myrcella, and moreover I promised him the lordship of Harrenhal Janos Slynt had just left vacant. And to that I added that he would be the lord of the Riverlands. I knew about his disproportionate ambition and he'd bite the bait. But Sansa, before you become enraged with me for having given Littlefinger my word regarding that he would be the
lord of your Tully relatives' lands, I suspected he wouldn't be the stool pigeon, and so I wouldn't have to fulfill what I had promised him. Littlefinger wasn't a lapdog of my sister's or anyone's and he wouldn't go straight off to tell her anything."

"Pycelle was the stool pigeon," deduced Sansa. "What did you do with him? And what happened to the other two, who had discovered that you had lied to them?"

"Let's say that the beard of the lewd-and-harasser-of-young-girls Grand Maester wasn't so long from that day, and he spent some time in the inside of a cell, until Cersei sent me her lover Lancel demanding the old man's freeing. That was when I took my bigheaded cousin down a peg or two, you remember?"

Sansa smiled. She didn't like either the pompous and hypocritical maester and she remembered perfectly what Tyrion had told her about Lancel.

"I offered my apologies to Varys, and I offered Littlefinger a deal I knew he wouldn't refuse. He'd be the negotiator between the Crown and your brother Robb to give you and Arya back in exchange for Jaime."

Sansa had her eyes wide open.

"You were going to return us to our family?"

"Yes, Sansa. As Hand of the King I could negotiate it. A fair exchange."

Sansa looked at the sheets, puzzled.

"But... My sister had disappeared and you knew it."

"Your brother and your mother ignored it still," admitted him, with an expression of apology. "Cersei had allowed Joffrey to execute your father and your sister to vanish. We only had you. I doubted I could negotiate with you only, honey. Excuse me for my rudeness, but in the world of political intrigues a girl doesn't have the same value as a warrior who in addition is the son of the most powerful man in Westeros. Your brother Robb wouldn't agree to the deal. But I was confident that your mother would."

Tyrion took her hand and caressed it, with his eyes low. Sansa was distracted, lost in her thoughts and she was frowning.

"Then you were thinking of lying to my mother, concealing Arya's disappearance. And moreover, I was worth very little, of course. How could I be compared to the legendary Kingslayer?," spat her, with her voice full of bitterness. She let loose his husband's hand and turned around on the bed, sitting on the edge, too much confused, annoyed and hurt to be fair to Tyrion in that instant. He was looking at her quietly, saddened. He had feared that reaction, but he was determined to tell her almost everything, except for his affair with Shae and other passages in which there were whores involved, because he didn't want to awake her jealousy. But in spite of risking Sansa's anger, she had to know about other things he had done, some of which weren't honest. She had to know his dark sides, too.

She put on the nightgown and the robe, turning her back to him, and went to sit on the windowsill, looking absent-mindedly at the night landscape of the bay. Tyrion followed her with his eyes and got up, put his robe on his shoulders and got close slowly to his offended and hurt wife. He didn't touch her.

"I won't try to justify myself for my dishonest actions, Sansa. But the peace of the realm was at
stake and I couldn't stop in details like your mother would believe she was going to be given back her two daughters and it wasn't true. Of course, I was longing to rescue my brother Jaime too. And by the way, I'd return you to your family, to the place where you belonged, and you'd get rid of your betrothal to Joff." He hushed, studying her delicate profile. "This world is terribly unfair and in its yardstick a fourteen-year-old girl is worth much less than the son of the most rich and influential man in the kingdoms. Robb wouldn't exchange the Kingslayer for his own sister, so I resorted to Catelyn. I trusted her motherly love, that was the only trick with which I could play." He did another pause. "Things are that harsh, but it doesn't mean I agree to them. For me you're more worthy than anything or anyone in this world, my love." His voice was between reverent and humble. He knelt before her in a signal of surrender and submission, not knowing other way to draw her attention.

Sansa turned to him at last. There were tears on her cheeks and Tyrion reproached himself. Perhaps, after all, it was a bad idea to have revealed that part to her. Her tears hurt him, as if it was him who had caused her that harm retrospectively. He felt responsible for the disappointment he read in her blue eyes.

"I'm so sorry, Sansa. If I could change the past, I would." He was looking at her with his heart in his eyes, waiting anxiously.

She became aware of his kneeling posture and the silent plea of the green eyes and she seemed to awake from a nightmare.

It's nonsense to complain now for things that happened a long time ago. Tyrion acted the best he could in his circumstances. He's right, he couldn't stop in tiny details and he knew that not even my brother regarded me as someone worthy enough in the game of thrones. But my husband is not to blame for that. He did what was in his hand to return me to my mother. She had stopped crying and locked her look with his, which was transmitting to her his whole soul. He loves you. He kneels before you to show you his total devotion and respect. This man is yours, everything he is, and he's putting his immense heart on your hand so you take it. Warmth came back to her and little by little she stopped feeling the cold that had penetrated to her bones. Her love for that imperfect and wonderful man, her man, flooded her like an unstoppable cascade. She jumped down from the windowsill and in that moment it was her who knelt before him, smiling at him again. Tyrion was invaded by such happiness when he saw that she was coming back to him that his eyes filled with tears.

"I love you, Tyrion," declared her, taking his face between her hands and drying the weep which was falling to his beard.

"I love you, Sansa," answered him, with his throat tight.

She kissed him and in that sweet kiss she conveyed him her forgiveness and her vast love for him.
Chapter 170

Meereen: Day 24

At dawn, Tyrion woke up perfectly rested and full of energy. Sansa had made the effort of trying to overcome the disappointment of knowing that Robb did not doubt to let her rot in King's Landing. He had been willing to abandon her to her fate as long as he kept Jaime as a hostage and that way he could hold a sword over Tywin's head. She, analyzing her feelings, realized that, though all that did not stop hurting her, Robb had acted as the King in the North and not as her brother. However, he had not acted the same way when he chose impulsively to marry that nurse from Volantis, and that hurt Sansa as well. In that, Robb had got carried away by his heart and not by his head. Later, Sansa came to the conclusion that nothing of that had any remedy at that point and it was pointless to be angry with a brother who was dead since a long time ago and who, despite war and the enormous pressure of being a rebel king, still loved his sisters; she knew it. She had said all that to Tyrion when her annoyance got soothed and they made love passionately before falling asleep.

He observed her in the peace of sleep and thought about her nameday, that would be two days after Pod and Leena's wedding. He would be delighted to take her to some place full of charm, far from the routine, from the pyramid and the city... That gave him an idea. Besides, he got the inspiration for a gift he was sure would thrill her. That same day he would talk with the people who could help him to prepare everything, among them Pod, Leena, Mhyraz and Dara. In the market he would make the research into the special gift, that required a certain search.

He was determined that Sansa had a day as nice as she could wish for. His heart sang just thinking in her blue eyes gleaming with joy.

Sansa stirred a little next to him and groaned in her sleep. She was having a nightmare. Tyrion embraced her to comfort her and she clung to him in her unconsciousness. Suddenly she awoke with a leap, releasing a brief cry, and he held her and caressed her forehead.

"Shhh, honey, easy. You only were dreaming," said him with a very soft voice.

"Oh, Tyrion," murmured her, with her voice sleepy and a little hoarse of newly awake which provoked him an inevitable erection. "I've had that nightmare again. The one with the men who are about to rape me. But this time they didn't stab the knife into me and the man who was between my legs succeeded..." She hushed and closed her eyes. "My moon period has come. I sense it." She raised the bedcovers a little and examined her crotch. Tyrion turned to give her some privacy. "Excuse me, my love. I have to get up for a moment," said her.

"Of course, my love." He imagined that she was going to wash herself in the basin. They had the habit of putting the pewter jug near the brazier, that was refilled with water every day. That way the water kept warm in case they needed it at any moment.

Tyrion heard the sounds of the ablutions and got even more aroused.

*Definitely I must be a pervert. I get horny like a horse when I think of her washing her lovely slit, even when she has her moon period.*

But he was resolved to respect the uneasiness that the fact of having her monthly blood caused her, and he would not start anything unless she herself did it or asked him to. Women often suffered aches and discomforts during the cycle and due to that it was normal that their desire lessened or disappeared.
But my cock goes on acting on its own. Look at it, there it is, stiff as a spear, without the slightest regard for its owner or his wife's lovely slit, into which it's yearning for stabbing itself.

He sat sideway on the bed to hide his bulge, while he imagined Sansa naked from the waist down and the water running over her folds...

Gods, this goes from bad to worse.

She went back to the bed and covered herself.

"How are you, darling?" asked him, solicitous and struggling to control his breath.

"A bit uncomfortable, but nothing which is going to spoil my day."

She was staring at him and smiled subtly, with the mischievous sparkle in her eyes.

She has noticed. She always does. Is it so evident at all times that I want her like a dog in heat?

"We still can do things, my insatiable lord. I see that you need relief." Without warning, she planted her hand on his bulge and he trembled and released a moan.

"Oh, Sansa. Truly, we don't have to do it if you don't really fancy it," whispered him, with his voice hoarse.

"I do fancy it. I want to pleasure you," affirmed her, emphatic.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 24

"Delighted, Sansa. I'm all yours." He gave in to her handlings, with his beats sped up in anticipation.

Sansa took off his clothes and he helped her to free him from the garments. She descended over his bare chest and began to kiss and lick him, helping herself with her hands. Tyrion closed his eyes, carried away by his delight.

*Undoubtedly she must have something of a lewd and generous goddess. She drives me constantly to her divine abodes of perpetual pleasure.*

She caressed with her lips and her tongue all the skin of his chest and his belly and got closer and closer to his most sensitive region, which was completely inflamed and yearning. She looked at his eyes maliciously just before kissing the basement and testing with the tip of her tongue.

He released a sound similar to a wail.

The mind-boggling lips and tongue were encircling and rising up all his length and she closed her eyes, as if she were tasting a candy specially sweet. She at last reached the glans and toyed with the protuberance before introducing it into her mouth.

"You're my goddess. You make it so well," murmured him, with his eyes following each one of her actions.

Sansa did not answer, as her mouth was full of him and she did not stop. She lowered more around his manhood and moved rhythmically.

"Yes. That's it. Make it this way, honey. Eat it all." He was grabbing her head and guided her, holding her hair to prevent it from falling on her face.

She kept that pace and Tyrion gazed at the way hiscock went into and out of those soft lips. The tongue and the walls of her throat rubbing his glans were driving him to an explosive climax.

"Sansa!" Completion hit him and his seed sprang up. She swallowed it and went on sucking until the manhood got relaxed. She let it get out of her mouth and addressed him a triumphant smile.

Sansa laid down beside him and looked at him, satisfied and proud.

"I see you a little self-satisfied, my lady," jested him, with his breath calmer.

"A well-made work is always a satisfaction, my lord," said her, with her tone of fake innocence.

"Indeed it is," corroborated him. "Would my lady like me to make her a job? I'll be careful," assured him, longing to give her the pleasure she had given him.

"Your lady would like it," affirmed her, smiling. She was not as uncomfortable or in pain as to not enjoy sex. He always knew exactly how to touch her.

"My lady's wish is my command."

He opened the laces of her nightgown and freed her breasts, which never stopped getting a moan.
out of him every time he saw them.

"Your tits are more and more nice every passing day, Sansa. The finest I've ever seen. I could spend entire days cuddling them endlessly." He grazed them very softly with his nails and fingertips, circling them until reaching the nipples. He hinted barely the brush of a feather upon them and Sansa gasped, eager for more.

"You want more, don't you? Ask me for whatever you want," incited him. He loved that she expressed her wishes openly.

"Caress them tighter. Squeeze them."

He did what she asked him. The breasts were slightly more tense and full, due to the cycle. Tyrion knew that women's breasts became more sensitive those days and he was resolved to take advantage of it on his behalf as well as hers.

"Devour them. I want to feel your tongue on them."

Tyrion applied himself to taste them, sucking the nipples and licking that skin so soft that it was wonderful. Meanwhile, his hand slid over the belly and the undergarment, reaching the clitoris. Sansa shivered.

"You want me to make you a handjob, gorgeous?," offered him, speaking against the skin of her breasts.

"Yes, Tyrion." Her cheeks were flushed. The fact that he did not mind to stain himself with her moon blood aroused her. Since they had made it that time during the journey, when she had the cycle, and he showed he did not mind at all penetrating or masturbating her, she had cast aside her shyness and let him do to her any thing he wanted. He was more cautious and preferred not to penetrate her unless she asked him to, as he feared it were painful for her, so he focused more on her clitoris.

His fingers rubbed with the skill that put her on the edge in a minute.

"You like it this way, darling?"

"Yes! It's perfect this way."

"You're who is perfect. You have me crazy."

She sat up a little on her elbow to kiss him, and they played with their tongues while his fingers were pulling the strings of her delight until it unleashed and she moved her hips in rapture and arched back, moaning his name.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
"Thanks, my love. It's been great," said her grateful, kissing him.

"Thanks to you. You're great." He smiled on her lips.

They got up to get dressed and Tyrion, after having driven Sansa to pleasure, had again quite a prickly problem between his legs, as her ecstasy had got him hard as stone once more.

_I'll have to seek relief myself before going, without her noticing. We have no time to do any more for now and moreover I don't want to bother her while she has her cycle, in case she's uncomfortable or she feels in pain._

Mhyraz brought breakfast and then Tyrion remembered one of the things he wanted to talk with him about.

"We've been thinking about a thing, and we're going to make you a proposal. You can choose freely and without pressure, alright?," set out him to the boy, who nodded. "The lady and I were wondering if you'd like to remain at our service for all the time you want and, if further forward you still wish to stay with us, we'll be glad. What we're asking is if you want to live with us. If we go to Westeros and some day Lady Sansa and I settle on our own, we'd be very honoured to count on you, as we are now. We'll take care of you and you'll be a part of our house."

The boy looked at them as if he were going to burst out crying and, in an impulsive gesture, he hugged Tyrion, who patted his back, moved.

"That means yes?," asked him to the boy, smiling.

Mhyraz could not speak, so he shook vehemently his head up and down.

"Alright. Then now you're a part of our family. I'll tell the Mother so she knows that one of her orphans already has guardians who'll take care of him."

The boy hugged him again and looked at him as he would look at his own father. Tyrion's throat tightened.

_This must be very alike to what you feel when your own son is looking at you._

Sansa was observing the scene from the door of the bedroom, newly dressed, and she did let loose the tears that the happy kid was struggling to hold back.

Before going out for his morning tasks, Tyrion sneaked out to the contiguous hall and masturbated, because the sexual tension he had accumulated due to not having relieved himself with Sansa the last time was harassing him. Once mitigated the tension of his crotch, he went to fetch Pod and his escorts and they went out to the cold and clear morning.

He smiled recalling the moment when, during breakfast, he had addressed the boy a knowing look to indicate him he had secret plans he did not want his wife to discover. The kid had waited for him outside and Tyrion explained to him that he needed his help for a gift he wanted to give the lady on her nameday, and he detailed him what it consisted of. Mhyraz smiled and said he'd do whatever
for the lady so she was happy. Later, Tyrion asked him if he knew when his own nameday was, and the boy said that there were still several months left for that.

"It's good to know it. We'll have to celebrate yours too, Mhyraz." Tyrion blinked an eye to him and the boy left, hopping.

When he joined Pod, White Fly and Green Beetle, he explained his squire his plans for Sansa's birthday and the boy told him that he could count on him for anything he needed.

They made their tour around the city and Koleos informed him that the previous early morning had had an attempt to sabotage one of the constructions, but the guards had stopped it and the masked men ran away.

_They have orders to not arrest them. As strange as it sounds, it's not advisable to catch any Son of the Harpy yet, because the rest of them woul be alerted, fearing that the arrested ones confess, and then it would be impossible to catch them. We must wait until we've gathered information about as many members as possible and then we'd carry out a general raid to take them to the queen's justice._

*(Part 3 of a longer chapter)*
Meereen: Day 24

It was better to let a few of them escape in order not to endanger the whole mission.

*How many more noble families and rich merchants, apart from the ones already uncovered, are involved? I hope Daenerys has information regarding that.*

The *little birds* were the most efficient system of spying that existed, put at the queen's service by Varys. Since Tyrion was a direct witness of the results of that system, he understood fully why the eunuch Master of Whispers of the Red Keep was the best informed man in the world and Tyrion reassured himself in the advantages of having him as an ally.

*Lots more than having him as an enemy, of course.*

In the market, Sarik promised him that he would carry out the transactions to get, in a period of a few days, the orders Tyrion needed, and afterwards this one walked to some stalls which had merchandise that was ideal for what he was thinking of doing.

By the way, he had scribbled on his sheets of paper the reports and numbers he had to note down in order to keep the accounts up to date.

The balance of recovering after the disaster went on being positive and the market was being enlarged with new stalls of Meereenese merchants, what contributed to increase the tax collection for the Crown. Tyrion observed that those sellers did not have an amount of income high enough to have been slaves' owners and so it was very unlikely that they belonged to the Sons of the Harpy, but he was sure that they were an object of Daenerys's espionage, until they were definitely discarded.

Later he talked with Kerro, whom he located in the Square of Graces supervising a work, and Kerro told him that the school would begin in less than a week. Almost all was ready and organized and all the people involved knew what they had to do. On the other hand, the most disadvantaged families were going to move very soon to the pyramid.

Important changes were approaching and Tyrion hoped that everything turned out well. He knew that a good planning was the key, and even the most complicated tasks could be brought to a successful conclusion with the proper planning. And they, fortunately, did not lack that. They could have another shortages, as they did not have lots of resources or raw materials and providing for more than fifteen thousand people in midwinter and in the harsh land of Meereen was not a triviality. But foresight was their best guarantee of survival.

At midday, Tyrion considered all his transactions finished and, when he returned, it occurred to him to drop in the parade ground to greet Ser Barristan, whom he had not seen in several days. There he was, training the kids. Pod immediately went to give a helping hand, while his master was chatting with the old knight, far enough from the others to be unheard.

"What do you think about the queen's marriage to prince Oberyn?," consulted Tyrion.

"That Dornishman is too bold. And he's thirty years older than her. Yes, he keeps in good form, but he might be her father. Moreover, he has promiscuous habits and a concubine with whom he lives together. I don't like it at all, and I've told the queen so. But it's a very favourable alliance, that's
unquestionable. As long as she agrees to such an... strange married and family situation."

*The correct word would be "indecent", since a puritan point of view, thought Tyrion, amused.*

"And I've warned her that she shouldn't trust that Ellaria. It's said that she's a woman as dangerous as the prince," added the knight.

_She and her daughters are called "Sand Snakes". I don't think it's due to the softness of their bites.*

"Daenerys adapts quickly. She'll be able to cope with the situation and she'll put Ellaria firmly in her place."

"I hope so. I don't have many years left ahead of me and maybe I won't live enough time to carry on taking care of her whe sheen claims the Iron Throne. You'll have to do it instead of me. Do it well," demanded the venerable knight.

"We'll do it, Ser Barristan," affirmed Tyrion, with a firm nod of his head.

The man looked like he had taken a load off his shoulders with Tyrion's words.

*He knows I'll do all is in my power to consolidate her in her position. We've progressed quite a lot since the times of King’s Landing.*

"I've talked her in favour of that alliance, Ser Barristan. The support of Dorne is fundamental and, despite his flaws, Oberyn'll be a good husband, I'm sure of it. He's very devoted to his family."

The knight had nothing to oppose to that.

"I won't take more time from your trainings, Ser. If we talk any other day... Might you do me a favour?"

"Of course, Lord Tyrion. Tell me."

"Will you tell me about your youth and maturity, and what you know about my house before my birth? I've always wanted to listen to a great knight who has lived enough and narrates me first-hand what has meant to him being what I couldn't be."

Ser Barristan looked at him with friendliness, as if Tyrion was a kid asking an adult for a tale.

"I'll do it with pleasure, Lord Tyrion. But you already are a knight, even though no king has made you one." He bent in a signal of respect and Tyrion did the same, feeling his chest swelling as if he effectively were a brave knight with a history of great feats. They bade farewell and Tyrion entered the pyramid, smiling widely.

*Maybe after all I'm not as far from fulfilling that other dream. I don't have an attractive figure, a shining armour or an unbeatable sword, but I do have a lady, my Sansa, who fight for and whom crown Queen of Love and Beauty, and a queen whom keep on a throne. It's not going to be so different from what Ser Barristan has done during all his life.*
"Hello, gorgeous." Her charming figure against the light, sewing by the window, was a vision that comforted him and made him feel at home every time he came back from his tasks.

No one can be luckier than me. Having this glorious woman receiving me at home is the best privilege any man can aspire to. No kingdoms, no castles or any more that can't be compared to all Sansa gives me.

"Hello, my love." She cast aside the needlework and bent on the chair to kiss him.

"How do you feel, honey? Are you in pain?"

"I was before, but I sent Dara to ask one of the maesters for some herbs to make a soothing infusion, and the pain has vanished. You know I've as well made Dara the offer of being a part of our house? She has thrown in my arms crying, the poor thing, and she has made me cry too," told Sansa, smiling with tenderness. "It seems that we now have two pupils to enlarge our little family."

"I'm very proud of you, darling." Tyrion gave her another kiss and breathed in her light scent of lemon and herself. He tried to disregard the furious call of his demanding cock.

She's not very well now, little bastard. Leave my poor Sansa alone for a while. In this moment she can't look after you.

"And I'm proud of you." She caressed his face, over the beard she liked so much. "How has it all been outside?," asked her, interested.

"My morning has been fruitful." Indeed it's been fruitful. I'm preparing for you a nameday I wish you remember always, my love. "This early morning there was an attempt to sabotage one of the constructions, but the guards have prevented it. And on the other hand, the market is going very well and it's being broadening with Meereenese merchants. That is resulting in more incomes for the Crown. And at last, I've had a chat with Kerro and he has announced me that almost all is ready for the opening of the school."

"The Sons of the Harpy have made another attempt, then?"

"Yes, but it won't be much what they'll do with the heavy presence of soldiers in the city and the adopted security measures."

"Has it been found out anything more about them, Tyrion?," asked her, worried.

"Until I have another conversation with Daenerys again on that topic, I won't get up to date with the new information. Surely soon there will be news. But don't worry, darling, you can see that the measures are effective. The Sons of the Harpy practically can't scratch their own asses without Daenerys finding out," said him to calm her, using his sense of humour to make him smile, and it worked.

"Soon the pyramid will be replete. With the ones who live here already, the families that are going to move and the school, which will fill the second floor in the mornings, this is going to be very animated," commented Sansa.
"Well, yes. We're going to have a few neighbours. We won't have much time to get bored."

"But if I never get bored," objected Sansa, with her suggestive tone. "My hungry husband always has me busy."

He reacted immediately. Alright, alright, little bastard. At last you're free to get as cheerful as you want, because it seems our Sansa's mood is naughty and she wants a lay.

"A body like yours can't be wasted, gorgeous. It's a sin that it remains a single minute without attention." He waited until she began some movement. Sansa attracted him by the neck of his doublet until placing him between her legs. Tyrion put his hands on her thighs, over the skirt, and slid them upwards, to her hips. She encircled him with her long legs and pressed herself against his inflamed crotch.

"Make it to me here, Tyrion," pleaded her, on his lips.

That chair was low enough for him to make love to her comfortably with her seated.

"Won't it hurt you, honey?," asked him, with his throat dry and his voice choking with lust. He tangled his fingers in her hair, holding her head.

"I'm not in pain any more. The infusion has alleviated me. I want to feel you inside of me, my love."

Those magical words were his passport to paradise.

"Gods, Sansa. You get me so excited." He helped her to take off the undergarment, let loose her breasts and lowered his pants. She rested her feet on his shoulders, in a very bold posture they sometimes adopted and which they loved. Sansa grasped the arms of the chair and rested herself on the back. He penetrated her and held her hips to thrust deeper. She stimulated herself with a hand while he was moving in and out slowly, carefully, in order not to cause her any discomfort.

She was being transported by her husband's gentleness. He always thought above all of her well-being, and she wanted him very deep inside of her, in the deepest of her insides.

"Don't worry and fuck me hard, Tyrion. I want to blend with you."

"Oh, Sansa, you're a sex goddess come down to the earth," said him panting, speeding up, as she wanted.

"That's it, my love. Make it that way. I'm going to finish soon."

"Finish, my love. I want to feel your delight," encouraged him, on the edge. He slowed down a little to wait for her.

Soon afterwards she reached her pleasure, shouted, gripped him with her walls and arched.

"Sansa, you're so beautiful," moaned him, emptying himself into her.

They were stained with her menstrual blood, but their clothes weren't, because they had been careful to put them aside. She was very flushed because, no matter how far she went in the practice of sex with her husband, there always were things that would make her blush when she recovered from her lewd fever.

"Definitely, I think my septa wouldn't approve what we've just done, Tyrion."
They burst in laughter and Tyrion loved her even more, because he adored seeing her laugh.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Mhyraz reminded them that Sansa had to attend the queen's chamber to assist her personal dressmaker with the dress for Pod and Leena's wedding. Tyrion anyway had work to do that afternoon, so he did not feel very displeased by the fact that she had to be absent. He would miss her in the bedroom, sewing with Leena and chatting, as he had got used to work in the adjacent hall at the other side of the door. He was going to be a little alone. He hoped his account books distracted him.

After lunch, Mhyraz and Tyrion accompanied Sansa to Daenerys's rooms, rising several floors. He did not want her to go alone anywhere. And when the families moved to the pyramid, he would maximize caution around her. Such a young and beautiful woman was a temptation for any man, no matter how good and kind he seemed to be.

He bade her goodbye with a kiss at the door of the queen's chambers.

"Have a good afternoon, honey," wished him to her.

"You too, my love," corresponded her.

"Later I'll come to fetch you. Don't even think about going back you alone. We can't trust nearly anyone even in the pyramid, my love. I don't want anything to happen to you."

"I understand, Tyrion. Go and keep calm, I won't move out of here without you."

"Then see you later. Knock on the door, I'll stay until you enter."

Sansa knocked and Missandei opened to her. Tyrion blinked an eye to her and walked away along the corridor with Mhyraz.

She went into and Daenerys got close to welcome her.

"Good afternoon, Lady Sansa," greeted her.

"Good afternoon, Your Grace." She made a bow.

The queen introduced her to a girl more or less her age and Leena's, with dark brown hair, dark eyes and was swarthy.

"My name is Cloe, mistress." She bent.

"Please, call me Sansa." She bent too. "May I see the dress you're making for Her Grace, Cloe?"

"Of course, mistress... Sorry, Sansa." The girl smiled, shy. She took Sansa to her sewing table under a large window, where a taffeta dress in several tones of green was spread, highlighting Daenerys's light green eyes. The sleeves were taken in to the elbows and from there the fabric was splitted and fell loose to the feet. The lowcut was shaped as a curved V.

"It needs some alterations, and I don't know how to make the ornaments," admitted the young woman. "My mother couldn't complete my training, because she died and a friend of hers who belonged to the same master took care of me, but she didn't know anything about this job."
"The dress making is nearly perfect, Cloe. Let's see where we must touch up. Your Grace, would you mind trying it on?," requested Sansa.

Daenerys nodded, smiling. Missandei got close to help her take off her clothes and the queen undressed before the girls without the slightest qualm, only keeping her underwear on. Sansa blushed and looked at the floor respectfully, as she was not used to see anyone naked except for her husband. Her Northerner customs had instilled in her the decency of wearing as many clothes as possible before others, but it too was a logical thing in a region that was always cold, even in summer. As a young girl she had only broken that rule with Jeyne Poole when they were to swim in the pool of the godswood.

Daenerys observed her modesty and hinted an understanding grin. All of them put her the dress on and Sansa studied it carefully.

"It needs to be taken in at the waist. A little wrinkle appears at the back, because it's more loose-fitting than it should be, but that's easy to mend. We need some pins to mark the exact place where we must take in," said Sansa.

Cloe picked up a handful of pins and Sansa showed her how to put them.

"It's done. Now you can take off the dress, Your Grace."

daenerys did and Sansa and Cloe placed it onto the sewing table to examine the mark. Sansa showed her what she had to do and the girl put the stitches until the fabric was correctly closed. They put the queen the dress on again and the wrinkle had disappeared.

"Are you comfortable, Your Grace?," asked Sansa.

"Perfectly comfortable, Lady Sansa."

"Good. Then there are only the ornaments left. What are you thinking of for it?"

"Of a red dragon with three heads embroidered on the bodice," explained the queen.

Sansa nodded. "Do you have at hand a picture of your blazon, so Cloe can copy it?"

Missandei gave them a piece of fabric with the Targaryen blazon and Sansa started to explain to Cloe how to embroidery. At the beginning she practiced on a cloth that had been left over from the dress, and soon the first unsteady stitches became steadier.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 176

Meereen: Day 24

"Very well, Cloe. Put the stitches closer together and it'll be perfect," praised Sansa, recalling with nostalgia septa Mordane's lessons.

Cloe went on practicing and Daenerys went next to them to look at their progress.

"May I have a word with you, Lady Sansa?, asked her.

"Of course, Your Grace."

The queen guided her to the adjacent hall, that did not have windows and was modestly decorated. Sansa noticed that the original decoration must be much more luxurious. The queen and herself were alike in that, as both preferred austerity. Missandei served them wine of a jug.

"It's evident that you're very happy with your husband. He's a good man."

"He's the best, Your Grace. He makes me as happy as I can be."

"Take good care of him, because you won't find another like him."

"I know it very well, Your Grace. I'll fight to be by his side for all my life."

Daenerys nodded and observed her carefully.

"Lord Tyrion does have my consent to inform you and consult you practically about all the matters discussed in the Council and in our private meetings. I know what it is to share such a deep connection with someone who you love and I too know about your discretion, my lady. You can consider yourself as a member of the Council in the shadow." She smiled with an amused flash in her eyes. "You must know I have a lover, Daario Naharis. In Westeros it's not highly-regarded that the kings and queens take lovers, I know, but I'm not in Westeros, and a queen sometimes has to let herself some entertainments, don't you think?"

"I think the heart can't be shut forever, Your Grace," said Sansa cautiously.

"No, it can't. Because of that nearly all the kings and queens have had lovers. The majority of my ancestors have married between siblings or close relatives and all the noble houses agree to marry between them. Very rarely the unions are out of love. And it's sad to live without love."

"Very sad. I've known what that is, Your Grace, when Joffrey beheaded my father and I was left alone in the Red Keep. I haven't been alone so much time as you, it's true, but I understand that feeling of not having anyone around who loves us."

"Viserys loved me, on his own way, but most of the time I felt lonely. Until I fell in love with Drogo. And later he was gone and emptiness was about to swallow me. Now I'm trying to escape that emptiness with Daario. He's not like my khal, but I think he loves me as well. He didn't like when he knew about my betrothal to prince Oberyn, but when I said to him that I have made it a condition for the wedding that my lover remains with me, he settled down quite a lot. He seems willing to accept it. I know he doesn't like to have a rival and if it were for him, I wouldn't marry anyone, but he understands. I've made him clear that, whatever happens, I love him and no marriage will take me away from him if I go on loving him. His biggest fear is that I fall in love
with Oberyn. I can't predict what will happen, but Daario is my man and, whatever I feel for the prince, I doubt I'll give up on him, as I doubt Oberyn'll give up on his concubine. Anyway, this is not a romantic engagement.”

Sansa thought that stranger things had happened and it might perfectly happen that the young queen fell in love with the mature but attractive and sensual Dornishman. But who knew what might happen in such a long term. Daenerys did not even know yet when she would claim the Iron Throne.

"We ignore what will happen, Your Grace. For now, you are the queen of Meereen and you're providing for thousands of people who didn't have anything before now. It's a motive to be glad for," encouraged Sansa. "You have many subjects who call you Mother. Your heart is big, and you'll always find love, Your Grace."

Daenerys smiled at her with friendliness.

"Thanks for your words, Lady Sansa. Sometimes, all this overcomes me and I need to be reminded that I'm only a human and I can't be more than that."

"Only the gods can endure everything. For that they're gods."

"Do you believe in them, Lady Sansa? Which faith do you feel inclined to?"

"At present, to no faith. I believed in the Faith of the Seven before, like my mother, and in the old gods, like my father. But I doubt that, if they exist, they listen to us, Your Grace. I no more put my faith in them. I believe in the people who loved me when I was a child and who gave their lives for me, I believe in how much happy I was with them, and above all I believe in my love for Tyrion. He is the driving force of my life."

"I neither opt for any belief. My lineage were devotees of the Seven, but I've seen too many things to affirm that a god is truer than another. Maybe all the believers are right, maybe none of them is."

"Maybe, Your Grace."

They smiled at each other and kept a knowing silence.

"If you'll excuse me, I'm going to check on Cloe's progress in embroidery."

"Of course, Lady Sansa."

The girl was shaping a rudimentary tricephalous dragon on the cloth. She looked frustrated.

"It's your first day, Cloe. My first embroidery was a complete mess, I assure you. In comparison, yours is a wonder. Go on practicing and you'll do it better little by little. And remember, the stitches must be very close together."

"I won't be able to embroider the Mother's dress in time."

"Don't worry. I'll do it. In due course you'll be able to decorate all her clothes if you fancy it."

"Thank you very much, mistress... Sansa." It costed an effort to the girl not addressing her with formality, but it was natural. It would be as if the queen asked Sansa to call her by her name. She doubted she would be able to. Her strict training in manners etiquette could not be cast aside overnight.
She went back by the queen's side.

"I won't keep you any longer, my lady. Your husband must be missing you a lot and I don't want to deprive him more time from your company." A spark of mischief was dancing in her light green eyes.

"It's a pleasure and an honour to serve you, Your Grace," said Sansa courteously.

"Tomorrow Cloe will go to your chambers with the dress and the embroidery threads, so you carry on with the ornament and she can progress more with her learning."

"I'll wait for her there. Ummm, Your Grace... Might I ask Missandei to send word to my husband, so he can come for me? He doesn't want me to wander alone along the corridors."

"Of course, my lady. Your husband is right to be so cautious. Missandei, send word, please."

The pretty young woman with the curly hair bent quickly and left the chamber. Sansa supposed she was going to speak to one of the Unsullied who stood guard at the door.

The queen and Sansa chatted about Pod and Leena's wedding and the suits Sansa had designed, and they talked as well about Mhyraz's and Dara's ward. Daenerys approved it and gave her consent.

"You'll make those children very happy. They need a family. Most of them will have to remain in my custody until they are of age, but if some of them can find families that take them in, the better for them."

Missandei announced that Lord Tyrion was outside. Sansa bade farewell with a bow.

"Tell your husband that tomorrow evening there will be a Council meeting," said Daenerys, accompanying her to the door.

"I'll tell him, Your Grace. Good evening." She made a goodbye bow.

"Good evening, Lady Sansa."
They kissed and walked along the corridor, holding hands.

"Have you had a pleasant afternoon, darling?" asked him.

"Yes, my love. I've given a helping hand to the queen's dressmaker, who is my same age and her name's Cloe. She couldn't end her training, because her mother, who was who taught her, died. We made some alterations to the dress, and Cloe is learning to embroider. Tomorrow she'll come to our rooms, because I have to make the ornament for the queen's dress and by the way the girl will continue with her embroidery lessons."

"I think it's great you teach that girl. She's going to learn from the best." Tyrion kissed her hand.

"There must be veteran dressmakers among the freedfolk. Why has the queen chosen her?" asked Sansa, puzzled.

"Perhaps because Daenerys has a soft spot for inexperienced people. Or that young woman in particular has driven her attention. Maybe she wants everyone to see that anyone can have a chance if he or she deserves it. It seems very typical of her. She doesn't reject anyone for being a novice."

"Yes, it looks like that," corroborated Sansa.

They began the descent to the floor below, along the ramp. Dusk was falling over Meereen and some spaced torches illuminated the corridors dimly. Daenerys was trying to save wool and fuel. Sansa understood one of the reasons why Tyrion did not want her to wander alone. Those tunnels became sinister in the half-light.

"We've chatted about prince Oberyn's marriage proposal and she has spoken to me about Daario. She feels less unsure and thinks he'll accept the terms. I've made her glimpse that it's unknown yet when she'll claim the Iron Throne or, accordingly, when her marriage will be celebrated, so for now the important issue is her ruling of Meereen and the thousands of subjects who revere her here. We too have spoken about the loneliness both of us have felt when we've lost someone dear and how sad is living without love. This topic arose because of our chat about arranged marriages, as many unhappy married people search for lovers because in the long run most need someone who love. Ah, and she has told me I can consider myself as a member of the Council in the shadow, because she's aware that you tell me everything, with her permission, of course."

He grinned and caressed her hand. Their fingers were intertwined.

"You're a good counselor in the shadow, honey. I like especially to consult you about certain affairs of state in the strictest privacy of the bedroom. It's the best way of solving these affairs," joked him, suggestive, with the wicked spark in his eyes.

"Oh, you fool." She blushed and gave him a jog.

"We form a great team, Sansa." Tyrion squeezed her hand. "You help me to be a better counselor."

"You're enough brilliant you alone, my love. I don't contribute very much."

He stopped and took her hands.
"Indeed you do. You encourage me to be a better person, to think things better, you give me inspiration and sometimes you have ideas I haven't had into account. Is that a scarce contribution? A brilliant mind isn't the only condition to be a good counselor," signaled him. "My father had a brilliant mind, but he hadn't the slightest trace of compassion or empathy. Did it make him a great counselor?"

"Your father kept the peace in the kingdoms for many years," pointed her, admitting the truth of that. The fact that her father-in-law was a pitiless being did not erase his virtues.

As the virtues don't erase either the evil deeds, thought her.

"He did. But, at what cost? The Seven Kingdoms were really frightened of him. Do you know about the origin of the song The Rains of Castamere, Sansa? You know why it was composed?" Though he did not like to talk about his dead father, Tyrion loved chatting about any topic with her and he immersed himself in that conversation while they went on walking to their rooms. There was a short way left to the second floor.

"Because your father wiped out house Reyne of Castamere?," recalled her.

"Exactly. House Reyne was the second richest house in the West, behind mine. It had pledged its fealty to the Lannisters, but it often happens that the one which occupies second place on the ladder uses to feel envious toward the first. The Reynes of Castamere were almost as rich and powerful as my family. And that almost must be extremely annoying. Like us, they had gold quarries and they probably thought that being second best wasn't their thing. In my grandfather Tytos's times, they and the Tarbecks rebelled, taking advantage of the Lannister patriarch's weak and peaceful character. But they had undervalued my father. His youth didn't stop him from crushing the rebellion, burning the strongholds of both houses and executing the two lineages completely, including the children, so there would be no more members of those houses in the future. It was Tywin's letter of introduction. And deeds like that kept the kingdoms united and in peace. Terror towards Tywin. Ironic, isn't it?"

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 178

Meereen: Day 24

They were at the door of their rooms and Tyrion opened with the key.

Sansa reflected, with the tiny wrinkle on the space between her eyebrows that made him smile.

"But there have been good kings too, who have kept peace without resorting to terror," pointed her, going into the adjacent hall. "Like king Jaehaerys I The conciliator."

"Those are the two ways of keeping peace: subduing through fear or gaining devotion. But it's necessary to have true talent for one thing as well as for the other. It's not enough to sow fear, as it's not enough to be good-hearted. Joffrey was cruel but an idiot can't keep peace, as neither can someone weak like my grandfather."

"The excess of goodness is as bad as the excess of wickedness," summed up Sansa, for Tyrion's joy, who felt proud of the maturity she had developed and how invigorating was talking with her.

"That's it, gorgeous. That's the same topic we once talked about, regarding the opposite sides."

_I don't understand why my girl was so despised. They had to be complete imbeciles to be unable to notice that she's clever. She limited to perform her role and she did it so well that they swallowed it. The worst is that she herself came to believe some unkind adjectives they attributed to her._

Tyrion was lighting the candles and Sansa went to the basin to wash herself. After those hours she felt dirty and sticky with her menstrual blood and she fancied a sex session with her husband after the entire afternoon without seeing him.

He continued, while he brought the flame close to the wick.

"It can be affirmed that my father wasn't a bad ruler, if we speak about ruling in general. But in particular, that's another story. While no one stood up against the Lannisters or kicked over the traces, Tywin provided people with prosperity. Otherwise, people vanished off the face of the earth. That was how my father understood ruling."

"Well, that ended for him. He won't sow more terror," said her from the bedroom. "But now the sparrows rule."

"Unluckily. I don't know what is worst," complained him ironically.

The chambers were illuminated at last and Tyrion took a seat, waiting for Sansa to wash herself. As it was to be expected, he got aroused envisioning the water running down her body.

Since she had gone to Daenerys's rooms, he had been making a clean copy of the pieces of information in his account books and afterwards he read for a while. Of course, he too had a great erection in a moment he got distracted reminding some of his sexual encounters with Sansa and he masturbated, because she probably would take long still to send word to him to go fetching her. Later he asked Mhyraz to bring the bucket with hot water and soap, and washed himself to be clean and smell pleasantly when he went to pick up Sansa.

He had missed her, because it was strange for him to be alone in their own rooms, where his wife's presence was a constant.
"I'm ready now," announced her.

"Ah, are you? Ready for what?," asked him, naughty, striding to the bedroom.

"What do you think I'm ready for?"

She was naked and with her hair loose, falling like a copper-coloured curtain far down over her figure.

"You're a godess," said him, with his mouth dry and his crotch struggling to rip open his pants.

"Well, this godess has missed her man and wants sex," blurted her, throwing her hair back to uncover her breasts, inviting.

Tyrion roamed her with his ardent eyes.

"This man has missed his godess too and is dying to fuck her," said him breathless, getting close quickly. He put before her the footstool Mhyraz had brought on his request in order to reach certain places of the rooms without having to ask her to take the things he needed. He climbed on it and put his hands on her hips, raised to her breasts and pinched the nipples hard. She emitted a moan. He embraced her waist and submerged his face between her breasts, rubbing her skin with his beard. He felt her holding her breath and she grabbed his hair and guided him over her. He took a breast and introduced a half in his mouth, while he was trapping the other with a hand. Later he inverted the action. Sansa was enraptured under his lips and his hands, moaning with surrender and clinging to him, as her kneels were faltering. He jumped down the footstool and tried something new.

"Encircle me with a leg, Sansa." She did it and he held the back of the thigh with an arm. "Now encircle me with the other." She enveloped him with her other leg and Tyrion held it with his other arm. "Rest on my shoulders." Sansa grasped his shoulders and he lifted her, with her legs around him. He carried her to the bed, where she had put some fabrics so she would not stain the sheets with her blood.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 179

Meereen: Day 24

"I see you had all this planned to seduce me and take me to bed, lustful lady."

"That was my plan all the time," affirmed her.

He put her on the edge of the bed and she helped him to take off his clothes. Tyrion brought the footstool, which was being very useful, especially for sex. Mainly with that thought he had ordered it, though the pretext was that it would serve him to reach higher in his rooms. Once naked, Sansa drew him to her, encircled him with her arms and legs and caressed him from his thighs to his head, wishing to encompass all of him. He let her do, entranced and embracing her, feeling beneath his hands the extremely soft skin of her back and her breasts on his face. Then she placed her opening just against his cock and he introduced it. They moaned at the same time and she laid down, arching her back. He held her firmly by her hips and thrust into her as slowly as he could, while Sansa stimulated her clitoris and her breasts.

"You want to make it slowly, honey? Let's extend the pleasure," proposed him, moving his hands over her belly, and she nodded. "Let me give you pleasure with my hands too." She stopped rubbing her clitoris and began to caress her other breast. Tyrion replaced her hand on her most sensitive spot and Sansa emitted a deep moan, throwing her head back.

"You like me to fuck you this way, Sansa?" He was rubbing her very slowly to delay her explosion.

"I adore it, Tyrion," affirmed her. "I adore to feel you inside and onto me."

He was moving in and out with no hurry.

"You like my fingers on your clitoris? It's such a lovely little thing, so willing... I feel how it shudders under my fingers," described him, to arouse her more.

"Your fingers drive me mad." She closed her eyes, transported.

"I love you, darling. You're the hottest woman I can dream of. You always fill me completely."

"I'm hot because you turn me this way. I constantly wish to do all this with you, because I'm yours. My body is yours. I love you, Tyrion."

"You're mine. You, my gorgeous woman, belong to me, as I belong to you. You're the most beautiful creature anyone can fuck and I want to make love to you always, during all my life, until my cock falls to pieces."

She smiled in her delight.

"I take you to your word. You'll have to make it to me until both of us fall into pieces. I mean, If you aren't too oldie for it," needled her, using their usual joke.

"Oldie, eh? What do you think of this oldie? Isn't he able to stab you right with his cock?", rebutted him, looking at her with a ferocious lechery.

"Oh, it's not so bad for an oldie."
"And this isn't so bad either?" Tyrion accelerated suddenly the movement of his fingers on her clit and the climax exploded inside of her like a deluge.

"Tyrion!," yelled her in desperation, convulsing against him. Some instants later, he felt the ecstasy of his own completion and moaned her name like a prayer. He closed his eyes and lied onto her, both sweating abundantly and breathing laboriously. Sansa tangled her fingers in his dishevelled blonde hair and held him against her in her possessive gesture.

"You've reached so far inside of me that I can't take you out, my love," said her, smiling at him, happy.

"And I don't ever want to take myself out of you, honey." He kissed her between her breasts.

Lassitude was overpowering them and Tyrion, with total reluctance, made the effort of sitting up on his elbow.

"Couldn't we skip dinner today?," suggested her, joking.

"We have to recover our energies, darling. At this rate you're going to use me up and consume me as if I were a prune. If you want a husband always ready and fit, this one has to feed well. The same as you. I want to caress your healthy and sensual body, not a body that is all skin and bones," scolded him, mocking.

"I love how you take care of me, my love. All that is for preventing me from turning into all skin and bones. Very romantic."

"Eh! I'm the most romantic man I know." He pinched her bottom.

"Really?," She raised an eyebrow, in a fake attitude of skepticism.

"Indeed. Did you know I have in the bag a greatly pretty red-haired girl who is begging me all the time to have a roll with her? I have an infallible trick: I sing her serenades under the moonlight, among the branches of magnolia in blossom. My beautiful voice captivates her."

"Is it true? I didn't know you sing. Or that there are magnolia in blossom on the Bay of the Skahazadhan. I see you've kept your bests charms for that red-haired." Sansa started to tickle his belly with her nails.

"Oh, you're not bad looking either, honey." His crotch was inflaming again. "You want me to sing a serenade to you? My cock sings them marvellously as well, in a slit like yours."

"Ah, no, thank you. Save it for your red-haired." She turned her back to him, grinning in pure mischief. Immediately she felt him upon her, immobilizing her on the mattress, and she burst in laughter, excited.

"Well, well. Where's your red-haired?," challenged her.

"Alright, I confess: you're as pretty as her. You want me to sing now? I warn you I'm very good handling the flute."

"All right. Show me how good you're handling the flute," commanded her, laughing with no stop.

They made it again and they were so aroused by their game that they finished barely in a few minutes. They washed themselves in a hurry and got dressed for dinner. Mhyraz found them in such a merry and playful mood that his expression, half amused and half scandalized, made clear
what he was thinking: that in that moment he was not very sure of who were the guardians or who were the pupils in that curious family.

And that made them laugh even more.
Chapter 180

Meereen: Day 24 – 25

"I remind you, my husband, that you have pending to tell me a couple of things." She tickled lazily the hair on his chest.

"Let's see... I was practicing as an acting Hand and was determined to counterbalance Joff’s excesses. But, as I told Cersei, it's very difficult to put a collar on a dog when a crown has already been put on his head. To that I had to add the fact that my charming nephew hated me and wanted to see me dead. Being totally honest, I admit that the feeling was quite mutual and I confess that there wasn't a single day in which I didn't feel tempted to strangle him. But, as I couldn't do that favour to the realm, I had to resign myself with trying to rule while the snot spent his valuable time pulling up flies wings and torturing people as well as animals. As I told you, I did some changes. I redecorated the Tower of the Hand in my style. You must have realized that your hedonistic husband likes the good life and to have certain comforts at his disposal." He blinked a naughty eye to Sansa. "I sent stupid Janos Slynt to the Wall and appointed Bronn as commander of the goldcloaks. Bronn refused to wear the attire of the city watch, alleging that the cloak slows down a man in a fight and turns who wears it into an easy target, because of its yellow colour. So he went on dressing as always, in the sellsword style. On the other hand, I didn't feel yet very at ease with the composition of the private Council. If it were for me, I would've done a radical cleaning and among all of them I perhaps would had kept Varys only, because he was the most useful of the group. But that was a nest of snakes. My dear sister, hypocritical dirty old Pycelle, despicable Littlefinger, tricky Varys... I neither considered myself as a paragon of virtue, but what I didn't doubt was that not a single one of those who sat by that table were really honourable since Jon Arryn and your father had occupied seats by it. The Council had degenerated into that gang in which I included myself."

Sansa put a hand on his beard and looked at him with feigned reproach.

"Now who is undervaluing himself?"

"It's the truth, Sansa. Honourable never was one of my qualities until I fell in love with you. And even so, I'm only honourable in everything that concerns you. For me there isn't anything above you or that is more important than you, my love," confessed him, with his reverent look.

"Love is a kind of honour, Tyrion." Sansa smiled at him tenderly. "Being willing to give your life for someone you love... There is no greatest honour than that. Perhaps it's the only type of honour that it's worth."

"For me it's the only kind that exists since I am with you."

"And that makes me very happy, my brave and honourable man." She kissed him. "Now that you have mentioned Jon Arryn... Didn't you comment something about him some days ago? That you suspected that he was assassinated too?"

"Yes. The signs indicate me that he didn't suffered a simple fever that made him pass away by chance. Do you know about the tears of Lys?"

"I think not, but that seems to be a sort of poison," ventured Sansa.

"Correct, Sansa," affirmed him. "It's undetectable. It's colourless, tasteless, odorless and it leaves
no traces. It causes a serious indisposition that results in death in a few hours, and those symptoms are easy to mistake for the ones of a severe fever. Isn't familiar to you someone who is fond of using poisons to get rid of anyone who stands in his way?"

Certainty lit in her eyes.

"Littlefinger. Why? I know it's nonsense to consider the motives for which Baelish commits his atrocities, as it's evident he likes spreading chaos, but Jon Arryn was a good Hand and brought peace for seventeen years. Too much boring and steady for Littlefinger's liking?"

"I think he wanted to start a war between your lineage and mine to create instability in the kingdoms. The Starks and the Lannisters never have got along and a simple brush was enough to light the spark."

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
'Meereen: Day 24 – 25

"And what connection had Jon Arryn's assassination with the war between our families?" asked Sansa, puzzled.

"I suspect that Littlefinger made a clandestine maneuver so your parents suspected the Lannisters. By means of Lysa, surely. In those times Lysa lived in King's Landing with her husband and her son and I bet a jug of wine that Littlefinger and her were lovers. Not because the ambitious counselor loved her, but because using her suited him. She was totally blind with sick love for him and she did everything he ordered her to. She poured the poison into her husband's cup and later, in some secret message, she induced her sister Catelyn to suspect that the Lannisters were involved in the Hand's death. One single time that my family wasn't involved, and they were pinned the blame on," joked Tyrion ironically.

"Then... Our happy years in Winterfell ended because that revolting bastard of Littlefinger fancied it?" spat Sansa. The fact that she was using dirty words was an indication of the rage she felt and he caressed her cheek lightly with the back of his fingers to calm her down with his touch.

"Remember that Littlefinger hated your father for having stolen Catelyn to him. With Arryn's assassination he obtained a multiple revenge. He eliminated one of Eddard's best friends, foreseeing that Robert would go in search of his almost brother Ned to ask him to be his new Hand. Baelish knew that your father was unsuited for the game of thrones and he sooner or later would be crushed by the intrigues. All his honour wouldn't save him from the treacheries of the Red Keep."

Sansa breathed in, making the respiratory exercises that helped her to relax.

"And why that lie about the Lannisters?"

"To arouse discord and mistrust in the Starks, as I signaled to you. He expected that, with the presence of our royal retinue in your castle, some conflict would burst, as effectively happened after Bran's accident. And there's nothing to start a big fire as effective as lighting it with a highly flammable fuel. He had taken care of it through the insidious lie told by Lysa to your mother. Lysa surely sent a crow to Winterfell."

Sansa was lost in her thoughts, frowning.

"And couldn't it turn out that Bran's accident... wasn't an accident? What if he was... thrown down? When he recovered consciousness a month later, he didn't remember what happened to him, so he neither could know if someone pushed him. Bran was an accomplished climber and he never had fallen down before. And what a coincidence that he fell and broke his spine just when the royal entourage were guests in Winterfell."

Tyrion gathered all his caution when he thought up about the explanation he was going to offer her.

"It's very possible that it happened the way you say, Sansa. Nothing must be discarded. In the retinue there were more than a few bums very capable of hurting a kid. But how and why that person did it, it's something that eludes me." He had no other choice than lying in that issue. He could not give Jaime away. Tyrion still feared that his brother had something to do, or at least he
was an accomplice. Sansa never must know about it. He asked for her forgiveness in his insides for hiding that to her. "Truly I'm very sorry, honey, for the destruction of your homely happiness. Wherever my relatives have passed through, there have been trouble and pain. I can't make you up for all they have done to you. And Littlefinger causes destruction anywhere he lays his eyes on, as well. Between him and the others have provoked the fall of your house. But at least we can draw comfort from the fact that my house neither is in its prime. Everyone gets their comeuppance in the end, as the proverb says."

"I have no words to express how much appalled and disgusted I am to know that that... bastard who proclaims his love for my mother, is the responsible for a great part of my family's tragedy. I'd feel a great joy seeing him ablaze one day, the same way he has turned my childhood home into ashes." Resentment brought a cold gleam to her blue irises.

Tyrion put his hands on both sides of her face and drew her to him, to make her look at him.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 24 – 25

"Maybe you'll see your wish fulfilled, or maybe not, Sansa. Life rarely is fair, as the gods aren't either, if they exist. I'll support you and help you in all you need, so you obtain what you deserve, my love. But don't consume with the fire of vengeance, Sansa. I've had, and still have, my own share of that and I know it leads you to darkness. I don't want darkness to swallow you, Sansa. I want you to stay with me in the light," pleaded him, caressing her cheeks with his thumbs.

Her harsh look softened instantly.

"Darkness can't swallow me because you're my light, Tyrion."

"And you're mine."

He attracted her face and kissed her to shoo away the ghosts and show her once more that he was hers forever.

In the morning, just after waking up, Sansa almost jerked up when she realized something important.

"The wedding is tomorrow! I have to finish the queen's wedding. And we must give a helping hand with the preparations. Once I finish the embroidery of the tricephalous dragon I have to go to Pod and Leena's rooms to offer them my help. Perhaps they need advice."

Sansa's animation amused Tyrion.

"Easy, honey. They surely have enough help by now. But it will be a great courtesy that you offer yourself. You know about those things."

"Of course I know about that, Tyrion. I've been trained to be a host and I know a few things about decoration, leading the service and pleasing the guests."

"You too know a bit about pleasing your husband, but your merit is that you scarcely were trained for that," jested him, suggestive, sliding his fingers over her forearm. "At least in how to please a very lecherous husband. You've had to learn everything very quickly. And you're a model student."

Sansa felt the heat in her low belly.

"I have a great teacher," whispered her, sitting on the bed before him and drawing him to her.

"I still can teach you some lessons, gorgeous," boasted him against her lips, to provoke her.

"Teach them to me," challenged her, licking his lips. Tyrion moaned and grabbed her head, intensifying the kiss. Sansa encircled him with her arms and legs, with the strong desire to possess him entirely burning her.

"Come here," said him, moving a little away from her. He climbed onto the bed. "I want you to straddle me, but turning your back on me." She did it. Tyrion had a great view of her back and her buttocks. "Now mount my cock." Sansa introduced it into herself and he shivered. "Bend a bit forward. You can rest on the bed with one hand and with the other one you can masturbate while I
fuck you. I want your ass within reach."

She couldn't see his face and she was imagining the lust in his green eyes.

While she was moving over him, Tyrion massaged her buttocks and her low back.

"That's it, darling. Very slowly. Feel me in your insides. Feel your fingers on your clitoris and my hands on your skin."

"I feel you, my love," affirmed Sansa.

He sucked one of his own fingers and slid it between her buttocks until grazing her anus. Very carefully, he began to push his finger inside of her.

"Oh!," moaned her, surprised.

"You weren't expecting it, were you, my horny wife? You didn't know that a woman can be doubly penetrated."

Sansa denied with her head, closing her eyes. The finger reached as deep as it could and he gave it a rocking movement, always slowly.

"You're alright?," asked him, as always prioritizing her well-being and comfort.

She nodded. "I'm very well, Tyrion. I like it very much."

"This way you feel filled up in both places. My cock fills you at your front and my finger do it behind. Though it can be done the other way round too, with a little practice and the proper posture. We'll try it another moment, you want?"

"Yes, my love. I want to try everything with you."

"Those words are my perdition, Sansa." He moved the finger faster and with the other hand squeezed a buttock. "There's very little left for your pleasure, honey. Finish for me. Merge with me."

She felt so filled up and complete with both appendices inside of her, and his voice excited her so, that her climax expanded furiously and Sansa cried his name at the top of her lungs.

"Very well, gorgeous. Shout. I want everyone to hear you're mine." He pulled out his finger and held her hips, helping her to move. "Ride me faster, gorgeous. I'm about to spill."

Sansa accelerated and immediately felt his cock shaking in her insides and his seed flooding her. Tyrion recited her name moaning and finally got relaxed beneath her. Lassitude after coitus invaded them and they embraced on the mattress.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 183

Meereen: Day 25

"Do you think there's a better way of starting the day than this?," asked Sansa, mischievously.

"There isn't a better way of spending the day than this," redressed him, grinning.

"You're right, as almost always." She kissed him on his nose, on his cheek and on the corner of his mouth.

"Eh! Almost always?," objected him, comically.

"I see you a little cocky, my lord," mocked her, with one of their usual jokes.

"No chance. I am very modest. Am I to blame for being so perfect?"

"Almost perfect," rebutted Sansa.

"Ah, that's so?" Tyrion began to tickle her and she tossed and turned on the bed, bursting in cackles. "Now you'll see who I am, rebellious wife." He went on tormenting her a little more with his fingers on her sides and she was struggling to get rid of his hands. "Say: my husband is perfect."

"Almost perfect!," exclaimed her, laughing incessantly.

That game got him again as hard as a horse in heat. "Very well. Here's your punishment." He penetrated her for the second time that morning and she laughed and moaned at the same time.

"Am I perfect or not?," asked him, thrusting into her. He rubbed her clit with a fast twist of his fingers and she arched against him. "Don't you think this fuck is perfect?"

She was enraptured. "Yes! Everything you do to me is perfect."

"Well, we have progressed a little at last," accepted him mockingly, panting. He spun giddily the thumb on her clit and she melted under his hand and around his cock, which was ramming into her with wild insistence. Later it was his turn and he let himself fall onto her, exhausted.

"You've been a very naughty girl," murmured Tyrion against her wet belly.

"And you've been almost perfect."

They laughed again and had to make the effort to get up and wash themselves before breakfast.

The morning tasks went with total normality. Tyrion observed that the city was adapting more or less to the coexistence between freedfolk and Meereenese people. Daenerys's five hundred guards patrolling the streets night and day prevented many conflicts from bursting.

It would be necessary much more time, probably decades, for the free citizens native to Meereen and the former slaves to really smooth things over and accept each other. But Tyrion doubted that they had so much time ahead for that. The most probable was that Daenerys set off long before to Westeros and the majority of freedfolk would follow her.
He wondered who would remain in command when the queen decided to leave her post. She would have to choose her successor or successors, but even so she could not be sure that her measures would work. In Astapor, she had appointed a Council of Sages which was quickly removed by the Butcher King, who in his paranoia believed that the Council would return them to slavery and he interpreted things in his delirious way, enslaving the former noble people and proclaiming the former slaves as Good Masters. Later, Cleon was killed and Astapor sank into a series of infightings for power, a king following another, and those had been the last reports that had arrived from the Red City. Daenerys had once received its emissaries with all her courtesy. They went to pay their respects on behalf of the kinglet of the moment and to reach an agreement with her, and she dealt with them with diplomacy, but she was not in the least in favour of supporting the atrocities which were being committed there. Tyrion knew that for her the issue of Astapor was a thorn in her flesh.

She thinks she turned her back on them and left them at the mercy of vengeful and vicious beasts. She didn’t have into account that the thirst for blood would shatter her plans of peace.

She had no intention to make the same mistake in Meereen, and because of that she took the decision of staying. But that situation was not definitive. And Tyrion had come to know her enough to be sure that she would not take lightly the issue of succession.

When the day comes, she’ll take with her half of the people who live here, and her Unsullied and Second Sons, who keep order. The Meereenese that stay here will suffer the sudden change in circumstances and they’ll have to manage through other ways. And who knows if disaster will spread as well, like in Astapor and Yunkai.

It was a dilemma difficult to solve, if it had any solution. He shook his head. Troubles one by one, as Varys once pointed out. Now we have more urgent matters.

Once finished his visits to the constructions and to the market, he headed for the Great Pyramid, where Sansa would be ending her lessons with the children and, nervous due to the preparations for the upcoming wedding, must be embroidering the queen’s dress, which had to be finished that very afternoon.
Chapter 184

Meereen: Day 25

Tyrion, apart from carrying out his routine tasks, had made sure that his orders for Sansa's nameday arrived or were finished in time. He had consulted the people who were going to give him what he needed and they confirmed him that all was going as planned. He would count on the day after the wedding and the following morning to get the presents ready. He hinted a smile of satisfaction and felt impatient as a kid, longing for seeing Sansa's expression when he took her by surprise.

As Sansa had quite a busy day and he did not want to distract her, he headed for the parade ground, with the intention of visiting Ser Barristan for a while.

"Good morning, Ser Barristan," greeted him.

"Good morning, Lord Tyrion."

"How is the training going?" It was the usual question Tyrion always asked him.

"It progresses apace. Every passing day it's more obvious that some of those kids have the makings of warriors. The others will never become warriors, knights or soldiers, but the fighting skills may be very useful for them and save their lives. Moreover, they are improving with the slingshot. A few girls are specially skilled with that weapon. Little Mhyraz is teaching them well," explained Barristan.

"He's a great boy. My wife and I have taken him in as a pupil, so he's a member of our house. And Dara too, that pretty Meereenese girl with jet black hair, who is assisting Sansa. These children need families and we wish to offer them a home, a house which they can call their own. We'll be their guardians and will take care of them. When we go back to Westeros, if any time Sansa and I recover Casterly Rock and Winterfell, they'll be their homes as well."

"It's very generous on your part. Those kids would give their lives for you. They know too well what means lacking almost all and suddenly being alone in the world, so they'll love you with devotion for all their lives."

Ser Barristan was smiling while he stared at the kids, who were focused on their arduous physical training.

"They're the future," commented him. "They'll follow us in the evolution of life, and the way they'll act will depend on how they're treated and educated. We have to give them the best of us if we want that there are many chances for them to give the best of them."

Tyrion thought of his father, he recalled the loneliness of his nights being a despised boy, when no one sang to him when he woke up crying out due to a nightmare, no one took him in his or her arms apart from the nursemaid to feed him, no one told him tales or said affectionate words to him. He remembered Tywin's and Cersei's sinister shadows hovering over him, both looking at him with cold hatred in their light eyes, as if they were counting the days he would take to die and they were hoping that those days were the least possible, to get rid of him as soon as they could. He recalled Cersei torturing him by stealth and he bearing the pain with quiet tears because he knew that no one except for Jaime would defend him and he, stubborn, did not give his eldest sister the satisfaction to go to Jaime with his complaints and so make her mock him branding him as a
He recalled one time, being very little, in which he got seriously ill with an illness typical of childhood and fever made him be delirious. In his hallucinations, his mother went to take care of him, she told him that she loved him, that she did not blame him for anything, and she encouraged him to be strong and resilient. After that vision caused by his illness, Tyrion decided that he would insist on living, contradicting the expectations of almost everyone around him. And that ferocious tenacity had accompanied him until the current days.

Tyrion thought that he had always drawn strength recalling that his mother, even after her death, had helped him. He was nearly sure that all that was only an illusion of his mind, confused with fever. He did not believe in any afterworld, he doubted the existence of the gods and of spirits that refused to abandon definitely the world of the living; he had seen, lived and read enough to have an almost absolute certainty that the intangible dimension, if it existed, was not compassionate towards the human beings. If it existed, Tyrion bet more than anything that it was a kingdom of darkness.

He had heard stories of black shadow which stabbed Renly Baratheon, supposedly materialized by Stannis's red priestess so he could be the indisputable candidate to the Iron Throne and thus he could claim it by force. It was said that he at last did not achieve his goal because Ser Davos, the Onion Knight, had persuaded him not to take with him the witch to the battle, and due to that the Lord of Light turned his back on him.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 185

Meereen: Day 25

Varys once told him how he was castrated and how the sorcerer who did it threw into the fire his amputated virile parts and a voice spoke from the flames. Because of that the Master of Whispers detested the dark arts.

Jorah had told him how a Lhazareen witch had snatched Daenerys's dothraki family. He himself had heard strange voices in the tent where the woman was carrying out the blood sacrifice with Drogo's horse and later, when he took his khaleesi in his arms because she was in premature labour and, ignoring what else he could do, he searched for the witch's help, in the tent he saw monstrous things he was unable to describe.

There were rumours too about Lord Beric Dondarrion, who had joined the rebel Brotherhood Without Banners formed after Eddard Stark's fall, had been resurrected several times by his friend, the red priest Thoros of Myr, a follower of the Lord of the Light whom Tyrion remembered because the man spent the days in King's Landing even more drunk than Tyrion himself and laid all the whores.

Tyrion was not sure of what to believe of all that, but what he was sure of was that he did not want to have anything to do with that sullen dimension.

Returning to the main topic he was dealing with, Tyrion was a boy with an unhappy childhood who did not let himself to be defeated by adversities. All right, he had to be fair; he did not know poverty, he did not starve, he grew up in one of the most prominent houses in the Seven Kingdoms. He never lacked material possessions. But he would have given all he had if only he could have his mother with him, if only he had been loved by his father.

Due to that he could understand those children's loss, children who in that winter day in Meereen were training in the parade ground of the Great Pyramid, having overcome terrible obstacles and misfortunes and who looked at the future with hope. Life was gifting them in those moments a chance to give the best they could. Tyrion wished they could make the most of it and he wished too that at least some of them fulfilled some of their dreams when they were older, something difficult because fate was jealous of dreams and used to steal them. He had had to defend his dream tooth and nail to win it and every day he made his best effort to protect it and take care of it.

Hope was one of the biggest promoters of the will to live and prosper. A simple dose was enough for people to carry on.

As Ser Barristan said, those kids were the future. And even though they did not have much more, they treasured something more valuable than gold: hope.

Both men were observing quietly the trainings, sank in their reflections.

"Do you remember when you were a lad like any of those, Ser Barristan?," asked Tyrion.

"As if it were yesterday, Lord Tyrion. Sixty-five years are nothing. In the summit of age we tend to think that youth will last forever, but one soon realizes that it won't. Years fly and it's not pleasant to get old being aware that you've wasted more than a half of your time, that you haven't done enough and no one will remember you with true affection." The old man's voice sounded sad. "I know I still can consider myself lucky. Not everything I've done has been bad or reprehensible and
I've been granted the mercy of serving Daenerys in my last years. It can't be said I've led a dull life. But my old age berates me for all I haven't done and for all I did wrong. I suppose that's the price to pay for becoming old.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 186

Meereen: Day 25

Tyrion gazed at him.

"If it's not an indiscretion... You told me you've loved too, what I don't doubt. Every person with a heart loves some time. Was Lady Ashara Dayne your great love?"

A flash of pain shot through the knight's blue eyes.

"She was very beautiful. Her hair was very dark, in contrast to her white complexion and her violet eyes, with a figure that made everyone turn to look at it. She was the sister of my comrade-in-arms, Ser Arthur Dayne, one of the best knights who have walked over the Seven Kingdoms. I admired him deeply. He was one of the scant true knights that have existed and it was an honour to be his brother in Aerys's Kingsguard."

"He must think the same of you," interspersed Tyrion, smiling. "You were a legend. Certainly Aerys wasn't the best of kings, but he had an unbeatable Kingsguard."

"We respected each other. Once I traveled to Starfall, the Daynes' settlement in Dorne, and she was there. For me she looked brightest than the morning star in the blazon of her house and I fell in love helplessly, but I didn't say anything to her. Some time later, she attended the Tourney of Harrenhal where supposedly Rhaegar got infatuated with Lyanna Stark. Some lords and knights competed for the honour of dancing with Lady Ashara, Ned Stark among them. I observed her from a distance, keeping an eye on everything she did. She was flirting with one and all, like any young woman extremely beautiful and aware of her power over men. She wasn't shy or modest and she displayed her charms like a flag. But, though her flirtatious behaviour aroused my jealousy, I respected her too much to think she could do something really improper. It's not forbidden for a marriable lass to flirt a little, dance and enjoy herself. If one doesn't really enjoy in early life, when will do? Years don't forgive."

"Might she have suspected that you loved her?", asked Tyrion, interested.

"It's possible. But if she did, I simply was one more on the queue of her admirers. I was a kingsguard and couldn't marry, so she was out of my reach."

"Did you love her more than you loved the fiancé you had before becoming a kingsguard?"

"Yes. Lady Denise Foote and I were engaged when we were just teenagers. For me she was like a sister. I think she fell in love with me, but I wasn't able to feel more than a fraternal affection for her, though I of course would fulfill my duty. But fate changed our course and finally Denise wedded a Fell of Felwood. I haven't seen her again for more than forty years."

"What do you think of Lady Ashara's suicide, Ser Barristan?"

"Several months after the Tourney of Harrenhal, she gave birth to a dead baby girl. Surely one of those admirers who besieged her during the tourney disgraced her. I couldn't assert that she was ravished, but when she returned from the event she was pregnant. Excuse me for what I'm going to say, as it's not my intention to offend Lady Sansa, but it was put about that Eddard Stark might have done something more than simply dance with her that night, though with the perspective of time I'm more and more sure that he didn't do it. In regard to the suicide, I think she didn't get
beyond her downfall."

"I ignore if my wife knows about those rumours, but if she doesn't, it won't be me who'll tell her. Her father's image is very damaged already and I'm not going to contribute to sadden my wife with rumours," said Tyrion firmly.

The old man addressed him an apologizing look.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
"You're doing the right thing preserving her from some pieces of gossip that are spread. Maybe Lord Eddard wasn't always so honourable as his fame declared, but I'm certain that he loved his sons and daughters. Do you know what makes me convince myself that he wasn't the father of Lady Ashara's daughter? That he wouldn't have turned a blind eye. If he carried his bastard son, Jon Snow, whose mother's identity is unknown, to Winterfell, I doubt he had abandoned Ashara to her fate if he had dishonoured her. In that period he wasn't still married to Lady Catelyn. After the tourney, Ned and Ashara didn't see each other again, I know that for certain. I think he limited to dance with her and, although he had felt attracted to her, he respected her. It had to be another who overstepped the bounds of propriety. The event was very crowded and lots of men had their eyes on the beautiful lady. I admit that when I found out about her indecent assault, for me everyone could be equally guilty, because she never revealed her lover's or rapist's identity. For a time jealousy and rage blinded me and I didn't distinguish which was the worst, if the fact that someone had abused her or the fact that she had given herself freely. I couldn't come to the truth and that was eating me away, because I was a naïve man in love and I attributed to her the purity all people blind with love wishes to see in the loved person. But perhaps she had let herself be drawn by her passion for a one-night lover and that was a betrayal for my fool heart, so I tried to discard it with all my will. Soon later, she threw herself into the sea from the Tower of Palestone Sword of Starfall and since then I haven't felt the same for any other woman again. My dreams of a love that couldn't be mine anyway, were shattered and all my impossible romantic aspirations ended there."

Tyrion felt a great curiosity to the interest the knight said that Eddard had shown toward the lady in the tourney and a smile was about to spread over his face.

Even the most honourable men have their dark secrets. My father-in-law wasn't always the serious Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North. Once he was very young and the flesh is weak. I should know.

But probably he would never discover the truth regarding his theory about Jon Snow's true parents or about the supposed love affair between Ned and Lady Ashara Dayne, so he only could conjecture.

But it's obvious that no one is made of stone, concluded him, recalling that proverb which he liked so much for its accuracy.

"You had your oath, your sword and your legendary fame, Ser Barristan. I have Sansa. Each one finds his reason to fight for. All survivors are closed some avenues but they are opened others. And you wouldn't have gone so far if you didn't have your reason, a motive you considered greater than love."

"Once I wasn't very sure that there was anything greater than love, Lord Tyrion. And if I am totally honest, I still doubt there is. What I felt when I loved Ashara was stronger than any vow, any oath, any great deed with the sword. It reached deeper than everything else. But I remembered why I became a member of the Kingsguard and recovered my lost balance."

I agree with the old man that love reaches deeper than everything else. It must have been arduous for him to give up on it after having known how it is. And that taking into account that he didn't even taste it in all its facets. He didn't caress Ashara's body or found pleasure inside of her.
He wondered if the knight had known some woman physically. If he had given in to nights of lust with a lady of a minor house, a whore, a tavern or kitchen wench, a peasant or a merchant’s wife. But he kept his curiosity for himself. It would be too much rude to set out that.

He didn't imagine him whoring with any wench, as to Tyrion that frivolous behaviour didn't fit either Eddard Stark. But, and he resorted to another of his favourite proverbs: everything is possible.

"For me evidently there isn't anything greater, Ser Barristan, but I admire you. I admire the strength that has made you stand up after you falls and, after being humiliated and rejected, go over half the world in solitary to come and serve a queen who hardly has entered adulthood. Any other in your place who had suffered such a denigrating treatment and had been deprived from his title of kingsguard, would have devoted himself to get drunk and lay all the whores he could until ending dead in some stinking alleyway."

"An oath is sacred, Lord Tyrion. Maybe there aren't many sacred things in this world, but an oath has power. Probably that's a mere illusion in the mind of a fool old man like me, but I'm the sort that believes that the given word is an unbreakable bond, and who breaks it condemns himself to eternal punishment. Oaths are a very ancient magic and today very few people believe in them. But believe me, its words tie more tightly than any chain. And because of that I came to search for Daenerys. Because I gave my word. And I'll fulfill it until my death."

Tyrion had Jaime in mind. He knew that the old man despised him for breaking his vows in order to save half a million people.

What happens when the taken oath is invalidated because it's impossible to go on fulfilling it without harming seriously other people? Does it have validity still?

He did not utter any of that. The knight would not understand. He was too much upright and had not seen himself in the dilemma of having to choose between his honour and his conscience.

Or has he? Have you had to choose some time and you don't want to admit it? Reality isn't like legends. Everyone has to choose some time. And everyone has something to be ashamed of. You yourself have admitted before me that you aren't proud of all you've done. And it's understandable. It's normal.

Precisely because of that he mustn't judge Jaime, least of all. But it was true too that very few knew Aerys's true plans and his intention to burn the whole King's Landing. If they had known... Would they think the same?

Tyrion decided to let the matters take their course, as Jaime did not need or want to be excused by anyone. What was done could not be undone and he carried his nickname of Kingslayer like a shield, exactly as Tyrion carried his nicknames of Imp, Halfman and Demon Monkey. They bothered them, but not Jaime nor Tyrion gave to their enemies the satisfaction of showing it.

Tyrion chose another direction in the conversation, to avoid bringing to light the topic about Jaime, which was gliding quietly over them.

"I gave Sansa my word in the sept. And I too will fulfill it until my death."

"We are men of our word, Lord Tyrion. Each one of us in our own way. And we'll fulfill it until our last day."

"Until our last day," asserted Tyrion, pronouncing the sentence the same way as all the new black
brothers of the Night Watch when they dedicated their lives to a cause much greater than all of them.
Meereen: Day 25

Sansa was embroidering the ornament on the queen's dress and a brunette girl was with her, observing. She must be... How had Sansa said she was called? Ah, yes, Cloe. Both girls stood up when they saw him coming in and Cloe bent in a respectful greeting. Tyrion got near his wife, who bent to kiss him.

"Good afternoon, master," said the queen's dressmaker.

"Good afternoon. Your name's Cloe, isn't it?"

"Yes, master." The girl was looking at him with undisguised curiosity. With no doubt she knew, like everyone, that the queen had a dwarf counselor married to a pretty and tall red-haired. Seeing him with her own eyes had to be surprising for her, thought him, sighing. Thank goodness this isn't King's Landing. Here no one mocks Sansa or me, at least not in our faces.

Tyrion examined Daenerys's dress.

"It's very cute, Cloe. It must've been very difficult to make it, but you've done it really well. I know by my wife that needlework is a task that requires a great dedication."

Cloe blushed with the praise.

"Thank you, master. I learnt from my mother, but I started a few months ago and she's dead, so I haven't continued with the learning of the job."

"You have talent. With a little help you'll acquire the knowledge you're lacking. And Lady Sansa is the proper person for that."

Sansa smiled at him.

"Oh, yes, she is. She's the best dressmaker I've met, and my mother was very good, but she never had to make so nice and complicated dresses as this," said Cloe.

"Well, I'll leave you alone so you can continue. This is going to be a busy afternoon and there's no time to lose."

"We'll talk during lunch, my love," said Sansa to him, with the smile that melted him, and promising silently that she would compensate him later for not taking care of him yet. He returned her look, as if saying: I'm keeping you to your word.

He headed for the adjacent hall and, thinking about what he might do to pass the time, he remembered that in a week it would be the first day of the next month and by then he must have ready all the monetary assignments to be set aside for the varied groups of freedfolk, dothraki, soldiers and the queen's personal staff. He would have to request the queen's express authorization to gain access to the Crown coffers and distribute the money. He should have at his disposal a heavy safekeeping and that day many city guards would watch the people's comings and goings to prevent robberies.

It was necessary that he noted down in detail all the monetary consignments and, for that, the day of the distributions he would write down the name of each representative responsible for collecting
the assignment of his group. Tyrion would make a mark in each given consignment to make sure that each one had been given his fraction and prevent possible frauds.

With Kerro's pieces of information, he had already calculated how many groups of each brotherhood and collective there were, and with that information he would avoid that any of them tried to collect too much. He did not think that someone was bold enough to try such a wicked deed, at risk of dealing with the queen's justice. But just in case, it was better to be cautious.

Later he would prepare in the account book the whole list with the assignments, which would include the pieces of information about the brotherhoods or collectives, leaving gaps for the names of the people responsible for carrying the money.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 25

For the moment he had no more to do and there was still a while left until lunch, so he decided it was a good moment to check certain details for Sansa's nameday. As he could not get her out of the pyramid to take her to a nice place, because it was dangerous and moreover... Where might he take her to in the overcrowded Meereen? Due to that the plan consisted of recreating a dream place in one of the rooms of the pyramid. To achieve that he had chosen a large and well illuminated hall located five floors above, equipped with a small landscaped terrace similar to the queen's but much more limited, which must have been used by some of the Great Masters. Tyrion had sent Mhyraz to consult Daenerys if she gave him her permission to occupy the room during Sansa's nameday, and the queen had given it. Mhyraz told him that the Mother had smiled when she heard his request and indicated to him that he conveyed Lord Tyrion her satisfaction for his greatly caring attitude towards his wife.

Tyrion imagined that Daenerys's namedays probably were skipped in her childhood, as he did not regard Viserys as a sentimental person. It would not have been at least until her marriage to Drogo that she would start to know what was to be lavished for the fact of turning one year older among loved people. The dothraki celebrated noisily any event, because that was their way to celebrate life and the luck of going on riding one more day over the prairies of the Great Grass Sea. The birthday of their silver-haired khaleesi was a reason as good as any other.

The room itself would be the first surprise. He would decorate it with the assistance of Pod, Leena and the children and, when he took Sansa there, the other gifts would appear one by one. He wanted to show his deep love for her and to remind her how happy she made him, and above all he wanted to make her very happy.

As in that moment he felt lazy to rise five floors to be there for just some minutes in which he anyway could not do anything as his orders had not arrived yet, he decided to get away to the contiguous room to jerk off. When he had seen Sansa after the entire morning out, he had got hard and with the issue of Daenerys's dress, the visit Sansa wanted to pay to Pod and Leena and the meeting of the Council that was going to be carried out that night, he would have to say goodbye to sex at least until the early morning, if at those hours they were not too tired to perform it.

Well, as much as tired... I'm never tired for that, thought him with lewdness.

He went to his corner, lowered his pants and breeches and grabbed his cock. Slowly, he moved his hand up and down along it and closed his eyes. He did not want to rush, because Sansa would be busy until lunch and, as he surely could not possess her during the whole afternoon or part of the evening, he was not in a hurry to finish. Later he would endure long hours of sexual abstinence.

He imagined her naked, recalling every inch of her skin, the generous curves of her breasts, her rosy nipples that got erect when she got aroused. The pubis with the reddish curly hair that resembled cupper threads. The silky and perfectly shapely legs, surprisingly strong when they encircled him to press him against her. The unblemished white and smooth back, without a single mole or mark. The bottom with so rounded buttocks and the lovely dimples of her lower back, which drove him crazy and incited him to throw himself over her to kiss them, lick them and spill his seed onto them.

His hand was moving slowly around his manhood, building up his pleasure little by little, over a low heat.
He thought of her sweet slit always soaked for him, of the button of her eager clit that hardened and vibrated under the touch of his fingers, his lips and his tongue. It was the spot of her highest delight, as it was for any woman. For many of them it was not enough to be penetrated to peak; they needed to be stimulated on that tiny hummock and then they got crazy and opened themselves like flowers at dawn. But the preliminary games were important too, the prior excitement which disposed them towards intercourse or oral sex.

He recreated in his mind the flavour and the smell of her intimate folds, he imagined himself devouring them while she moaned with total surrender, with her legs widely opened and her feet resting on his shoulders, and she was grasping his long blonde hair to guide his movements on her most sensitive area, and she finally exploded beneath his mouth, he felt the contractions of her muscles and she cried out and crushed him until the assaults of her completion subsided and Sansa got relaxed, happy and grinned, drawing him to her to rest by his side.

Tyrion reached his top and his seed sprang up, staining the floor and his hand with each spasm of his penis. He panted quietly, enjoying the sensation and missing his wife's body, which made the sensation rise to infinite. He waited some minutes to recover and then he cleaned everything and tidied up his clothes and hair. He went out to the corridor and returned to his rooms. The two girls were still immersed themselves in their needlework but, when he appeared at the door of the bedroom, Sansa realized what time it was.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
“We'd better continue later, Cloe. We've nearly finished the embroidery. Have you noticed carefully how it's made?”

“Yes. I think the next embroidery will be better.”

“You have to practice and they'll be perfect,” encouraged Sansa.

“I'll do that. I'm going now,” announced Cloe.

“Come back in a while and we'll finish the dress.”

“I'll come as soon as I can, mistress... excuse me, Sansa.”

Tyrion smiled, amused. It was difficult for the girl to speak to Sansa as an equal, but he knew his wife had encouraged the girl to do it. With time she would get used to it.

The young freed girl left and Sansa turned to him, taking his hand.

“Oh, Tyrion, I'm sorry for spending so little time with you today,” regretted her.

“Don't worry, honey. We must do what needs to be done, I don't want to distract you.”

“How much time is left for Mhyraz to come?,” asked her, looking at the light which entered through the window to calculate the rough hour.

“Scarcely some minutes, darling.”

Her suggestive look lit the fire inside of him, as if he had not just spilled himself on his own hand a quarter of an hour ago. She always turned him very horny.

And besides, my father was right in one thing. I'm a lustful beast. Writhe in your grave, Tywin. Your dwarf son spends his life fucking. Though I must admit that, thanks to you, I don't need whores any more. You gave Sansa to me and that's one of the scarce things for what I'm grateful to you. Perhaps if you had devoted yourself to do the same, to fuck more often, you wouldn't have been a fucking bastard your entire life.

If the remembrance of his father were not so bitter, Tyrion would wonder if Tywin had shared a gratifying sex life with Joanna. But he was not in the mood to face that, because he felt indifferent towards his father's feelings. Regarding Joanna, Tyrion felt other way.

I wish my mother were happy and had enjoyed it. I have no idea of how was for her to live together with Tywin, but I hope he were able to love her as she deserved. At least her, as he didn't do it with anyone else.

“A pity, my love. I have some things in mind that I wanted to do with you,” dropped Sansa with her look of feigned innocence.

He already felt the pressure against his pants.

“Oh, Sansa, look how you've driven me. After lunch we should have a quick lay because I'll be
unable to endure without getting my cock into you," said him, with his dirty way of speaking, which he loved to use when he was aroused.

"I'll get angry with you if you don't. I want you to get it into me," blurted her, putting his hands on her breasts.

Mhyraz knocked and they jerked up, laughing, flushed with desire.

When Mhyraz cleaned the table, Tyrion asked him politely how the trainings with the slingshot and his routine in the pyramid with the other children were going and, as soon as the boy left, Sansa did not waste a single second to slip off her undergarment and open her bodice. She sat on the low chair and he lowered his pants and penetrated her with a grateful sigh. She stimulated her clit and he caressed her breasts.

"Oh, gorgeous," moaned him. "I've missed your slit and your tits since this morning. For me that's a long time. You have a very hot husband," said him, moving in and out of her.

"And you have a very hot wife," murmured her panting, increasing the movement of her fingers on her spot of pleasure. "Say dirty things to me, Tyrion," asked her.

"You fuck divinely, Sansa. My cock sings with delight inside of you. I want to spill in your insides until I fill you up with seed."

"Oh, yes. Tyrion!," shouted her, melting, moving her hips against him to feel him deeper.

"Very well, honey. Give it to me. That's it. Now I'm going to give my seed to you. You want it?"

She nodded, panting after her pleasure.

"Oh, Sansa! Take my seed," exclaimed him, shivering and pressing against her, irrigating her insides with the warm fluid.

They rested for some seconds in the same posture and he pulled out his penis, reluctantly as always.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 25

They tidied themselves up the best they could and Cloe knocked to carry on with the queen's dress. Tyrion kissed Sansa before leaving her with her tasks and, in a good mood and happy because of their intense sexual encounter, he told himself that he would start to write down the consignments of money in the account book. He sat down in the adjacent hall, with his things scattered before him on the table, and he applied himself until he heard the girls commenting with enthusiasm that the dress was finished. He took away the books, the papers, the quill and the bottle of ink, and he went to the bedroom to compliment the finish of the garment.

"It's gorgeous," praised him, examining the tricephalous red dragon which stood out on the waist. "The whole dress is amazing."

"Thank you," said the girls at the same time. Sansa added: "We have to take it to the queen. Would you accompany us, Tyrion?"

"Of course."

He opened the door, glanced at both sides of the corridor and, after that little precautionary measure, gave way to them gallantly.

One never knows who can hide behind the shadows of these long and cavernous corridors.

They walked up to Daenerys's private rooms and Missandei cleared the way for them.

"Oh, how nice," exclaimed the queen's maid.

Daenerys heard the voices and went to welcome them.

"Ah, you've finished it. Give it to me, Cloe." The girl gave her the suit and the queen spread it out to look at it. "Excellent work. Congratulations to you both." The addressed girls made a bow of gratitude. "Help me to try it on, please. I want to see how it fits me."

All the women went to the bedroom and Tyrion stayed in the hall, smiling. He walked close to the glass door which looked out onto the gardens. The wedding would be celebrated there. The queen's landscaped terrace was ideal to celebrate events privately. It had palm trees, orange trees and lemon trees and some flower beds with roses of different colours, that were resisting to the change of season and were blooming profusely. In the center of the garden there was a forged arbour. As the weather was expected to be sunny and steady, it would be pleasant to be outside in the middle of the day.

It was not possible to have a better place for a wedding. And the number of guests was appropriate too. Just enough.

Tyrion always had hated weddings. Especially those absurdly multitudinous, squandering a huge amount of money in food, of which a great part was thrown away, or in outlandish decorations or in musicians and other shows of which at least a half were in excess. He considered ridiculous to spend so much money for a simple day in which everything was pretence, façade, the groom and bride feigning a love they did not feel, the guests throwing at each other disguised daggers, plotting intrigues and treacheries.
But his friends' wedding was going to be very different. For love, simple and with the presence of the closest acquaintances. For the first time Tyrion would feel at easy in such event. No one would mock him. There would not be shameful parodies of jousts with dwarves riding pigs or toy horses.

The women's stir was heard in the hall and Tyrion went back.

"Thanks for all," was saying Daenerys, again with her ordinary dress. "From today, Cloe, you'll make all my clothes. If you need help, send word to Lady Sansa, if she's available."

"Of course, Your Grace. I'll help Cloe as long as she needs me," assured Sansa.

"Great. Well, I won't keep you any longer. Cloe, I'll prepare for you a close hall, that will be your residence and your place of work, so you don't have to come and go out of the pyramid constantly, with the risk that brings. When you have to go out, send word and I'll assign one of the guards to you."

"Very well, Mother." The girl bowed.

"As for you, Lady Sansa, I'm proud of your talent. Soon a lot of people will have clothes more cute than those of the Great Masters. The orphans and the guest children will parade around," said her, smiling humorously.

Sansa blushed.

"It's nothing to get excited about, Your Grace. But I want them to be wrapped up."

"Good. Lord Tyrion, remember the meeting of tonight. I'll try not to prolong it too much. Tomorrow will have to show our best aspect."

"I don't forget it, Your Grace."

"You can retire. Have a good afternoon."

"Same here, Your Grace."

The couple bowed and Missandei accompanied them to the door.
Chapter 192

Meereen: Day 25

They went to Pod and Leena's rooms, that were a mess. Leena moved from side to side searching for this and that and several girls were following her. Sansa smiled and went to give a helping hand. They were preparing the ornaments, which later they would have to distribute and hang over the gardens. Moreover, Leena was hesitating about the hairstyle she would wear. Their men left them on their own, in a complete loss regarding everything that involved decoration matters. They took a seat and Pod served two cups of wine.

"Look at them, how much they enjoy all this bustle. To tell the truth, I have enough with a chair acceptably comfortable to sit on and with a table on which I can eat. I don't care if the place is more austere than a Northern castle," said Tyrion.

"Neither I," corroborated Pod. "All that will be hanging there only for some hours and it'll have to be removed the day after. But for them it's important, I suppose."

"They need to care for all the details. They have an aesthetic sense we haven't been taught to the same extent. It must be that, because of being the ladies of their houses, they feel responsible for the appearance, for making sure that the chambers offer a pleasant impression and that the people in their charge or that are their guests are comfortable and well lavished. We can consider it nonsense, but all that may have more importance than it seems. Without exaggerating, of course." A grotesque memory came to his mind. "Do you recall that figure of a giant lion from which the dwarves of Joffrey's wedding came out?" He grimaced.

"Of course I recall it," asserted Pod, smiling.

"It was a monstrous thing of a dreadful bad taste. It only could be an idea of someone so discreet as my nephew," said Tyrion, sarcastic. "That wedding was a complete horror."

"What happened to the book was a pity, my lord. I know how much you valued it."

"I was a stupid. How did it occur to me to gift a book to an ignorant snot who wouldn't have read more than a few sentences together in all his life? And besides, one of the most valuable books that exist. I should've rumbled he would commit such an atrocity. The little scumbag didn't feel respect for anything and hated me. Unless I had gifted him a crossbow or a dagger, he wouldn't have accepted anything which came from me. And even so, if I had given a weapon to him, he'd have used it to torture and kill. I didn't want to have that fact weighing on my conscience, the guilt of putting on his hands a weapon with which causing more damage than he already caused."

"You did your duty as his uncle, my lord. Only he was responsible for what he did with your gift."

"I know, but even so... Due to my bad decision there are only three copies of Lives of Four Kings left."

"Surely they're in a safe place, my lord," encouraged Pod.

"I hope so," sighed Tyrion. He looked at the boy smiling again. "But you didn't spend such a bad day as I did. You at least enjoyed the views." He was referring to the female dancers and contortionists who had enlivened a part of the event. The boy's eyes had almost popped out of their sockets staring at them. One of the girls who had taken his virginity in Littlefinger's brothel was a
contortionist who was able to perform the Meereeneese knot, or that was what she announced to the clients. "Have you heard of the Meereeneese knot, Pod?" asked Tyrion suddenly, amused with the boy's extreme flush, that matched Sansa's when she reddened. "I've heard of it but I've never seen it. The stories tell that it comes from here. I once read that some slave girls were trained hard so their bodies kept very flexible and they entertained the guests in the Great Masters' feasts, carrying out really complicated contortion acts. Moreover, it's not difficult to guess which other goals their skills had."

Pod kept silent, but that was sufficient answer for Tyrion, who did not force beyond the boy's shyness. The day Tyrion rewarded him for saving his life in the Battle of Blackwater, gifting him an afternoon of pleasure in the brothel, he got so stunned when the boy took back untouched the purse of coins, that he and Bronn asked him about his supernatural lovemaking skills, but they hardly pulled out of him any information and at last, frustrated, they had to let him alone. Tyrion never had met a whore who rejected gold.

Well, except for Shae when I offered her the golden chains. That still caused him a sting of shame. He had offended her taking for granted that she would sell herself. He humiliated her.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 25

In spite of his great timidity, Pod undoubtedly had a talent. Or more than one. Since the incident in the brothel all the women in the Red Keep whispered when he walked past them, but not with mockery as when it was Tyrion whom they saw, but with admiration and curiosity. Surely, if he had wished, the boy might have screw all the women he had fancied, as they were falling at his feet. There was not anything like a rumour going round about a handsome lad's great sexual deeds to make practically all women fall like ripe apples.

Finally the girls announced that they were going to take the ornaments to the queen's gardens and they had to call more children to help to carry them. Tytion and Pod shared their part of the load too and they rose up along the ramps and walked through the corridors towards Daenerys's rooms, who was absent, but Missandei opened for them, as she was fully abreast of their visit.

They got down to work and, following Leena's instructions, they put the ornaments. Tyrion had to admit that the gardens had gained in beauty. Some of the ornaments were lanterns which suited gracefully hanging on the branches of the trees. Evening fell and Leena apologized for having kept them for so long. Everyone went down to their chambers to wait for dinner.

The Council meeting was just after dinner, so Tyrion bade Sansa farewell with regret and with the erection against his trousers, because he did not have enough time to relieve himself with her.

"Later we'll have a historic shag, my love," said him after the goodbye kiss.

"Won't you be too tired, oldie?," joked her.

"This oldie will catch you later and you'll see, honey." He gave her another quick kiss and left.

In Daenerys's private hall only Hizdhar was missing, who arrived some minutes later, apologizing for his delay. When everyone was assembled, they sat around the table and the queen took the floor.

"Several matters claim us here today but, out of consideration for the wedding of our good friends Podrick and Leena, I'll try not to expand excessively. Let's begin with those that concern us closely. The school will be opened this very week, with the attendance of three hundred and fifty-four children, plus the thirty guests, and the twenty five more suitable teachers have been selected. The halls are prepared and have the necessary materials for the lessons. As it was agreed, the whole group will come five days a week and it will be watched by the soldiers. The teachers will form a brotherhood of teachers and they'll receive a monthly assignment for their dedication. Lord Tyrion, you'll calculate the amount that will be given to them."

"In a week it will be the first day of the next month and all the monetary consignments will be given to the groups, Your Grace. I'll need access to the Crown coffers and I'll keep thorough records of all the payments. Moreover, that day Kerro and I will need a strict surveillance to prevent robberies and frauds," pointed out Tyrion.

"Of course. Gamble on it," guaranteed her. "The works are going apace and soon some of the houses will be finished. Tell Kerro, Lord Tyrion, that he should start to select the families that are going to move to those houses. They must have a member at risk of succumbing to the cold, like
frail elderly and little children."

"I'll tell him, Your Grace," said him.

"Very soon too the thirty families in the most disadvantaged situation will move to the pyramid and their rooms are being fitting out. They have been made aware that they must contribute to the good coexistence in the pyramid and under no circumstances they must act in a harmful way towards their neighbours or the rest of the inhabitants of this building."

The counselors nodded.

"The season of the fighting arenas will be begun next month. Hizdhar has organized it efficiently and he has chosen all the fighters who have slipped through the net. In less time than originally planned the fighting championships in the minor amphitheatres will start, and those qualified will pass to the final in Daznak's amphitheatre. In ten days the first contests will be disputed, two per day. As in the amphitheatres a representative of the Crown must preside over the box, Hizdhar himself will do it in one, and I need someone else who replaces me in the other amphitheatre. I'll attend to the final in Daznak’s."

"I'll do it, Your Grace," offered Daario.

Daenerys dedicated him a discreet smile and she exchanged an understanding look with the sellsword.

Both have this planned, of course. I think is great that he has offered himself to endure the torture of remaining in the box for hours. Though surely for him the vision of blood and death is much less unpleasant than for me, thought Tyrion.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
"Very well, captain. Keep alert and don't lower your ward," recommended the queen.

"I never lower it, my queen." He smiled at her and she blushed, what was not very difficult due to the whiteness of her cheeks.

"And now, the matters that go beyond the ramparts of the city. I'm going to let loose Rhaegal and Viserion. I've already sent crows and emissaries to alert the neighbour settlements and, as soon as their replies start to arrive, I'll set them free. I suppose that people in general won't take it very well, but with the security advice I've spread it should be enough to prevent big problems with the dragons. Anyway, I've ruled that, if any shepherd loses a head of cattle because of the dragons, he will be permitted to come to complain and he'll be given a compensation, after which he will be taken to the temple of Graces so the priestesses bless him and he'll have to donate to the temple three quarters of the compensation. That way I'll make sure that those who complain are telling the truth and they aren't mere fakes. Who really loses any of his animals won't have to lie before the gods of Ghis and will be willing to keep a quarter of the compensation, because he'll need it to replace the lost beast. Fakes will risk to lie before the gods and a quarter of their compensation is too little money to be worthy of all the swindle."

She turned to look at Ser Barristan, who returned her a nod. It was obvious that she had already discussed that question with the old knight.

Maybe some dudes will take the risk, but the majority won't dare to deceive Daenerys or arouse the rage of the gods for a handful of coins which aren't worth the bother. Most of these people believe in the gods of Ghis and they're superstitious. And they are afraid of the Breaker of Chains as well. All of them know the stories about her conquests. I doubt they've forgotten what she did in Astapor or the one hundred and sixty-three Great Masters crucified for having killed the same number of slave children and put them on Daenerys Stormborn's way.

"After the reports about Drogon's behaviour during these last weeks, I've come to the conclusion that dragons don't attack people indiscriminately. They're fierce and untameable, but clever, and unless they are provoked, they limit to go past and hunt animals to eat. If they're left alone, they do the same. Keeping an eye on the flocks and the children, preventing these from mixing with the cattle, accidents could be avoided. That's what I want the neighbour settlements to understand. Rhaegal and Viserion can't go on being locked and one day they'll smash the dungeons to escape. The only available solution is to let them loose, like their brother, and they'll lead a normal life like any wild beast. If people ignore them, nothing will happen. The worst that might happen would be that the dragons eat some of their sheep or goats."

"Let's hope it turns out to be as you say, Your Grace," said Hizdhar, whose fear for the dragons was evident. Daario shot him a quick glimpse of contempt.

"I'm sure it will. I know my dragons better by now."

Hizdhar nodded, not very reassured.

"From beyond the sea, a crow has come from Elyria. Nearly all the ships of the Dornish fleet stopped off in the isle and, after the count, only three are still missing. It's possible that, if nothing serious has happened to them, they reach the rest. But the worrying thing is that Tolos, New Ghis
and Old Ghis are sending war carracks to block Slaver's Bay. Our vessels won't have other choice than eluding them or fighting them. Captain Gilean is sailing to Tolos and, if he comes upon one of those carracks, his mission is going to be hindered. I hope the Dornish ships go to his aid as soon as they can." Daenerys's unease with that news was evident. "We can't afford to lose our merchant captain or to let our fleet be lessened."

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 195

Meereen: Day 25

"You could try in those cities the same ploy than in Yunkai. Incite the slaves to rebellion, as the slavers depend on them and they won't be anything without them. What will they do if their slaves refuse to obey and join against their masters?"

"We can try, but the results could take months, in case the ploy is successful. Tolos, New Ghis and Old Ghis are very far," said the queen.

"For now it's the only we can do, Your Grace. And to try to elude the enemies' forces."

"Yes," sighed Daenerys. "It's something about which we'll have to reflect at length." She did a pause. "Regarding Westeros, it has come to my attention that the candidates for Lord Commander of the Night Watch have declared their candidacy and the vote will start in short. Jon Snow's best friend, Samwell Tarly, has carried out a cunning campaign, supported by my great-granduncle, maester Aemon. I hope they have achieved to tip the balance in favour of Snow. He's the most suitable to cope with the problems experienced in the north, beyond the Wall, and who understands best that the Free Folk are frightened of the White Walkers. Almost any other black brother turns his back on them without the slightest hesitation, and they forget that the wildlings are as human beings as them. In fateful times like these, we all must unite against the evil forces. The rivalities among nations and houses are nonsense compared to what is coming from the lands of eternal winter."

"Very true, Your Grace," said Ser Barristan.

"Stannis is staying as a guest in the Wall and is holding Mance Rayder as a prisoner. In King's Landing, the queens and Ser Loras are still prisoners in the cells of the Red Keep, awaiting the sparrow's justice. Their condition is terrible, because they are forced into extreme fasting, they're not allowed to wash themselves or change clothes, their cells aren't cleaned and they don't have pallets or blankets to cover themselves, like the treatment common prisoners receive. Their mood won't take long to break down and we'll see how all that results."

Where's your pride now, dear sister? Ragged, hungry, thirsty and covered in your shit. Who would have said it?

"Lord Kevan Lannister has decided to go back to King's Landing to give a helping hand to king Tommen, who doesn't know what to do and lacks character to face up to the sparrow's. The boy isn't to blame for being kind-hearted, but it's obvious he's not intended for wearing a crown."

Poor Tommen. You should've taken him far away, sister. If you really wanted to protect your children, you wouldn't sit them on the Iron Throne.

"Theon Greyjoy has been brutally tortured by Ramsay Snow, newly named Bolton, who has brain washed him and has turned him into a waste."

Tyrion did not know if being glad for for the twisted luck of the son-of-a-bitch from the Iron Islands, or if pitying his terrible fate. Roose Bolton's bastard son was one of the worst sadistic people in Westeros, surpassing Joffrey, as Ramsay was a very smart and nasty piece of work.

"And now, my lords, we have the question of the lodging of the new freedfolk who are arriving
every day. We can't build more constructions. Of course, it's unfeasible to build outside the ramparts, because those areas would be exposed to external attacks. The ramparts are intended for protecting all of us, and we can't afford to demolish them even partially to make the city bigger and reconstruct them afterwards, what would waste an amount of time and resources we don't have. We can't weaken our precarious position."

Tyrion was thinking an idea over.

"Proclaim that all the houses that take newcomers in will pay a half of the taxes. Maybe that encourages them to be hospitable, even though they have to be pressed together a little more. We can take in more people in the Great Pyramid too. We'll make up for the loses in the taxes with the profits, because more people produce more with their work."

"All right, Lord Tyrion. When the freedfolk of the camps begin to move to the houses, word will be spread and they'll be encouraged to be hospitable with the newcomers. After all, the houses won't belong to them. What they'll do will be to use them, so everyone has the same right, and I'll let them know so. Thus no one will believe himself or herself the owner of the house where he or she is going to live. And we're all equal before winter."

"Exactly, Your Grace." Tyrion addressed her an encouraging smile.

"Well. We have debated all the urgent matters until today. On successive days, reflect carefully on all we have spoken. As I promised you, I won't keep you more time. Go rest and tomorrow we'll meet in much more relaxed circumstances," said Daenerys, smiling. "Sleep well."

"Same here, Your Grace," said everyone in unison, and one by one they left the hall.
Meereen: Day 25

Sansa had dozed off in the bed while she was reading, but she woke up when she heard Tyrion coming in and rubbed her eyes to clear her head from the webs of drowsiness. He surely was eager for sex and she was longing for pleasing him and that he pleased her. She quickly slipped off her undergarment. She was not wearing anything beneath the wool robe and she knew he would be driven mad as soon as he noticed. There were only a couple of days left for the end of her moon period and she was bleeding little. She had washed herself before he was back.

"Hello, honey," greeted him from the door of the bedroom.

"Hello, my love," corresponded her, sitting on the edge of the bed.

He gazed at her eyes slightly swollen by the nap she had had while she was waiting for him. She's so adorable when she's newly awake...

He went close to her, put himself between her legs and planted his hands on her thighs. She bent a little to kiss him.

Then Tyrion realized she was naked under the robe.

*Oh, gods.* He inhaled deeply and started to uncover the smooth legs, moving away the fabric made of soft light-blue wool.

"Dear me, gorgeous. I see you were waiting for me impatiently," murmured him, caressing the thighs from bottom to top. The copper-coloured hair of the pubis was attracting him strongly.

"Very impatiently," signaled her, licking her lips. He could not resist that gesture.

"Oh, Sansa." He took her head with both hands and bent it toward him to kiss her with an absolutely primitive hunger. He sought her tongue and she offered it to him with a moan. He then lowered his hands over her neck, her breasts and her belly and untied the knot of the robe belt. Without stopping the kiss, he opened the garment and lowered it over her arms, until getting her completely naked. He moved away a little and stared at the breasts, that never stopped causing him a quiver of delight. He drew her closer to him to cuddle them with his mouth. Sansa enclosed him instintively with her legs and embraced him, tangling her fingers in his hair. She threw her head back and moaned.

"Oh, Tyrion, I'm yours. Take me." He felt in his avid mouth the vibration of her sweet voice flooded with desire.

"You're mine, Sansa. And I'm yours. I want to fuck you," whispered him against the erect nipples.

"Do it, my love," invited her. She began to undress him and he helped her to do it faster. Then she jumped down of the bed and knelt before him. She slid her hands over all his torso, the flat belly and the muscles of the chest with the soft blond hair, and she had her gaze locked with his. His erect penis was pointing to her, eager. Sansa grasped it without preamble and started to masturbate it, feeling the shiver that ran through it with her touch. She descended and put it into her mouth. Tyrion released a hoarse moan and held her head while she was moving. The tongue was stimulating the glans and little by little she introduced more of his length inside of her mouth, trying to relax her throat to hold back the gag reflex. She at last succeeded in taking it in to the
basement, kept it that way for some seconds and moved back a little.

"Gods, Sansa," moaned him, transfixed. "That has been incredible."

She tried again and introduced it all in her throat, making an effort to restrain her gagging. She achieved it for some instants. His hands were closed around her head, though without pressing her, because he did not want to force her. He knew that what she was doing to him was very difficult to perform. He had laid some whores specialized in performing that kind of extreme fellatio on the clients, but not many knew how to do it well. Sansa was trying and that was one of the most erotic things a woman could do to a man, or that was what he thought. Though everything with her was amazingly erotic.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 197

Meereen: Day 25 - 26

He loved that his cock disappeared entirely between those lips which always pronounced so polite and sweet words, and which at the same time were so ardent, so yearning in their kisses and caresses. Her concentration was driving him mad, as well as her closed eyes, her tongue licking all his length.

No matter how much all that turned him mad with desire, on that occasion Tyrion wanted to make her finish and spill himself in her womb, because they were the two things that he most liked in his life.

"Stop, honey. Lie down. I'm going to fuck you and make you peak. What I like most in the world is watching your pleasure. Let me give it to you," pleaded him.

Without words, she did as she was asked and he knelt between her legs on the bed. He penetrated her and Sansa enclosed her legs around him. Tyrion with one hand toyed with her clitoris and with the other he caressed the belly and the breasts. He thurst deep into her, awaiting the climax that would not last to unleash and press him with the contractions of those soaked and hot muscular walls wrapping his entranced penis. He rubbed with his thumb the tiny button under the copper-coloured hair, imposing it the exact rhythm, and smiled with delight when he felt her explosion coming. She gave in to the overwhelming sensations and she once more shouted his name while she was crushing him and moving desperately her hips against him.

"You're wonderful, honey!," exclaimed him, giving free rein to his own euphoria, giving her passionately everything he was along with his seed.

They laid down languidly and, after putting her on attentively the undergarment Sansa had to wear due to her moon blood, they went to sleep in a tight embrace. Tyrion smiled thinking vaguely that both had longed so much for giving themselves in to the delights of sex that she had not even asked him yet about the matters debated in the Council meeting.

They woke up when dawn was hinting in a faint glimmer. As that day they were excused from their morning duties because of the wedding, which would be celebrated at noon, they shirked under the sheets, made love and later Tyrion told Sansa what had been discussed in the Council meeting.

"Since the beginning of our journey you were foreseeing sea war, and you were right, as always. Those carracks are going to complicate captain Gilean's missions, even though he has the help of the Dornish fleet," commented Sansa, frowning with concern.

"Ground attacks are unviable for several reasons. First, because the Masters fear that their slave soldiers turn against them, attack them and leave them in the lurch. Practically all their armies are made up of slaves and that is their great weak spot. Daenerys is going to incite a new rebellion in Yunkai and I've advised her that she might try the same tactic in other cities, but the problem is that they are too far away and, unless the slaves act on their own initiative, it may take months until there are results. That's our best weapon to fight the slavers and the one that can help us to win this war in the long term. The bad thing is that it's a slow process." He hushed for some moments. "The second reason that our enemies haven't sent their ground forces against us is that a siege of Meereen is impracticable. Thousands of Meereenese people live here and there are many Great Masters among them still. If the enemies wanted to kill us through starvation and lacks, the
Meereenese population who are their followers would fall too. What would a siege be useful for then? For killing their allies, as well as they'd do with us? Many Meereenese have had their roots strongly stuck here for lots of generations and they'd refuse to leave the city. What for? To become outcasts? No, a siege of Meereen wouldn't work. The only effective way of attacking us is by sea. They know we depend on the maritime commercial trips for a great part of our subsistence and they want to break our spine."

"Oh, Tyrion. That's very alarming. Winter has only started." She hugged him tightly.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 26

He tried to calm her down.

"I hope that their carracks don't manage to cause so much damage as they expect. Slaver's Bay is large and I reckon that Tolos, New Ghis and Old Ghis don't have so many war carracks as to outnumber our fleet, which altogether have more than fifty ships. Since war started, all the Ghiscari area has suffered the effects and has become poorer due to the interruption of the slave trade and their resources have been lessened. Moreover, our men are very experienced and have good warriors at their disposal. Anyway, if things become difficult Daenerys can request more help from Dorne, as she has promised her hand to Oberyn, and the Dornish people have promised her their unconditional support. On the other hand, I have faith in all Daenerys has begun in these cities, which will be a progressive chain reaction and more and more slaves are going to rise up in arms. Sending the proper jog to them, it's only a matter of time." He caressed her back, a gesture that always soothed her.

Sansa sighed against his chest.

"Surely time will tell that you're right. For now, we'll have to wait the events and hope that things don't become much more difficult for us," said her.

"Let's hope that they don't. Let's have faith. Faith is all we can have for now, and it's free," joked him, kissing the crown of her head.

She hinted a smile and kissed his chest.

"Do you think my brother will be elected as Lord Commander?," asked her.

"It's difficult to surmise it. The other candidates are older and much more experienced, but Jon has become popular and has proved his worth. It's going to be a hard-fought election."

"I wish he wins. I know he's going to carry a great responsibility upon his shoulders, especially with the crisis they're suffering, with the Free Folk struggling to cross to the South and the White Walkers coming back. But that's what Jon has wished all his life. He has never wanted to be a conceited toff."

"He's a tough Stark of the North descendant from the First Men. Whether he has Targaryen blood or not, it's undeniable that he's so much a Stark as you, Sansa. Each one on your own way, but both of you are partly wolves." He smiled at her mischievously.

"When I lived in Winterfell, I dreamed of marrying a Southern lord or prince who would take me to his lands where it rarely snowed, and the sun shone brightly over the green fields that almost never were covered in white. Even though I was happy in my house with my family, I didn't feel as Stark as the others. My appearance is of a Tully and I never felt brave or rebellious like my sister Arya. I've had to lose all of them to realize how much I miss them."

Tyrion did not want her to get saddened, and especially in a day in which she was going to wear an astounding dress with the colours of her house and she would be radiant and would spend a nice time with their friends.

He took her face in his hands.
"Listen to me, Sansa, you're so much a Stark as the rest of your family. Valour isn't proved simply with a sword in your hand, or leading armies at war. I'd say that surviving all you've had to cope with is not for weak people. You have come up to Meereen, which is thousands and thousands of miles far from Winterfell. Did you ever imagine you'd reach so far?"

"Not even in my most bizarre dreams, Tyrion. I never saw myself as an adventuress. My aspirations didn't go beyond being the lady of a castle."

"Well, that's exactly what you're, gorgeous. A real adventuress. You'd be the envy of many girls who never go beyond the boundaries of their close land. I'm sure my uncle Gerion would fall at your feet out of pure admiration."

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 26

"Oh, you're exaggerating. I wouldn't be here if it weren't for you." She caressed his messy blond hair.

"We all need help, Sansa. I neither would be here if it weren't for you. You've been my motivation to go across half the world and bring you to safety in the safest place we could reach."

"You make me feel like one of those heroines of some stories Old Nan told me."

"You are. Never forget it. And to my eyes you're the most impressive woman I've ever known." His green eyes were reflecting an absolute fervour toward her and Sansa was melting.

"I think you've earned a prize, my lord," suggested her, caressing far below his belly and touching his fully ready manhood.

"Then let me claim it right now, my lady," gasped him with his voice hoarse.

"I'm very glad to give it to you, my husband."

She put herself upon him and they made it once more until short before Mhyraz announced breakfast.

They washed themselves quickly and afterwards Tyrion dried her hair. He helped her to put her dress on and emitted a whistle of full admiration.

"You're so beautiful that all I want is to strip you off that cute dress and fuck you endlessly." She gave him a jog.

"No way, insatiable goofy. I haven't spent hours making it to take it off after five minutes," scolded her, laughing, with her cheeks reddened.

"But that's real praise for the great work you've made with it. The fact that I can't wait to take it off you demonstrates how wonderfully well it fits you," said him with a tone of innocence and a wide lechery grin.

"You'd be wishing to take it off me even though it were a piece of junk," protested her, laughing with no stop.

"Yes, you're completely right, gorgeous, but as I'm a gallant husband I'll add that nothing you do is a piece of junk. I always want to tear your clothes off, but I don't do it because I'm a considerate husband."

"Ah, lucky me. I even have to thank you for respecting the wholeness of my wardrobe."

"Of course. Believe me, I respect your pretty clothes because you've made them, my love."

"And because we're in winter, of course," pointed her out, mockingly.

"Well, that's not a big deal. Shagging you several times a day will remove the cold in a blink."
"I see, my considerate husband. Come on, stop chatting and get dressed at once," ordered Sansa, very amused.

"As I said, she's a she-wolf," murmured Tyrion, going to fetch his attire.

"I've heard you."

"A gorgeous she-wolf." He sent her a kiss and got dressed.

Dara had been informed by Mhyraz that she went later than other days to style the mistress' hair and she knocked on the door at that moment. Tyrion opened, greeted her affectionately and the girl got down to work with Sansa's hair.

He had finished already and he felt like a handsome prince with his nice clothes. *She manages to make me feel so dashing as the Knight of Flower,* thought him, touched. *Her eyes look at me as if I were.*

He entertained himself observing how the girl's skilled hands were working in the long and thick mane of copper-coloured hair, shaping a simple but pleasing hairstyle, with several braids which joined forming cute styles. The rest of the hair was loose and fell in waves upon her shoulders.

Sansa congratulated Dara, hugged her and told her to go to get ready as well, as she would be present at the wedding with the other children. The girl went out very happy.

"You're stunning, honey," said Tyrion, captivated. "It'd be a pity to spoil such a cute hairstyle," added him, naughty.

"You're terrible," laughed her. "You're very handsome too, my love."

*She said something like that when I went to see her wearing my wedding suit just before the ceremony. But by then she said it out of courtesy, and now she's sincere. It's curious how our perception of beauty changes when we love.*

"You make me feel like the Knight of Flowers," declared him, moved.

"For me you're more handsome than him because you're my man." She bent and gave him a tender kiss.

"I'm the luckiest man in the world, Sansa."

"And I'm the luckiest woman." She put on her snowflake brooch, which suited her perfectly with the Stark colours. She was not wearing any more jewelry, but Tyrion thought that she would not have been prettier with necklaces, earrings or bracelets. Her beauty was all the accessory she needed.

They put their capes on, smiled at each other and he offered her his hand to take her to the queen's gardens.
Meereen: Day 26

Some guests were awaiting in the garden already, smartly dressed, or at least so much smartly as they could afford. Hizdhar was wearing the Ghiscari traditional tunic of varied colours and long to toe. Jorah had managed to tidy up to an acceptable level his old doublet of house Mormont and he looked nervous, as he had not had any chance to be so close to the khaleesi since she had exiled him. The others had not appeared yet.

"Good afternoon," greeted Tyrion and Sansa, and the others repeated their greeting. The men shot furtive glimpses to the young woman and Tyrion could not help to notice it.

She's so pretty that it's impossible not to look at her, thought him, full of pride.

The knight went close to them both.

"You're very beautiful, Lady Sansa," complimented him gallantly. She thanked him for his compliment with a nod. "It's a nice place to celebrate a wedding," commented Jorah, looking around. Tyrion noticed the longing in his pupils, that seemed to absorb the surroundings his khaleesi saw daily. For him must be exciting to have been authorized to have access to his loved queen's rooms, after the depressing period of his exile, when he thought he would not see her again. "The khaleesi has been very generous offering her gardens."

"It has been Daenerys's gift. She wanted that they celebrated the wedding of their dreams because they deserve it. Both of them are very good-hearted and love at each other," said Tyrion.

"Perhaps the khaleesi is trying to experience, even as a guest, something she did not have, a happy wedding. A Westerosi girl who is given to a scary dothraki khal in a uninhibited and violent ceremony doesn't have a very good time in her wedding day."

"Poor thing. She must be yearning for running away," pitied Sansa, feeling empathy toward the young Targaryen sold without scruples by her brother.

"Her face was pallid and she did not taste food for the whole day. The feast of horse meat surrounded by flies must not look very appetizing," explained Jorah.

An ironic reflection occurred to Tyrion.

Not to mention the dothraki men and women who in those feasts copulate in full view of everyone, and the rivalries those sexual encounters generate between those who want to prevail, fighting to the death in order to fuck and plant their seed. And I had a reputation for paying a lot for sex. How much is to pay with one's own life?

Sansa knew about that custom, but not Tyrion nor Jorah mentioned it out of respect for her sensitivity.

"I felt pity for her, so alone and frightened, and I went to greet her and I gifted her some books about the history of Westeros. She cheered up a little."

"She has lent them to Leena and me for the children's lessons," added Sansa. "We're treating them very carefully."
The knight addressed her a courteous smile.

"They couldn't have been destined for a better use than that. The khaleesi finds a practical usefulness for almost everything. She has to, as she has never lived in abundance and here we aren't very well off."

"How is it that Illyrio Mopatis gifted her dragon eggs, Ser Jorah? He surely didn't imagine they would hatch out," guessed Sansa.

"He believed they were petrified forever and that they were only a mere ornament, a little reminder of the height of Valyria and house Targaryen. Otherwise, he'd never have gifted them. Even petrified, dragon eggs cost a great fortune and besides, regarding the rebirth of dragons, if he had foreseen it would happen, it would've been the definitive stroke of luck for someone so monstruously greedy as Illyrio. He wouldn't have offered them on a platter so deferentially to a girl whose only possessions were her blood and her name. Anyway, Illyrio is interested in the fact that the khaleesi gains access to the Iron Throne and he considers that she has contracted a debt of honour with him for having given her the eggs. He's not a reliable ally, but in his selfish way he has helped her and will go on helping her when it's necessary. Of course, all his support is aimed to the scheme that she conquers Westeros and he's planning to gain fat profits from all that."

I wouldn't even ask that merchant to lend me a pair of shoes, but, on the other hand, we need to enlarge our fleet to repel the war carracks, thought Tyrion, with an idea taking shape in his mind. Mopatis has ships, lots of ships. And what if we ask him to send us reinforcements? If it's true his plans consist on that Daenerys sits down on the throne, why isn't he going to give her a helping hand again so she achieves her goal? He can afford it. He has so much gold or more than the gold in the underground rooms of Casterly Rock. I have to bring up this question to the queen. A sudden inspiration came to him. Is he banding together with Varys? The Spider commented me more than once that he has "good friends" in Essos, and indeed it was him who sorted out the the issue of the ship to Pentos to save Shae. Moreover, he procured a house for her in Pentos, where she might live comfortably. Who does Varys know in that city who possesses so much power and influence? Illyrio, of course. Both of them are interested in all this project about Daenerys returning the old splendour that the Targaryens supplied to the Seven Kingdoms.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 26

Tyrion made a mental note and kept his ideas for later, because in that instant the rest of the guests were arriving, followed by the groom and bride and the priestess of the temple of Graces.

Sansa let out an impressed exclamation when she gazed at Leena. "Oh! How beautiful she is," blurted her out spontaneously.

Leena and Pod went out to the garden arm in arm, smiling widely. The bride's tulle dress shone softly in the sun and her light-golden hair was gleaming. The groom's demeanor was much more refined than what they were used to see in him. Not Tyrion nor Sansa had seen him without his simple squire clothes, except for the slightly more elegant attire he had worn in his masters' wedding.

Daenerys was very beautiful in her green dress with the embroidery of the three-headed dragon. Missandei was very pretty too and had put back her wild brown curls. Daario always managed to be charming, seductive and rascally, and that day his qualities seemed to multiply, as he for a change was not dressing as a sellsword and was off duty.

Ser Barristan had chosen his usual dark clothes over which his armour of the queensguard was striking, as always. He took his oath so seriously that he did not take his armour off even for that day. As for Kerro, his aspect was plain but respectable. He had his long dark hair, streaked with grey locks, tied back in a ponytail. Beside him walked a woman with a hardened complexion and sad eyes, clearly overwhelmed by the fact of being present at the Mother's private chambers.

She must be Kerro's wife, thought Sansa, feeling a liking for her. She would try to make her feel at ease.

Everyone exchanged greetings. Sansa and Leena melted in a hug and Tyrion and Pod shook hands and exchanged a smile.

They positioned themselves in the place intended for the ceremony, under some orange trees and among some bedflowers of yellow roses, and the priestess officiated. She pronounced the words in High Valyrian but, as the bride and groom already knew what to do and say, they did not have much difficulty. Pod, shy as ever, cluttered a little the parts in which he intervened, especially because he had had to memorize the speeches in Valyrian, but he managed to recite them to the end, with a very reddened face. Some Ghiscari rituals followed one another, which involved that Pod had to give to the bride a handful of copper coins and another handful of hazelnut tree seeds, symbolizing prosperity and fertility in marriage. If the wedding was officiated between rich people, the coins were made of gold or silver, but in the majority of weddings the copper ones were used.

Later, everyone congratulated the newlyweds and they sat by the trestle tables put under the forge arbour. The children made their appearance, carrying the platters and dishes. Immediately the delicious smell of the wedding feast floated in the air.

Sansa and Tyrion took a seat between the bride and groom and Jorah, and opposite them were Kerro and his wife, whose name was Jalima. Sansa included Leena and Jalima in the conversation and soon the intimidated builder's wife got relaxed. To Sansa's left, Tyrion was talking with the knight and Kerro.
The children were coming and going assisting the guests diligently, and Tyrion blinked an eye to Mhyraz and Dara.

"When did Kerro and you join the Mother's entourage?," asked Sansa. She had encouraged the woman to address her informally and she was doing the same.

"When she took Astapor. Our Good Masters weren't good at all. They sold two of our children and I haven't seen them again," declared Jalima, with her voice loaded with hatred and bitterness.

Sansa shivered with horror and pity. That had to be a terrible blow for a mother.

"I'm very sorry, Jalima. Have you tried to find them?"

"We tried, but the only we knew was that they had been bought by a slaver merchant from Yunkai. When Astapor fell, we decided that we must safeguard the children we had left and we joined the Mother. In Yunkai, we searched for them but it was impossible to find out anything. The city was destroyed and there were fights and scuffles everywhere. I still keep a little hope that maybe they manage to escape and come to Meereen. I wish they imagine we're here waiting for them." The woman's eyes were dry.

When was the last time she cried? She had to spill all her tears for her lost children.

Sansa’s eyes, on the other hand, were burning, but she kept her composure. By her side, Leena had a blank look, with pain reflected in it.

She lost her little siblings. Her parents sold her. She must be remembering all those misfortunes.

"Maybe one day they'll come. Don't lose hope."

"That's what keeps me up every day."

"I've lost all my family, and I have the dream that some of my disappeared siblings reappear. I have to keep the faith in the hope that at least one of them is alive," confessed Sansa.

Jalima addressed her a melancholy smile and in their tacit silence both of them recognized one another in their losses.

"Was it very difficult for you to adapt yourselves to your new life in freedom?," asked Sansa, interested.

"It was harder for my children. Walking across hundreds of miles and living in the open air haven't been easy for them, but luckily they're not so little any more ans they're strong. Soon we'll move to one of the new houses and they won't spend more nights inside a tent."

"I'm very glad, Jalima."

The woman glanced at Tyrion for a moment and turned to her again, with curiosity written in her black eyes.

"I know your husband is a good man. Kerro respects him. He's doing a lot for our people. How did you met him?" Jalima cheered up with the change of topic.

Sansa hinted a smile, pleased with the pleasant turn in the conversation.

"We come from two very ancient families in Westeros, the Lannisters and the Starks. They've never got along but, until the period in which the Lannisters visited my home a couple of years
ago, there was peace in the realm and our houses did not have brushes between them because they were very far from each other. Mine ruled the North and Tyrion's, the West and the Iron Throne too. But one day that peace was broken. Meanwhile, I traveled to King's Landing, the capital, to wed prince Joffrey, who later would be a king. At the beginning I believed he was a kind-hearted prince, but I got disillusioned. He was a monster that ordered my father beheaded because he didn't consider him as the legitimate king. Joffrey had promised me he would be merciful, and that was his mercy. He forced me to stare at my father's severed head."

"I'm sorry, Sansa," said the woman.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 26

"Thank you, Jalima. My mother and my eldest brother leaded the rebellion of the North against the Iron Throne and I remained trapped in King's Landing, held prisoner by the Lannisters and engaged to the monster. Soon afterwards, Tyrion came back from his trips across the North to the Red Keep. He had been appointed Hand of the King by his father, Tywin Lannister, who was the most powerful man in Westeros and leaded the Southern side at war. Tyrion went to the capital to rule and control Joffrey's follies. He treated me with kindness and stopped the mistreats Joffrey was inflicting on me. Soon after that, the city was attacked by a pretender to the Throne, Stannis Baratheon, and Tyrion leaded the defense. He stopped the advance of the enemy troops until Tywin Lannister came with an army of thousands of soldiers and crushed Stannis's forces. After that, I was freed from my engagement to Joffrey, because the Lannisters and the Tyrells became allies. The Tyrells were the house that had just helped the Lannisters to defeat Stannis. Joffrey was going to marry Margaery Tyrell and I was over the moon because I was going to get rid of the monster, but I was still a prisoner and was not safe from the king's clutches. The Tyrells manipulated me to engage me to one of them, because they wanted the North for themselves and I was the heiress of Winterfell, the castle of the Starks of the North, where I was born and I grew up. But Tyrion's father found out about the conspiracy and forced Tyrion and me to marry, because he wasn't willing to be snatched the key to the North, that is, me. We were practically two strangers and I didn't want anything to do with my husband, because he was a Lannister. But he was kind to me from the beginning, he didn't force me to... share intimacy with him and was unwaveringly patient and understanding with my coldness and distance. My father-in-law provoked my mother's and my brother's assassinations and I only wanted to die. My parents had been murdered, my sister had disappeared, my eldest brother was slaughtered too, and I was told that my two little brothers were burnt. My only living relative was a half brother who was serving in the Night Watch. Today he continues to be my only living relative of whom I have evidence."

Jalima, and even Leena, though she knew about the story, were listening with all their attention.

"Some days later, the king's wedding was celebrated, and it was awful, and I felt sympathy when I saw how Joffrey treated my husband. The king suddenly fell dead and Tyrion and I fled. From that moment we fell in love and traveled to Meereen, where Tyrion entered the queen's service. His vast experience is very useful for her."

"He must be a man with many qualities. It's evident that you're very much in love with him," asserted Jalima, with her sad smile.

"I'm so much in love that my heart leaps with joy every time I look at him."

"I've loved Kerro tenderly for all my life. We were born slaves and were children of slaves. We grew up together in the pyramid of our Good Masters. When I became a woman, we got married. Our children were born and the two older were taken away from us. Kerro has been my support and my strength since I can remember."

"He too must be a very talented man. He has been chosen as your chief representative among thousands of people," praised Sansa.

"Very soon, since he was very little, he started to show signs of his many skills and due to that the Masters never wanted to get rid of him. He protected me and the Masters respected me thanks to him. But a son of the patriarch of the Masters, who was our age and who always envied Kerro's
talent, convinced his father to sell our older children and thus harm us as much as possible. I every
day prayed for my children's return and for the Masters' death. Kerro coped with it with greater
fortitude than me, but he hated the Masters as much as me. Some of our prayers were answered and
the Mother came, killed almost all the Good Masters and freed us. We could've stayed in Astapor
as free citizens, but we chose to follow the Mother, because Astapor was dead for us and we
wanted that our little children had the chance of a better future than ours, under the protection of
the Breaker of Chains. Our life has been harsh since we left Astapor, but at least now we're the
owners of our lives."

"I know what it feels to be a possession, a merchandise at the mercy of cruel and capricious
masters. Somehow, I was a slave as well. I don't intend to compare myself with you, but I'm telling
you this so you know that your sufferings aren't unfamiliar to me. I didn't have a neck-ring, but it
was like I had one. And Tyrion set me free. When he held my hand to take me away from the Red
Keep, I chose him. That very day I could have abandoned him to run away, because I had a escape
plan, but I decided to stay by his side. My heart guessed which was its true home."

Jalima nodded, understanding.

"There are many slaves who don't have a neck-ring, or tattoos on the cheeks," said her, referring to
the indelible tear on Leena's face. She looked at the blond young woman and addressed her an
affectionate expression. "I hope you're very happy, Leena. You've come out of hell and now your
life belongs to you. Show your tattoo off with pride and never be ashamed of it. Look always
straight ahead, but don't forget the past, because only reminding where we come from, we are able
to move forward."

"I won't forget what I was, Jalima. As if I could," added the girl, ironic. "But I understand what you
mean. When one has known deep sufferings, esteems more the happy moments to come."

"That's it. The mishaps of life whether kill you or strengthen you. I think it's clear which way we
have chosen."

Effectively, we all are survivors. Some time ago I didn't see it from that perspective. I believed I
was weak. Though I haven't lost two children like Jalima or haven't been forced to work in a
brothel, I've been a victim of slavery and wickedness too. I might have jumped from a tower to put
an end to everything, but, for some reason, I decided to go on resisting. It had to be the Stark's
stubbornness that runs through my veins, thought Sansa, smiling.

"We've chosen to live and love. Let's toast to it," proposed Sansa. She stood up, a little tipsy by the
wine she had drank. Being sober she would not dare to be so bold in public. Tyrion turned to look
at her, amused. He realized that he never had seen her under the influence of alcohol, as she rarely
drank. When the others noticed the young woman's intentions, stood up as well, with their cups in
their hands.

"A toast for Pod and Leena. For life and love," declaimed Sansa, with a clear and steady voice. All
of them raised their cups and clinked them.

"For life and love," recited them together, and drank a gulp to seal the toast, as if that ritual could
make the good omens come true.

It was exciting to believe that even something so trivial as a toast had some power to influence fate.
Chapter 203

Meereen: Day 26

When they finished to eat, the children added more tables and sat down, as they had been promised. All the adult banqueters were very satisfied with the careful and diligent service the children had carried out and they congratulated them. It was the moment in which the youngsters could enjoy the party too. The grown-ups spread out among the bedflowers and the fruit trees, with their cups of wine in their hands. The newlyweds, Tyrion and Sansa were keeping an eye on Jorah, but he looked calm. He frowned sometimes, when he looked at Daario, but he tried to disguise it. The sellsword got close to chat with them, addressing flirtatious remarks to the women. Even Jalima fell under the charm of the rascally captain of the Second Sons, whom she had not met until that day. Daenerys talked with one and all, without giving preferential treatment to the sellsword, and Jorah was devouring her with his eyes, as if he wanted to stick in his memory his khaleesi’s splendour to remember it in his low points. She nodded to him in a sign of respect and hinted a slight smile of reconciliation. Jorah returned it, with an expression of happiness lighting his face, which seemed to have rejuvenated.

Tyrion and Sansa were watching them both and listened to their conversation.

"I haven't had the chance to talk with you until today, Ser Jorah. How are you?," asked her, interested.

"Very well, khaleesi. I like my work. Patrolling the city keeps me busy for many hours and gives me the chance to know Meereen and its inhabitants better." He hushed for some moments. "I want to thank you again for having readmitting me. I was a lost poor wretched until I crossed paths in Tolos with Lord Tyrion, Lady Sansa, Podrick and Leena, and thanks to them I found a reason to carry on. I regret so much what I did, khaleesi... Every night your look of disappointment chased me, it pestered me in my nightmares, I saw it before me when I was awake. I was going mad. I was a stupid, I'd never have come to that agreement with Robert, because later I regretted it infinitely more than I've been sorry for any other thing in my life. I didn't count on the fact that I'd admire and idolize you nearly from the first time I saw you. The treachery I developed on your back has been the worst mistake I've made, and I've made a lot. I fell victim of my blindness and my stupidity, as usual. It happened to me once with my wife, Lynesse; I should've realized from the beginning that she only wanted my position and my money, but I didn't see it in time. It happened to me too when I sold those furtive hunters to the slavers, thinking that Ned Stark wouldn't find out. And it happened to me with you. But, after having lost you, I touched the bottom. I couldn't fall lower already, so I only had two chances: or let myself die thrown out in a corner, or stand up and fight to go back to your side. And for once the gods answered to my prayer, putting Tyrion Lannister and Lady Sansa in my way. He offered me my last chance to return, and she offered me forgiveness for the offense I committed against the Stark name. And now I'm here with you and it's like a dream for me. I feared I wouldn't see you again." The knight finished his long explanation with a slightly moved and shaky voice.

Daenerys's look had softened as he was speaking.

"Understand it was a hard blow for me to know that you hadn't been honest with me, at least when I met you for the first time. I was too much furious and disappointed. I put my trust in you, I loved you like a brother, you were my best friend. It hurt very much, Ser Jorah. Every night I cried in my bed, when no one saw me. But before people I had to be strong, and couldn't show weakness. And in that time I was unable to see beyond my fury, either. I didn't understand you were sincerely
repentant and by then you were completely loyal to me, in spite of your dubious beginnings. I didn't consider that a person can change when he or she knows another with whom a very strong bond is established, and that happened with both of us, not only with you, Ser Jorah. Your wise guide and the good advice you gave to me since you joined my service helped me to grow up, to gain confidence and inner strength. I'm not any more that young half-ripe teenager. Now I know that even the people who love a lot between themselves can hurt each other sometimes, but the important thing is to be able to forgive if the remorse is genuine." She did a pause. "For now I can't reinstate you in your former post, but I'm glad you're back."

"Me too, khaleesi," affirmed him, with a smile.

Daenerys corresponded to his gesture and went to talk with Kerro and Jalima. Ser Barristan, who was walking next to her, stopped to chat with Tyrion, Sansa and Jorah.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 204

Meereen: Day 26

"Nice day," commented Ser Barristan, looking at the cloudless sky and the sun shining high. "That boy is a pride for anyone who has the honour to count on his friendship and loyalty. You couldn't have found a better squire, Lord Tyrion."

"It's true. I have a good eye for people," said Tyrion, with a lightly mocking tone. "In King's Landing no one would've given a copper for him. There they were too much lofty and sophisticated to stop to look twice at such a shy boy as Pod. The world is that blind, Ser Barristan. The majority despise an extremely skilled but discreet young man, and on the contrary they acclaim many arrogant idiots who, if they aren't noticed in a hundred leagues every time they fart, they feel they've wasted their valuable days." That quip made the old man smile, because he in effect had met a few of those arrogant idiots.

"Tyrion!," whispered Sansa, scandalized for the vulgar expression, pinching him on the arm. But at the same time she was trying to hold back an amused grin which was struggling to spread over her face.

"I'm sorry, dear. I'll watch my mouth," apologized him in whispers, feigning, shooting her a brazen blink.

"I'm afraid that some of my last comrades-in-arms in the Kingsguard belonged to that category. Excuse me for what I'm going to say, but, even though I came to respect Ser Jaime because of his excellent qualities as a warrior, he often gave the impression of not taking anything seriously. He possessed the proper talent and skills, in a higher degree than most warriors in Westeros. There wasn't almost anyone who was at his level. And he was clever and valiant; there's no doubt that he and you are brothers. You have some features in common. Ser Jaime might have been much greater than he's been, but he resigned himself with little. Like me, after all. It's not for me to reproach him for anything."

"The Kingsguard has degenerated a lot, that's true, Ser Barristan. The fact that despicable guys like Meryn Trant or Mandon Moore are or have been a part of it tells loads about the crisis of the institution. The former was only skilled in beating girls and the latter gifted me this scar in the Battle of Blackwater, sent by my dear nephew and surely too by my lovely sister to kill me from behind while I was giving my all defending the city. Since you were fired, Ser Barristan, the Kingsguard lost its last trace of dignity, I admit it. I know Jaime hasn't been the best of men and I'm not trying to justify anything he has done, as I know that his membership in the Kingsguard has only been a cover to be close to Cersei. We all know that. That he loves her is an open secret. Whether it's an abomination or not, she's the only thing he has truly loved in all his life and he has wished to remain beside her. It's not a surprise for anyone why he became a kingsguard. In those years my father was king Aerys's Hand and Cersei was living in the Red Keep too. My siblings must come out with the plan that he entered the institution so he didn't have to marry anyone and he could be near her. The plan went bad when Tywin and the king became enemies and Tywin went back to Casterly Rock, taking our sister far from the capital. I suppose Jaime must think seriously about consigning the Kingsguard to hell, but instead he stayed in King's Landing serving a despot king who was showing signs of progressive insanity. I know he doesn't have a great sense of honour, and that even his ability as a warrior is almost like a game for him. I know the world sees the Kingslayer every time he's mentioned. But remember, Ser Barristan, that often there's more than can be seen at first sight. Now Jaime is a cripple who has lost his sword hand and his
aura of handsome and bold knight. We all have payed a price in this war."

"It's true, Lord Tyrion. No one has escaped unharmed," conceded the knight. "Have you thought of knighting the boy?," asked him, changing topic.

"Of course. No one deserves it more than him. One day I'll request it to the queen, but Pod'll have to strive for recognition through other deeds apart from simply saving my life," commented Tyrion, joking. "He's so devoted to me that he wouldn't mind being my squire for the rest of his life, but he has to think of Leena too. To raise his position for her. The girl loves him such as he is, but it doesn't hurt that she feels proud of having a knight in their family." He smiled, looking at the newlyweds, who were speaking with the other guests.

"Both of them are very lucky. Such love can't be found in any corner."

"Indeed it can't, Ser Barristan," asserted Tyrion, squeezing Sansa's hand and looking at her with adoration. "I never dreamt of receiving a prize like her. Who in my place would?" Sansa was corresponding to his devoted look smiling at him with tenderness.

Ser Barristan coughed discreetly, moved with the happiness of the couple before him.

"Love, when it's not selfish, makes us better," said him. "Lord Tyrion, you, Podrick and your beautiful wives are a credit to your houses and your blood. And to anyone who admires honest and brave people."

"So are you, Ser Barristan. One day I'll tell my children the great feats of Ser Barristan The Bold."

"It will be a real honour."

The knight bent and went next to Daenerys.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 205

Meereen: Day 26

When the children finished to eat, they stood up and announced that the dance was going to start. All the guests positioned themselves in a clearer area of the gardens, some of the kids grabbed their instruments and began to play a Westerosi song, surprising the adults, as they did not expect that the children knew songs that came from a land so far away. They must have rehearsed expressly for the wedding.

The dancers got ready in the center of the clear space and Tyrion did something unexpected. Instead of going to sit down, he remained beside Sansa and offered her his hand. She looked at him astonished and with a sparkle of delight in her blue eyes.

"You know how to dance?," asked her, taking his hand.

"The fact that I usually don't do it doesn't mean that I can't do it," said him, mockingly. "My figure isn't very elegant to exhibit myself in public places in full view of everyone, but among friends it's different. May I have this dance, beautiful lady?"

She accepted his outstretched hand.

"I'd be delighted, my lord."

Both addressed a comical bow at each other. He held her hand and put his other hand on her waist. He guided her over the dance floor to the rhythm of music, with firmness and confidence.

"You're good, Tyrion. We have to dance more often," suggested her, with a look that implied more intimate dances.

And, how not, his penis turned hard as stone.

"I'm thinking of some dance movements I can make with you," whispered him, with a hoarse voice. "A pity we can't practice them right now." His green eyes were roaming over her body.

Sansa knew how much he must be in need for relief and she herself felt an intense heat in her lower belly. The only she wished was that he stripped her off her dress and did to her whatever he wanted.

"Yes, it's a pity," murmured her, fixing her eyes on his.

"Sansa," said him, with his throat dry. "If you go on staring at me like that I'll take you to the queen's rooms, I'll raise the skirt of this wonderful dress and will stab my cock into you until making you cry out, and to hell with the others."

She burst out laughing, flushed. They continued to move among the other dancers, oblivious to everything that was happening around them, with eyes only for each other.

"I'd love you did it, my love. I adore feeling you inside of me. But it would be an insult to leave everyone in the lurch, I suppose."

"There are times in which I don't care two hoots about everyone, if I'm honest," said him, piercing her with his gaze. "But you're right, honey. Now wouldn't be the proper moment." He sighed
exaggeratedly, making her laugh. "However, later you won't escape. We'll have to release our accumulated tension and I won't have pity on you. I'm going to fuck you wildly until we're worn out with tiredness."

"Really? You sure you won't fall asleep before you've stripped me off?," joked her, provocatively.

"When have I fallen asleep gazing at your beauty and being about to stab you to the bottom, gorgeous?," reprimanded him.

*This is going from bad to worse*, thought him, with his cock protesting under his pants.

"It's only I thought you were an oldie," blurted her, laughing.

"Sansa... Let's pretend we have to go out to the toilet. I can't bear it any more. You're so stunning with this dream dress, with your hair shining in the sun, your laughter and your goddess body shouting at me, that I'm dying for pleasuring you this very moment."

"All right, Tyrion. But they'll notice."

"I don't care in the least. They don't ignore we spend more than half a day fucking. They know it in all the pyramid. Our moans aren't very discreet. Come on, let's go."

He took her hand and guided her out of the dance floor. Some of the others shot them a glimpse but they did not pay much more attention.

As they could not return to their rooms, that were much below, and they neither wanted to insult Daenerys making it in her chambers, they searched for another hall in the same floor. They found one which did not look abandoned or dirty. He sat down on a carpet, resting his back on the wall, and she slipped off her undergarment and straddled him, with her skirt raised to her waist. She impaled herself on his yearning manhood and moved upon him eagerly, rubbing herself.

"That's it, honey. Pleasure yourself. I want to see it," said him, grabbing her breasts over the sateen. "You move very well. This way, do it slowly."

Sansa rode him the way he asked her, building her own climax with his cock burning slowly her insides and her fingers completing her trip to the heights. She felt so filled up that the explosion, when it came, swept her from up to down and from the inside out, shaking her with its strength.

"Tyrion!," shouted her with each wave.

"Oh, honey, I love it. You want my pleasure?," asked him, on the verge. "Of course I want it, my love."

He gave it to her, shattering into pieces into her and moaning her name with that low and manly voice which drove her mad with desire every time she heard it.

They embraced, breathing laboriously, and gave themselves some minutes to relax and dry their sweat. They stood up and tidied up their clothes. She smoothed his tangled hair and asked him if her hairstyle was in disarray.

"You're perfect, my love. Let's go before I think of doing it to you again."

She gave him a shove and they got out of the chamber, laughing like two teenagers. *Well, she at least is a teenager indeed, and she makes me feel as if I were another*, thought him, at the height of
happiness. They went back to the party holding hands.
Chapter 206

Meereen: Day 26

The celebration was still at its peak when they went back. Most of the guests were dancing. Daenerys was moving over the dance floor in Ser Barristan's arms, Daario had asked the bride to dance with him, Missandei was teaching the steps to Grey Worm, who was smiling openly, Kerro was joking with two girls that were dancing with him at the same time, and the rest of the kids who were not playing instruments had spread out in couples that were moving joyfully. Only Pod, Jorah and Hizdhar remained a little moved away in those moments, chatting.

Tyrion and Sansa looked at the dancers while them both were still holding hands, touched and amused.

"It's a very happy day for us and all these people. I hadn't dared to dream of a day like this for a long time," said Sansa.

"There will be more, I promise. I'll gift you many happy days." He caressed her hand with his thumb.

"With you all days are happy, my love." She turned to look at him with bright eyes.

"With you they're even more happy, my love," affirmed him.

"No way. It's impossible you're happier than I am," jested Sansa.

"What do you bet, darling?," challenged Tyrion.

"A jug of Dornish wine?"

They burst in laughter, recalling the joke of the bet.

"One day we'll carry out that bet. I haven't forgotten it since I challenged you in Myr. The idea of spending a whole day fucking drives me mad and one of these days I'll lock the door of our rooms and we won't go out until I'm sucked dry completely into and onto you."

"We haven't specified if it will last a full day, that's to say, from dawn to dawn, or from dawn to dusk," added Sansa, with her challenging tone.

"Until we both decide to stop. You agree?"

"Alright. It'll have to be a mutual agreement. Remember that if you quit, you lose."

"Why are you taking for granted that it'll be me who quits, honey?"

"Because you're an oldie, remember?," mocked her, without helping her giggle.

"With that you've earned a punishment for tonight, brazen lass. Would you like to be able to sit down during the remainder of this week?," said him with his voice of fake reproach and looking at her with his eyes flashing with lust.

Sansa was feeling again the heat in her belly and knew he must have another huge erection.

"Are you going to spank my ass?," asked her, with feigned innocence.
"It's worse than it. I'm going to stab my cock into you from behind. More than once. And I won't be merciful."

Her skin was burning with his dirty sexual language.

"Tyrion, we have to calm down. I think they're looking at us," whispered her, restraining her naughty smile. "It'd be too much obvious that we disappeared once more."

He inhaled several times.

"You're right. But later you won't escape the punishment," murmured him, shooting her his wicked look.

She kept her answer for herself because if she did not, it would be her who would lay him down in that very place, and it would not be very polite to make it before those people.

Mhyraz and Dara ran close to them and addressed them gestures to ask them to go back to the dance floor. The couple looked at each other, smiling, and followed the children. Mhyraz invited Sansa to dance and Tyrion did the same with Dara. The boy imitated for the mistress the bow that the master addressed the girl before beginning, and they danced together with the others, laughing and chatting with one another.

In that moment the queen was dancing with Jorah and he looked like he was floating on the clouds. During the next song, Daario went near Sansa.

"May I have this dance? If your husband agrees," said him, turning to look at Tyrion with his dazzling smile.

"Of course," conceded Tyrion, feeling automatically the light knot in his stomach. It was barely a little pull in his insides, an unconscious and unavoidable reaction after a whole life being despised due to his dwarfism and to be compared in a denigrating way to his handsome brother.

He trusted Sansa and he knew that her young and sweet heart belonged to him, but he did not like to see her next to a gallant and seductive man like Daario, and he liked even less to see her in his arms, even though it was a simple dance.

Sansa addressed him a glance that meant: don't worry, my love, I'm doing this out of courtesy but soon I'll be with you again. He smiled at her and nodded slightly, conveying her that she did not have to justify herself and she was in her full right to dance with anyone she fancied. He went on dancing with Dara and the girl distracted him with her lively chatter.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 26

Meanwhile, Daario was chatting with Sansa.

"I don't know yet in detail the story of how he won you over and took you here, my lady," said him, interested. "I haven't seen plenty of happy couples in my life, and that's why I'm curious."

"It's a long story, and my husband would tell it to you better than me."

"Surely he would. I haven't met anyone who speaks more than him or better than him," assured Daario, mocking. "He's a special man. I'm not surprised that you love him. If I liked men, I think that even I would love him, I have no doubt."

That comment made Sansa laugh.

"He's mine," warned her, amused. "And I'm afraid that he doesn't like men, either."

"I know, I know. I don't have the intention to steal him from you, the gods forbid that. I congratulate you both, my lady. You've gone through a long distance together and lots of dangers. He's protected you well and if the queen didn't have other plans for him, maybe I would've hired him in the Second Sons." His tone was mocking, but Sansa read respect in the sellsword's voice.

The song ended and Daario addressed her a polite bow and went to another area of the garden.

Tyrion got close to her, recovering himself from the dance session with the little girl.

"Daario quite respects you, my love. You can rest easy, he hasn't tried to seduce me."

"He always tries to seduce, gorgeous. It's in his nature. But I declare myself satisfied with the fact that you've missed me a little."

"You goofy," said her, caressing his hand. "I always miss you when you're not with me."

The children who were playing the instruments repeated every so often their limited repertoire of songs, and in that moment they were playing for the fourth or fifth time an exotic Ghiscari rhythm.

"Daario has asked me about the beginnings of our love story and how we got here, but I said to him that you'd tell the story better," said her.

"Ah, yes, we do have that chat pending since the day we first met. People love to snoop around other people's lives, and he keeps up with them," said Tyrion, ironic.

"I've seen how Jorah looks at the queen, and I've observed how Daario does as well. The two love her, each one in his own way. Jorah is mature and earnest and Daario is young and carefree, but I think that both are totally devoted to her," reflected Sansa.

"It looks like it. For Jorah it must be very harsh," pitied Tyrion.

"Love hurts. Especially when it's unrequited."

"If you hadn't given yourself to me, maybe in these moments I'd feel the same as Jorah. In love with a woman who didn't reciprocate," said him. "Do you remember when you asked me what
would happen if you never accepted me in your bed?"

"I don't like to recall that. I know my rejection hurt you."

"Having you close to me every night in the Red Keep and avoiding to touch you... It was a torture, Sansa. But during our journeys by ship it'd have been even worse, both sleeping in the same bed. Perhaps I'd have come to pounce on you like the oversexed man I am," joked him. "Do you know how it felt to be by your side hour after hour, beside such a beautiful woman like you, and force myself to restrain? Thank goodness you opened your eyes to my charms," added him, ironic.

"I stopped being a kid, Tyrion. If every woman saw what I see, I'd lock you in a room and I wouldn't let a single woman get near you."

"Ummm, I like the idea. I'd be all for you, locked together day and night... Oh, damn. I've hardened again, gorgeous. You always turn me hard."

She burst in laughter.

"You're impossible!," scolded her, bending to kiss him in full view of everyone.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 26

They had dinner and, soon after dusk, when the cold was bitterly, the party came to a conclusion. Everyone thanked the newlyweds for the good time they had spent and they went back to their places of residence. Tyrion and Sansa returned through the corridors along with Pod and Leena.

"It's been gorgeous, Leena. The best party I've attended. At least no one has fallen dead or no one has been threatened with death," joked Sansa.

Leena hinted a smile, remembering the stories her friend had told her about her own wedding and king Joffrey's.

"I'm very glad you liked it so much, Sansa. For me it has been the best day I've lived."

"Well, this is only the beginning of your new life with Pod, so you'll have to get used to be happy."

Both smiled at each other.

"I'll always keep this dress. For me it's very special and I'll take care of it for all my life. I'll touch it every day to assure myself that I'm not dreaming and that I have with me my husband and my best friend."

Sansa felt moved.

"You're the best friend I've ever had too, Leena. As a child my friend was Jeyne Poole, the daughter of the butler of Winterfell, but we were only kids and we didn't know yet about the sufferings of life. In King's Landing no one was a true friend for me except for Tyrion and, sometimes, the Hound."

Leena was curious. "A dog was your friend in the Red Keep?"

"Oh, not a real dog, he was one of Joffrey's kingsguards, named Sandor Clegane, but everyone called him Hound, because the blazon of his house does have three dogs painted in it. It's a house vassal of the Lannisters."

"And how was it that a Joffrey's kingsguard was your friend?"

"He was a very rude and foul-mouthed man, but he sometimes gave me advice and helped me. I think that on his own way he wanted to take a little care of me. It turned out that the Hound wasn't so loyal to his master. Once he even saved me from being ravished by a crowd of rebels who were tired of starving because of Joffrey. And in the Battle of Blackwater he deserted and left without further ado, because he was scared of fire and the whole bay was in fire. His eldest brother burnt his face horribly when he was a little kid and he dreaded the flames."
"Poor man," said Leena.

"He too became a fugitive. Who knows where he must be, if he's still alive."

They kept silent while they were walking. Beside them, their men were chatting as well.

"Pod, I didn't know you keep your end dancing," said Sansa to him, making him blush.

"But I've performed it very badly, my lady. My poor Leena's feet must be ruined because of me," regretted the boy.

"You haven't done it so badly, dear. My feet don't hurt so much," mocked Leena, holding his arm. He looked at her with tenderness.

They arrived at the newlyweds' rooms and these bade farewell, and once more thanked their friends for the pretty clothes they had been gifted and for their pleasant company. They went in and Tyrion and Sansa resumed their walk.

Tyrion opened the door with the key and, when they had just entered, he pushed Sansa against the wall and started to caress her over the dress.

"The punishment, remember?"

"I've been very nasty, my lord. I deserve it."

"Of course you deserve it. Take your dress off before me, slowly."

She did it, garment after garment, and her extremely white and satiny skin appeared gradually until she was totally naked before him. She then undid the hairstyle Dara had made with so much care. Tyrion was devouring her with his eyes.

"Now position yourself on all fours on the bed."

Sansa climbed onto the bed and placed herself with her elbows and kneels resting on the mattress.

"That's it. I love that fine sight of your ass and your pretty slit."

He undressed as well while she was awaiting on the bed, offering him an absolutely sensual view. Tyrion climbed onto the mattress and positioned behind her. He caressed her back and lowered his hands to her buttocks. He squeezed them with gusto, admiring their roundness. Then he kissed and licked them, and without previous warning he introduced a finger into her. Sansa moaned, but he did not see her face. That posture was tremendously exciting too.

He introduced another finger and increased the swinging movement gradually while he kept on licking her buttocks. He continued to penetrate her with his fingers and rubbing her clit with his other hand, until he provoked her climax and she melted in his hands, crying out. Then he grasped his cock and placed it on her back entrance. He pushed slowly and introduced it little by little.

"Here's your punishment for your insolence, my lady. I'll fuck your cute ass. It drives me mad too."

"I've been a nasty girl and you can do whatever you want to me, my lord."

"Good girl." He introduced himself more. "Does it hurt?"

"No, my lord."
"I'll stab it to the bottom. This way. Now I'm completely inside. You want me to fuck you like this, honey?"

"Yes. Do with me whatever you want."

Tyrion was enraptured with desire due to that game. He thrust slowly at the beginning and increased the speed progressively, holding her hips. She was stimulating herself.

Tyrion controlled his thrusts, waiting for her.

"I want your pleasure, honey. Will you give it to me?"

"Yes, my love," moaned her, near the edge.

"You're divine when you set your pleasure free. And you're on the verge, I sense it. Give it to me."

She felt even more overexcited with the fact that he knew her body so wonderfully well and that thought drove her to her completion.

"You're so beautiful. Let me show you how beautiful you're."

And he did, spilling into her.

They fell on the bed, recovering.

"It's been the best punishment of my life," murmured her, smiling and sleepy.

"And of mine," affirmed him, covering them both with the bedcovers and embracing her before falling soundly asleep.
With the first lights of dawn, Tyrion woke up, excited with the expectation for the day he had ahead of him. The gifts for Sansa's birthday must be finished and had to be carried to the hall he had prepared for the event, and to achieve that he had to see some people. First, he would speak with Mhyraz to finalize some details about the special gift. Later, he would come to an agreement with Pod about the arrangements he was going to make in the room. Next, he would go down to the kitchens to chat with the cooks about the birthday menu which they already had thought ahead and thank them for their work. At last, he would go to the market and would visit the craftspeople who were contributing on their part so Sansa had the best nameday she could wish for. Or at least the best Tyrion could offer her in Meereen.

He made a mental note of everything he had to do, trying not to forget a single detail. The half-light of sunrise and the peace of that hour enveloped him, along with his wife's warm body, who was sleeping by his side.

Tyrion remembered the agreement they had come to some days ago. Sansa would stop drinking the moon tea from her fifteenth birthday on and since that moment she might get pregnant. Again Tyrion felt that strong mix of emotions that flooded him every time he thought of having a child with Sansa. The fear had subsided thanks to her firm confidence, to her faith in that together they would overcome everything. A faith she had achieved to transmit to him by repeating that both had sworn to get on together, and, as Ser Barristan had said, an oath had power. It was an ancient and almost forgotten magic, but powerful. They had united their fates with an invisible tie, but so resistant as a rope.

When Sansa turned fifteen years old, fucking with her would be much more than the familiar trip to pleasure. Every time they made it it would be a possibility to conceive a baby with Lannister and Stark blood, who would bear his surname and probably would resemble both of them or one more than the other. In any case, he or she would be their flesh and blood, and Sansa and he would love him or her more than anyone could be loved in that world. Yes, they even would love him or her more than they loved at each other. Because it was in the order of things that love for the sons and daughters was the greatest feeling. And that feeling would make them stronger and more complete.

He did not wish for any of his children the blemish he had had to endure, but he could not prevent it from being transmitted, if dwarfism was inherited through the seed. Either way, he had to get used to the idea that it might happen and, if it was so, at least his children would not know what it was to be despised by their father, that same contempt with which their grandfather had punished his own son.

Tyrion imagined Sansa's belly growing month after month, the little discomforts of pregnancy, her breasts developing to produce the milk that would feed the baby... And he got hard again. Sansa's nursing breasts were turning him randy. He hinted a naughty grin, without feeling too much guilty for yearning to fuck Sansa like a horse in heat when she had a swollen belly and her delicious tits had grown a little more. If it were for him, he would fuck her until the very day of the birth, but he would have to make an effort and respect her discomforts and nuisances. Perhaps during that time she would not be so receptive to sex, what would be normal in her state. He would have quite a bad time but would bear it out of concern for her, and he would have no other remedy than resorting to his consolation measure. Jerking off with no stop.
Well, he would see. Anyway they would have to be careful due to the pregnancy and make it with more delicacy, simply. Some whores had told him that fucking did not harm the baby in the womb. In fact, if he remembered correctly, he had screwed some pregnant whores and nothing strange had happened.

*And you're again like a bull. How can it be that thinking of Sansa's belly, so round and big as Illyrio Mopatis' one, turns me hotter than the bricks of Meereen in summer? Oh, gods. What should I do? Do I have a wank or wait for her to wake up and I pounce on her just when I hear her hoarse voice of newly awake?* A wicked grin was spreading over his face.

He opted for stroking himself very slowly, with the hope that she awoke, saw him with his hand on his own cock and she felt encouraged to go on in his place... He lowered his night pants, which were the only garment he used to wear to sleep along with the night shirt, because he did not like to wear breeches when he was sleeping. In fact, before marrying Sansa he had a habit of sleeping naked in summer, and in winter he almost always took his breeches off at night.

*(Part 1 of a longer chapter)*
Chapter 210

Meereen: Day 27

He slid his hand over his hard, hot and thick member, which had a life of its own and was dying to stab into the sweet slit that was its home. He ignored if Jaime had felt since his childhood that strong erotic excitement which struck himself, and he neither had any clue if Tywin had ever known what it really was to enjoy sex, though he had the impression that his father had not been a man with strong sexual passions, not even toward Joanna. Tyrion did not know about a single woman with whom Tywin had been apart from Joanna. Not a slightest rumour about visits to brothels or affairs with women with whom he might have alleviated the lonely nights of his widowhood.

If Tyrion had inherited that powerful libido from some ancestor, the gods knew who that person had been. But the truth was that since he was a child he had not spent a single day without being up for fucking. And when he did not have a woman to love and whom express his arousal to, what had been the normal except for the times he met Tysha and Shae before Sansa, he had spent more than half his life in brothels, but those brief encounters did not fill him. They simply relieved him.

Sometimes a tavern or kitchen wench willing to earn some extra coins had offered herself and he had laid her down onto flour sacks or the straw of a barn and they had made it in silence, shagging quickly and later Tyrion could not even recall the face of the woman in whom he had spilled himself.

In one occasion, when he was the Master of Drains in Casterly Rock and he was around seventeen or eighteen years old, some Lannister's vassals payed them a visit in order to pay their respects to Tywin and do business with him, and they stayed for some days. The lord who visited them was taking one of his daughters with him, because he wanted her to know the splendour of the Lord Paramount of the Rock and Warden of the West. The girl, under her modest and unattractive appearance, turned out to be quite impudent. She approached Tyrion openly, hiding from adults, because she felt curiosity about how a dwarf’s male member was, and so she told him. She seemed to be surprised with its normal size, like any man's, instead of being tiny. She showed herself willing to have sex with him, and Tyrion did not miss the opportunity to lay her. They made it in some of the many rooms of the castle, until she left with her father and Tyrion did not see her again.

But he very rarely had received advances of women who were not usual or occasional prostitutes. The scant of them who were not and who had not been paid simply had been curious to make it with a freak, so they could verify that from the waist down he had the same that the rest of men. And he had gone with the flow.

He was conscious that for him it would be practically impossible to find a woman who loved and wanted him, who was willing to fulfill his overwhelming physical desire. He lost hope of knowing someone who burnt out of passion for him the same way he would burn for her. Shae made him recover his lost hope, but the love he felt for her was not so deep. Deep down he knew that relationship would not last forever and one day Shae would go, either because he would have to compel her to go to redo her life in a place safer for her than the Red Keep, or because she would get tired of the fact that he did not love her as she deserved.

And Sansa... When she was given to him she was a child, a Northern girl with a strict education who hated the Lannisters for plenty of reasons. She would never let him touch her. She would
never feel the longing for touching him. Theirs would be a marriage without love or sex. All he could expect was to gain her trust step by step, to build some kind of fragile friendship with her.

But she had given him the most beautiful surprise of his life. And she went on surprising him, day after day.

She was his goddess. His ideal partner. His soulmate.

With her, sex was a miracle.

Due to that he could not stop desiring her, asleep or awake, doing anything and wherever he was.

*Wake up soon, my love, or I'll have to peak on my hand and there's no comparison.*

Sansa moved, made a little noise with her throat and turned to him, embracing him. He stopped the movement of his hand over his cock and looked at his asleep wife, smiling. She pressed herself against him and inhaled his smell. Tyrion caressed her hair and Sansa opened her eyes.

"Good morning, my love," murmured her, with a sleepy voice.

His cock jerked up.

"Good morning, gorgeous." He kissed her forehead.

She observed that he was naked from the waist down and smiled wickedly.

"My lord was masturbating, without waiting for his lady? He's so impatient as a child. I'll have to teach him to be more patient," said her, caressing his torso and lowering her hand until grasping his eager cock. He panted when he felt that soft hand on him.

*(Part 2 of a longer chapter)*
Meereen: Day 27

"I want to be a good student, my lady," whispered him, with his voice loaded with lust.

"You're a mischievous student and you have a very disobedient cock," said her, straddling him. "I'm going to tame it a little."

"How are you planning to do it?," asked Tyrion, with flashing eyes.

"You'll see right now."

Sansa rubbed herself against him, without taking off yet her nightgown or her undergarment. She was moving so slowly that it was a lingering agony of pleasure. With both hands, she caressed all his chest and his belly, above the fabric of the shirt. She put a hand on his mouth and he licked her sweet fingers. Her hips were moving upon him, in an enrapturing rocking movement, with her ardent crotch rubbing his cock mercilessly.

He gripped her hips and guided her sensual movement over him. His eyes were locked with hers, and both were burning at each other with their looks.

"Tell me what would you like to do to me, my lord," suggested her.

"I'd like to fuck your wonderful slut. I'd like to eat you entirely. I'd like to feel you to your deepest," whispered him, moving his hands over her belly and rising them to her breasts.

"That sounds very good, my lord. What else?" She was moving mercilessly, without taking a single garment off her tempting body.

"I'd like to suck your tits. But this damned fabric is getting in my way," said Tyrion, squeezing the breasts above the nightgown.

"Be a little patient, my lord. Remember I'm teaching a lesson to this impatient cock of yours."

"At this very moment patience is not one of the virtues of my cock, I admit it, my lady. It's suggesting me to lay you down on the bed, tear your clothes, immobilize you and bury it into you until making you yell. So I warn you that it's not going to hold on much more."

"Ah, no?" Sansa moved again and again, defiantly. "We have a little rebel here?" Her erotic tone had a hint of humour.

"Little? So now it's little? I haven't heard you complain before," said him, feigning reproach.

"And I don't complain. Its size is perfect. But I think its ego is quite big. I'll have to lower it."

"How are you planning to do it if I lay you down on the bed and I plunge it into you?," threatened him, rubbing the nipples in circles. Sansa closed her eyes and moaned.

"That's it, my hot teacher. You'll have to surrender. You can't resist. You want to feel it inside you." He sped up the movement of his thumbs.

"Really?," panted her, pressing herself against his cock. "It's very confident."
Tyrion reacted with such speed that he made her shout with surprise. He pushed her against the mattress, placed himself upon her and held her wrists against the pillow. Sansa struggled, bursting in cackles, with the waves of desire running through her blood.

"Do you want to check how confident it is?" Straddling her, Tyrion grabbed the hem of her nightgown and tugged it until stripping her, almost ripping the garment. He sank his face between her bare breasts, holding her wrists once more against the mattress, next to her sides.

Sansa moaned and pressed herself against him, surrendering to the burning sensation of his tongue on her nipples.

"Oh, yes, honey. Surrender to me. Let me love you."

"Yes, Tyrion. Love me. I'm yours."

"Oh, Sansa." He slipped her underwear over her legs in a pair of pulls. Her moon cycle had almost finished.

Tyrion placed himself between her legs.

"I love you, Sansa. You want to feel me inside of you?"

"I don't want you to go out of me ever." She had taken his face between her hands and was looking at him with very bright eyes.

"I won't ever go out." And he penetrated her.

Sansa closed her legs around him and drew him to her. Her hands went over his chest and she gripped his hair while he was thrusting. She arched and he lunged her deeply.

"Come on, darling. Finish for me." He straightened without stopping his thrusts and rubbed her clit.

"I love you, Tyrion." The tension became unbearable and exploded throughout her body.

"And I love you too, honey." He followed her to the absolute pleasure they always shared.

They rested, embraced.

"Tomorrow will be your great day," commented him, smiling.

"Yes. I had never awaited my nameday with such impatience," said her.

"Well, well. I see that my dick is not the only impatient here," joked Tyrion, tickling her side. She squirmed, laughing.

"Stop! Don't tickle me," complained her without stopping her laughter.

"All right. I'll be merciful with my impatient wife."

"Oh, fool. Shut your trap."

She hit him with the pillow and he tickled her again, until they realized Mhyraz would come soon and they stood up to get dressed.

"Do you remember what we talked about some days ago? That from tomorrow on I'll quit drinking
the moon tea," said Sansa while they were having breakfast.

"I know, Sansa." They held hands over the table and smiled at each other. "I'd like to gift summer to you. I'd want to gift you a happy home where our children grow up merrily and you can dance with me in the sun like you were dancing yesterday, and I can lay you on the grass, among the flowers, and make love to you tirelessly, without worrying about wars, or Sons of the Harpy, or monsters or anything that isn't our happiness."

"One day we'll achieve it. There will always be wars and monsters, but we'll find a place of peace, I'm sure. Because I trust you."

He felt a tight knot in his throat.

"We'll find it. Because you're with me."

She kissed him over the table and he looked at her with reverence, contemplating in her blue eyes the world he wanted for her.
Chapter 212

Meereen: Day 27

They bade farewell with a kiss and Tyrion went out to his tasks, with the incentive of devoting the day to organize all the preparations for Sansa's nameday.

As he had planned, he talked with Mhyraz and asked him the special favour both of them had agreed. The boy nodded with a wide grin and assured him that the gift would be in a safe place with him until it was time to give it to the mistress. Later Tyrion would bring it and Mhyraz would keep it hidden, so Lady Sansa did not suspect anything.

As soon as he met Pod and them both and the two Unsullied descended along the ramps to the kitchens, Tyrion explained to his squire how they would decorate the birthday chamber and garden, and Pod said that Leena did not want to miss it for anything in the world and she would go with them to help in whatever necessary.

"After all that you and Lady Sansa have done for us, it's the least we can do," said the lad.

"It's not going to be very complicated. The decoration will be simple, but the expert women's opinion of your wife won't be inconvenient. You and I are quite a pair of rubes regarding those things," joked Tyrion.

"Indeed, my lord," corroborated Pod, smiling. "Lady Sansa's going to love your surprises, you'll see. Surely the artisans have made a great work."

"They do have a likeable general supervisor and willing to give them a good reward for their effort. I'm convinced that they've given the best of themselves to please the beautiful wife of the queen's small counselor," commented Tyrion, with his mocking grin.

They arrived at the kitchens and Tyrion walked close to the cooks, who received him with a bow.

"How is the menu of tomorrow going? Did you get all the ingredients?," asked him.

"Of course, master. Tomorrow the mistress will eat her favourite dishes, plus the special dessert you ordered us," explained the head chef. "We hope tomorrow you'll enjoy a great day. You deserve it. Thanks to you my freedfolk brothers and sisters will have houses where they'll live and besides, thanks to the mistress our children will go to school. I'll try my best so her birthday meal is the tastiest you've eaten."

Tyrion felt moved with such display of gratitude.

"Your work in the kitchens is excellent. You feed everyone in the pyramid and I can assure you that not even in the Red Keep of King's Landing the cooks were better than you."

"That's a great praise, master. I've heard that the masters of the Red Keep are very demanding."

"The cooks had to please Robert, a king who spent his life eating like a pig, and Joffrey, a sadistic king, and Tywin Lannister, who was not precisely friendly. I can testify to that there the cooks haven't had it easy," said Tyrion, with his ironic tone.

"Then I'm glad to serve the Mother of Dragons," declared the head chef, smiling.
"So am I," agreed him. "Have a good day."

"Same here, master." The woman bent and went back to her tasks.

Tyrion and their escorts went out into the cold morning and headed for the market. Meanwhile, another of his ideas was going round his head and he expounded it to Pod.

"Listen, Pod. What do you think about all the freed children who'll attend the school are trained for fighting, both boys and girls? Two or three times a week will be enough, I think, at least to offer them a basic preparation. Their hours of practice might be included as school lessons, along with the teachers' lessons. The parade ground of the pyramid is sufficiently large. A few Unsullied and Second Sons could take charge of the lessons, and of course Ser Barristan and you will carry on with the children of the pyramid, except that now instead of training them when they end the morning lessons, you'd start a little sooner, and you'd go to give a helping hand as soon as I come back from my morning tasks and I don't need you more as a escort for that day. I think that the proper thing would be to dedicate the last hour of the school to the fighting practice." He did a pause. "I think it's fair that all the children receive military training and learn to be ready for battle." Tyrion was reflecting aloud.

"It's a good idea, my lord. We have to be strong people to defend ourselves against our enemies," expounded Pod.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"And the children will be the adults of tomorrow. If they want to have chances to survive the setbacks the world is going to put in their way, they have to start to get ready since today. Life has always been cruel to those who aren't born with a silver spoon in their mouths." He kept silent for some moments. "I don't want the girls to be excluded. They too have the right to know how to defend themselves. If my poor Sansa had learnt how to fight, Joff wouldn't have laid a finger on her, I'm sure. He was a coward snot." He hinted an ironic smile. "I'll present it to the queen. Surely she'll like the idea."

"Surely she'll do, my lord," said Pod.

"It wouldn't hurt that Sansa learn some skills. I'm thinking it over and I believe that, no matter how much she hates weapons, she should acquire some self-defense techniques. And it wouldn't be inconvenient for Leena, either. What's your opinion, Pod?"

"I think they'd be fearsome, my lord."

Both burst in laughter.

"You're very right. Certainly Sansa would be fearsome with a dagger in her hand." And he was sure it was true. The she-wolf that his young and passionate wife carried inside of her might be quite lethal with a weapon, if she felt forced to use it. "We'll suggest it to the girls, you agree?"

"Alright. Though it's possible that soon... They'll be in no condition to plenty of physical displays, my lord." Pod reddened, as usual.

"Ah. Do you refer to a possible pregnancy?" Again Tyrion felt the tug of emotion in his insides.

"Yes, my lord. Leena isn't drinking... the moon tea any more," said the lad almost stuttering.

Tyrion looked at him amused, wondering how such a timid young man had been able to impress even the whores of King's Landing, who had seen everything possible.

"Sansa as well will quit drinking it from tomorrow on. What do you think in regard to becoming a father, Pod? By the way... You've never told me how old are you. You have to be very young still."

"I'm seventeen years old, my lord. Within four moons I'll turn eighteen."

"Only seventeen? You're very mature for one so young. I've never met any boy your age that is a better person than you, Pod." The fatherly feeling he experienced toward the lad invaded him. "The Stark boys were decent lads too. You'd like Jon Snow if you met him. And my nephew Tommen is very good-hearted, too much to wear a crown. All of you are excellent boys. You deserve a better future."

"We're fighting to achieve it, my lord," said the young squire, smiling.

"Yes, we are. Well, what do you think about being a father?"

Pod reflected for some instants.
"It scares me a little. A child is a great responsibility. But on the other hand it makes me feel very happy."

"It happens to me as well. But it makes me very happy too. A child with Sansa would be the greatest dream of my life. A dream I nearly had given up on before she fell in love with me."

"The times I saw you both together in the Red Keep, before the news of the death of king Robb and Lady Catelyn... She was beginning to change a little with respect to you, I noticed it," confessed Pod.

"Yes, it seemed that step by step she almost had stopped seeing me as the Demon Monkey," said Tyrion, with a mocking tone. "We were the Demon Monkey and the Traitor's daughter. She realized I wasn't her enemy. But later that terrible tragedy happened and she closed herself to me. That was what my father always did. Running over anyone who bothered him, by hook or by crook, even though that involved destroying his own daughter-in-law. And, by the way, screwing up the little good things I gained with a great effort. After that... How was Sansa supposed to even want to look at me? I was Tywin's son."

"Yes, they were harsh times. But they're gone," offered Pod.

"Thank goodness, Pod. I'm not sure I'd have been capable of enduring Sansa's contempt forever. She was very important to me."

"I think I already said to you that I was sure she'd love you one day, my lord. It was just a matter a of time."

"Just what I said. You're very mature for one so young." Tyrion was smiling at him. "You'll be a great father."

"So will you, my lord." The boy corresponded to his smile.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 214

Meereen: Day 27

The bustle of the market, where he had just arrived, put an end to their conversation and Tyrion grinned widely, recalling the mental list of orders and the people with whom he had to talk.

He found Sarik drawing up an inventory of a set of newly come products. Tyrion, who did not forget his daily tasks, wrote down the pieces of information and he later spoke with the market supervisor to ask him for his orders.

"They'll all be finished tomorrow morning, Tyrion. We'll send them to the pyramid as soon as possible."

"Great, Sarik. Thank the crafstpeople for me. And how is the special order going?"

"Oh, your lady will love it. It's the best we've been able to find. We have it here. Do you want to take it with you just now?"

"Of course. I'll give it to my boy, Mhyraz, so he takes care of it until tomorrow."

"Well, wait a moment, while I bring it to you." Sarik went out of sight among the crowd for some moments and returned carrying a bundle in his arms.

"Here you are. Take good care of it." He gave it to Tyrion, who took it carefully.

"We'll do, Sarik. Soon you'll check it by yourself," assured Tyrion.

It was heavier than it seemed, and it was really superb. Yes, Sansa would love it. He felt a wave of delight thinking of how her eyes would shine when he gave it to her. And his dick hardened when he imagined the way she would thank him for it.

He smiled maliciously.

When he went back to the pyramid, just when the lessons Sansa taught had ended, Tyrion searched for Mhyraz and handed him over the gift so he watched over it until the next day. The boy took it carefully and examined it, moved by the fact that his master Tyrion was entrusting him something so important.

"You already know what to do. Care well for it and I'll reward you for the nuisance. Moreover, you know that if you want you can go on helping us with it."

"It's no nuisance, master. I'll care for it gladly," affirmed the kid, excited.

"Tomorrow, when I send word to you, you'll take it to the birthday chamber. What do you think, Mhyraz? Is it not nice?"

"Very nice, master."

"You'll see how happy the lady will be. Have you learnt a lot today with the lessons, Mhyraz?"

"Yes, master. I like very much the stories the mistress tells."
"Good. Ser Barristan already knows you're excused from attending the trainings because of the special favour you're doing to me, so don't worry."

"Thank you, master."

"Great then. You know, be careful that the lady doesn't notice. When you have to take us the meals today, give Dara the gift so she cares for it while you can't."

The boy nodded, made a bow and left for his chambers with the bundle between his arms.

Tyrion thought about returning with Sansa, but he considered that it would be better to let her her own little while to sew or to whatever she wanted. That afternoon Leena would not pay her the usual visit, because she and Pod were on their days of newlyweds and, except for their daily duties, it was normal that during their spare time they wished to be alone to celebrate their new marital status.

And by the way, perhaps, to make a little Payne. The truth was that he was looking forward for his loyal squire to become a father. For Tyrion it would be almost as having a grandchild. And if Sansa conceived soon as well, the two children would grow up nearly like siblings. This is going to be a pretty family.

As Sansa would not receive visits in the afternoon, Tyrion was planning to entertain with her a bit under the sheets after lunch, without the hurry of fearing that Leena knocked on the door at any moment. And if he was able to go out of the bed, he perhaps could make a clean copy of the scrawling writing he had noted down in the market.

His cock was already jerking up beneath his pants, thinking of the tasty dessert she nearly always offered him after lunch.

But meanwhile, he would respect her self-space, so the best he could do while he was waiting for lunchtime was to pay a visit to Ser Barristan, with whom he so much liked chatting. So he headed for the parade ground.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 215

Meereen: Day 27

The knight saw him coming and left Pod in charge.

"Good afternoon, Ser Barristan."

"Good afternoon, Lord Tyrion."

"How are the trainings going?"

"Very well. Today I've missed Mhyraz, but of course, he has to take care of Lady Sansa's present." The old man smiled with friendliness. "Wish her a happy birthday for me. I'm sure that tomorrow she'll have the best birthday of her life, at least until now."

"I hope so. She doesn't deserve less. But it's going to be little compared to what I'd like to gift her. And I don't refer to jewelry or suchlike in which she's not very interested. I'd have wanted to take her to a nice place where having a change of air at least for a day, but it can't be. So I've managed the best I could with what I have available."

"You're right. Although Meereen is a much safer city these days, there aren't any places where you can take her to in order to spend her nameday," agreed Ser Barristan.

"Unfortunately, there aren't any. Where could I take her to? To a tavern? There aren't either any gardens to have a stroll through, the trees are scarce and the grass hardly grows. The bay offers a very pleasant view, but as it's outside the city I've discarded it. Too much risky."

"Of course. But don't worry, you've had a great idea borrowing that room. In fact, yesterday Podrick and young Leena's wedding was celebrated inside of the pyramid as well, and it was an unforgettable party. The queen's gardens were ideal."

"It's true, and the chamber I'm getting ready has gardens too, small but proper for what I need them. They at least will help Sansa to believe that she is in other place, and not within these four walls."

The knight looked at him with renewed respect and fatherly fondness.

Such as I looked at Pod a while ago, thought Tyrion, moved.

"I hope with all my heart that you obtain for her all she deserves, Lord Tyrion. A young lady like her is worthy of something better than this, like the queen," said the old man, pointing at the pyramid.

"I know, Ser Barristan. I'll give her something better than this. I'm aware it would be unfair to complain, because we at least have a roof upon our heads, whereas many others don't have one yet. But I suppose that everyone who loves wants the best for the loved ones. And if it's in my hand to give Sansa a true home, I'll give it to her. As any other would do if he could." He did a pause. "Do you remember what you told me about the oaths? I don't forget it. And I'm sure you're right. An oath is powerful, because it offers us something to believe in."

"That's the true magic of oaths, Lord Tyrion, beyond their binding power, which is so real as the fact that you and me are speaking at this very moment. And talking about that... I think that the old
scoundrel Walder Frey is cursed."

Tyrion looked at him with curiosity, realizing what the knight was hinting at.

"That's what everyone says in Westeros. Frey broke the sacred law of hospitality. He ordered the Stark guests murdered, and they had eaten bread and salt under his roof. Do you think that violation of the ancient magic will have consequences for him and his lineage?"

"It has had them for your father. He too contributed to violate the law of hospitality. I don't doubt that soon the curse will fall upon the Freys, one way or another."

Tyrion kept silent, reflecting. He usually did not wish death for anyone who did not really deserve it, but the old Frey really deserved it. The old swine. The bad thing was that, if the stuff about the curse was true, the innocents of the family would pay for all that too, those who had not taken part in the slaughter. Though surely all of them, except for the little children, were fully abreast of what was going to happen, and even so they did not do anything.

Either way, curses did not distinguish between guilty and innocent people.

"Anyway, Ser Barristan, I'll defend my oath to Sansa with my honour and my life, as you defend yours. I've already have enough with the curse the gods gifted me when I was born and I don't need any more," joked Tyrion.

"It's better not to tempt fate, indeed," said Ser Barristan with a slight smile.

"I on my part won't tempt it. We have enough trouble without curses bearing down on us. Well, Ser Barristan, it's a pleasure to talk with you."

"Same here, Lord Tyrion. Come back here whenever you want and, when we have sufficient time at our disposal, I'll tell you all I know about your house and your mother before you were born, and about my youth. An old man like me always likes to remember the past. It's the only left when one has lived as much as me."

"I hope it's not the only one left, Ser Barristan. You still have a mission to fulfill with Daenerys."

"And I wish the gods let me live enough so I can fulfill it. And if they allow me, then I'll be able to die in peace."

"So be it," said Tyrion.

"So be it," repeated the old man.

"Have a good afternoon, Ser Barristan."

"You too, Lord Tyrion."

They bent in a sign of respect and Tyrion headed for the main gate of the pyramid.
Chapter 216

Meereen: Day 27

"How was your morning, darling?," asked Tyrion, taking Sansa's face to kiss her. She had been sewing by the window.

"As usual, my love. The morning has gone in a fly with the children's lessons. But seven of them have had to go back to their rooms a while later, because they've fallen ill. It seems that four of them have the symptoms of measles and one of the maesters is tending to them. Besides, there are three who have caught a great catarrh and they have a fever and throat ache. Dara informed me this morning that some of them weren't feeling very well."

"Oh, dear me. Let's hope it's mild." Measles was a disease of childhood and it did not use to be serious, unless the children were undernourished and feeble. And in winter it was very common to catch colds.

"They're not in a grave risk, as I've been told. But I feel pity for them, without a mother who takes care of them and sits next to their headboards. I'd like to visit them and by the way see how they live in the pyramid," said Sansa.

"We might go later," proposed Tyrion.

"Oh, thanks a lot, my love. I'm not at ease knowing that they are ill and lacking a mother figure who watches over them. The queen does all she can, but her duties keep her busy for long periods and she can't devote to them one by one." Sansa bent to give him another kiss.

"You'll be a great mother, Sansa," asserted him, proud, caressing her cheeks. "I'm planning to plant a baby in your belly very soon," said him, gazing at her with his reverent and lewd grin.

She turned a bright red. *How is it that this man always succeeds in turning me red? It's not as if I haven't done all sorts of things with him in bed.* She smiled provocatively.

"Will you? You'll have to do your best, my lord." She licked her lips and he stared at that erotic and deliberate gesture, with his hard dick claiming for its release.

"That's exactly what I'm planning to do. I think that I'll hardly let you come out of bed. I'm going to fuck you without a rest and I'll flood you with seed, so I make sure that its constantly inside of you and your womb has no other choice than conceiving a baby. I think that at last we have the ideal occasion for carrying out the bet," said Tyrion, placing himself between her legs. She was still sitting on the chair by the window. He drew her to him pushing her bottom and Sansa encircled his waist with her legs and his neck with her arms. He slid his hands to her breasts and squeezed them, enjoying the firm roundness and the hardness of her erect nipples.

"Ah, finally we're going to carry out the bet. I was coming to believe that you were backing down," provoked her, moving her lips close to his, without touching them yet.

"I never back down, gorgeous. What I intend to do, I do it to the end and bearing all the consequences. You weren't thinking you were going to get rid of me, were you, eh?"

"I was beginning to think you were becoming an oldie and the bet was only a bravado so you pretended to be a tough guy." Sansa grazed his lips, grinning mischievously.
He pressed her tighter against himself.

"I always fulfill what I bet. And moreover, this cute body of yours needs to be given a real shag. What we've done until now has only been a warm-up. And on the other hand, I think that at this moment you're the one who is a little cocky, darling. I'll have to take you down a peg or two. I'm sure I remember that you scolded and punished my poor dick for its arrogance, and it turns out that your body is behaving the same way." His hands were groping the breasts and he lowered them again to her buttocks, encircling them.

"That's because it learns from your example," replied her, grabbing his hair and pulling his head softly backwards. She kissed him fully and he introduced his tongue in her mouth. Sansa moaned and he was driven mad with lust.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"I'm going to fuck you just now," murmured him against her lips. He moved a little away to take off her underwear in a tug and he lowered his trousers and breeches. His erect cock jumped out of its confinement and he grasped it and introduced it without delay into her wet slit, and she received it with a gasp. Sansa clinged to him while he was lunging into her, and a short while later she leaned against the back of the chair to rub her clit. She put her ankles onto his shoulders and Tyrion opened the bodice of the dress and caressed the bare breasts.

"In a couple of weeks, when you're halfway your moon cycle, we'll carry out the bet. We'll fuck until we can stand it no more. Will you be able to do it?," challenged him, panting with his thrusts.

"Will you?" She was looking at him with a challenging, wild, hot gaze.

"Don't provoke me, woman, or you'll see," threatened him mockingly, carried away by the delight of fucking almost wildly that glorious body.

"Ah, will I? And what about if I don't finish yet and make you suffer a little more, my lord?" Sansa slowed down the movement of her fingers on her clit.

"You'll finish. You won't resist." Then he did something unexpected. He pulled out of her, bent down between her legs and sank his tongue in her folds. He caught her so much by surprise that Sansa let out a cry.

"Tyrion!," exclaimed her, moaning. "I'm not finished yet completely with my moon cycle," she managed to say, gasping.

"I don't mind," blurted him, while still licking. He introduced two fingers in the opening and applied himself to the clit with his tongue.

She gave in and held his head, gripping his hair to guide him over her.

"Oh, Sansa. I've spent days without doing this," murmured him upon the drenched folds. "I've missed tasting your sweet slit."

She let herself go and the explosion swooped down on her. She held his head tightly against her.

"Oh, Tyrion!," shouted her several times, moving her hips with wild abandon and arching against the chair.

"That's it, my love. Give yourself to me. I adore it," whispered him against the folds, until the spasms and shivers stopped. Tyrion kissed sweetly the reddish pubic hair and straightened up. Then he penetrated her once more, without waiting for her to recover from her climax.

"What did you say about not finishing yet, my lady?," said him, naughty, thrusting with no restraint.

"You've cheated, my lord," scolded her, placing again her ankles on his shoulders so he could enter her deeper.

"Cheating is allowed. You yourself said it," reminded him to her, moving in and out.
"I see that tricking your poor wife amuses you a lot, my lord," joked her, breathing quickly.

"You don't know to what extent it amuses me. In fact, my cock will show you right now. It's going to finish inside your hot slit. Oh, Sansa!," moaned him, emptying into her wave after wave.

"That's it, my lord. Finish inside of me. Give me your seed," encouraged her, who loved to feel the warm fluid of life in the most intimate of her.

"It's all yours, honey," said him, panting. "In two weeks, I practically won't pull my dick out of your insides. I'll put a lot of heart and soul into my work so we make a little Lannister." Tyrion kissed her, smiling.

"Ah, so you do all this because of that. You're only interested in making a little Lannister," reproached her, pretending to feel offended and biting his lower lip.

"Well, fucking this body of yours is not bad at all. It makes the process of making a little Lannister to be acceptably pleasurable."

"Ah, acceptably. The lord is very generous." She bit a little harder, grabbing two fistfuls of his blonde hair.

"I'm always generous, my lady. If you don't stop biting me that way and pressing your tits against me, at this very moment you'll see how generous I am. And Mhyraz'll have to wait outside with lunch, I'm afraid."

"You're a rascal," scolded her, laughing and pushing him to move him away a little and stand up from the chair.

"Indeed I am, gorgeous. I want to do rascally things to you all day long," said him, with his lecherous grin.

She went to wash herself quickly before lunch, flushed from the intense sex session and smiling widely, with her sore but sated body singing with pure joy.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 27

"How are your ill brothers and sisters?," asked Sansa while Mhyraz was putting lunch onto the table.

"Not very well, but they'll survive, mistress. The maester has prescribed them some remedies and the rest of the orphans are taking care of them," explained the boy.

"You're good brothers and sisters, Mhyraz," praised Tyrion. "Probably measles will be passed on to some of you," predicted him.

"Maybe, master, but I'm strong. I already had measles as a little child."

"Well, let's hope it doesn't affect you. Later the mistress and I will pay a visit to the sick children and we'll see if they need something we can provide them with," explained Tyrion.

"They're well cared for, master. The Mother has been with them for a while, as well," informed Mhyraz.

"Great. When we end eating, we'll go," asserted Tyrion.

"Perhaps Leena and Pod will want to come with us too, they're fond of them due to the lessons and the trainings," suggested Sansa.

"Of course. Mhyraz, would you mind asking them if they wish to accompany us? Tell them that if they want to go, we'll fetch them and we'll go all together, if they fancy. Convey us their answer when you come back to pick up the things," requested Tyrion.

"Right now, master." The boy went out.

"Ser Barristan didn't tell me anything about the ill kids. Perhaps he at the beginning didn't notice that they were missing. When I went to speak with him, the trainings were just about to start, the kids were arriving at the parade ground and he mustn't have had time to note their absence. And Mhyraz wasn't present, because he was keeping an eye on Sansa's gift."

They started to eat and Tyrion visualized himself as a child, lying on bed and burning with fever.

"When I was four years old, I got sick with measles," he told Sansa. She raised her eyes from her plate to look at him with her full attention. "I was alone in my bedroom, without anyone who were sitting by my side to comfort me. The maidservants came to administer me the maester's remedies but they didn't stay with me. Everyone were scared of Tywin and didn't dare to break his commands. He had prohibited them strictly from mingling with us beyond the simple treatment between masters and servants, and I suppose that with me the forbidding must be even severer, because, of course, how was he to allow his wife's killer to receive the slightest display of affection," recalled Tyrion, sarcastic.

"Oh, my poor boy," pitied Sansa, stroking his hand.

"I had such a high temperature that I started to be delirious, and no one showed up to put cold cloths on my forehead or hold my hand as you're doing. My mind began to wander and I hallucinated because of the fever. I saw my mother."
Sansa was listening in silence, without letting go of his hand.

"I saw her so clearly as I see you. She had golden and shining hair, just like the sun when evening starts to fall. She was tall, more or less like you, slender and her eyes were so green as emeralds. She got close to me, sat down beside me, on the side of my bed, and she stayed. She held my hand the same way you're doing it and she spoke to me."

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 219

Meereen: Day 27

"What did she say?" asked Sansa softly.

"I still remember her exact words. She said: Hi, my love. I'm here with you. I've never been really gone. I want you to know that you're not to blame for anything, that I chose to bring you to this world and my death was a deed of the gods, because they decided it that way. I love you more than anything in this world or the other, and I'll always accompany you. And now listen to me. I'm listening, mom, I said. I want you to be strong and not to give up ever. Your father and your sister are resentful, they aren't capable of seeing beyond their own bitterness, and they don't make your life easy, but you have to fight against them and against anyone who tries to make you feel miserable. You're my dear son and for me you're as handsome as any of my children. Don't permit the world to make you believe you're less worthy. You're a clever boy and you have a kind heart. You'll find the way to carry on. Because you're strong. And I'll be by your side. Whenever the world is cruel to you, remember me. Remember that I've always loved you. And just then the fever dropped and she vanished. I recovered very fast and since then I haven't fallen sick again, at least not seriously. I've never been sure if she was simply a hallucination or if she actually appeared for me. But it was enough to give me strength to survive and fight. In my worst moments, I've always recalled her such as I saw her then."

"Do you think she was such as you saw her?" asked Sansa, caressing his hand.

"Maybe her looks and her voice were a figment of my imagination. But she seemed very real. I even sensed her scent. And she had some tiny freckles on her nose and a mole just under her lower lip, on the right side. She has been the only hallucination I've had, so I don't know if all the hallucinations are so realistic. If my father hadn't been the way he was, I might've told him that I had seen her in my delirium and perhaps, describing her, he could have confirmed if she was the same as my actual mother. But I never told him anything, so I'll never know." His look was lost in the distance, with a trace of sadness. Sansa squeezed his hand.

"In fact it doesn't matter, my love. The important thing is that it was at that precise moment when you decided not to let others defeat you. One way or another, her mother's love helped you to carry on. A mother's love lasts beyond death."

*I hope that the love I feel for you lasts for all eternity as well,* thought Tyrion, returning her soft squeeze.

"I know you went to look after me when I was hurt in the Battle of Blackwater," confessed him suddenly.

Sansa stared at him, surprised, and certainty lit up in her eyes.

"Ah, Pod has told you, of course." She looked at him smiling.

"You remember that several days ago I was very happy when I came back and you wanted to worm the reason out of me, and I said to you that that was part of my story about my travels and how I became Hand of the King? Well, I've come early to tell you, I can't help it. I was very happy to know that you tended to me when I was fucked up, with my face split in two."

"You were very good to me. You were concerned about the Traitor's daughter. It was the least I
In that period I wasn't enough concerned about you, my gorgeous. But I know you don't want me to admit it because you don't like I feel bad about myself. His fingers were intertwined with hers.

"Well, my love, we'll talk about all this another moment, alright? Now we have to finish lunch, because it's getting cold, and later we'll pay a visit to the children." He smiled at her with his green eyes full of love.

"Your eyes are beautiful, Tyrion. Hasn't anyone told you ever? You have the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen in a man," said her, losing herself in those irides that were almost like two polished emeralds.

He felt deeply moved, as it always occurred to him with that amazing woman he had opposite him. And he too felt very hard beneath his pants, due to the way she was gazing at him.

"Sansa... You think that when Mhyraz cleans up the table, we might...?"

"Yes, Tyrion. If you make it to me quickly," said her smiling, with her challenging tone.

"You know I'm an expert, honey."

And they roared in laughter, sharing a knowing look.

They ended eating and Mhyraz came back, telling them that Podrick and Leena would wait in their rooms for them. As soon as the boy was gone, Tyrion turned to Sansa, with flashing eyes.

"Well... What about that quick session?"

In reply Sansa led him to the bed, took off her undergarment and she wasted no time to guide him to her insides.
Meereen: Day 27

The orphans of the pyramid lived in several rooms on the ground floor. The four children sick with measles had been grouped in the same chamber, so the maester could tend to all them together, and the three of them with a catarrh were in the adjacent room.

Tyrion, Sansa, Pod and Leena first entered in the room of the children with a cold, who were the ones who felt better. Missandei was there, sitting next to their beds and talking to them sweetly.

"Good afternoon, my lady," greeted Tyrion. All of them nodded as a greeting.

"Good afternoon. I see that you've come to visit these little devils," said the young woman, smiling. "They only have a great cold, but they love to complain so they're payed attention," joked her. Sansa went close to the beds and knelt to be at the children's level.

"Hello, Shaya. How are you?," asked Sansa to the most little girl of the group, who was six years old.

"I'm better already, mistress. My throat has nearly stopped hurting now."

"I'm very glad, Shaya. Now you'll have to stay in bed for a couple of days. Are you very bored?"

Shaya was a vivacious girl who needed a great effort to remain still, so a pair of days laying down was going to be an ordeal for her, thought Sansa, grinning.

"A little, but I have company. My brothers and sisters come to see me and the mistress Missandei stays with us for a long while. Besides, the Mother has come too and put her hand on my forehead. She has warm hands, unlike others who have touched my forehead," commented the girl.

"That's because she has dragon blood, Shaya. Do you remember what I told you in the lessons about dragons?," asked Sansa.

Everyone else were hanging on their every word. The other children were listening quietly and were looking at Sansa with respect in their black eyes. Missandei, Pod and Leena were smiling, and Tyrion was looking at his wife full of love and pride.

"Of course I remember it, mistress. You said that some people have dragon blood."

"Well, that blood is the reason why the Mother never has cold hands," explained Sansa.

"I like her hands. And I like her hair too. It's like silver. I didn't know anyone could have hair like silver."

"Many members of house Targaryen had silvery hair. In ancient Valyria, most of the people had hair of that colour. I think I've told you some time."

"Yes, mistress. But I like your hair as well. When I lived in Yunkai, I met a woman with orange hair like yours. The master bought her. She was good to me."

"I'm sure she's all right, Shaya. Now she must be a free woman." Or she perhaps died in the slavers' riot in Yunkai, thought Sansa, concealing her sadness. She turned to the other children.
"And you, Rak and Meleh, how do you feel? Today I've missed you too."

"Rak cried for not attending Ser Barristan's training," informed Meleh, with a naughty flash in his eyes.

"You too were about to cry, don't deny it," replied the youngest, angry.

"Both of you love the trainings," mediated Sansa. "Soon you'll be able to go back to Ser Barristan's and Podrick's lessons. And to the ones I teach you too, which, even though you don't like them so, they're important as well," pointed out Sansa, smiling.

"Yes, mistress," said both boys in unison, as if they had been caught committing a mischief. They looked at Podrick, searching for an ally, and he shot them a knowing blink.

"Well, just now we'll go to see the children sick with measles," announced Sansa. "In a couple of days you'll be perfectly restored. Try not to uncover and don't start jumping through the room and catching cold, because you might relapse. All right?" recommended her.

"All right, mistress," said the two restless boys, a bit crestfallen. Staying in bed for two days mustn't be their ideal way of enjoying themselves. Sansa was reminded of her wild sister Arya, when their mother sometimes punished her to remain in her bedroom for hours, so she could learn to be less hot-headed and acquire a lady's patience, what of course was useless. Arya looked like a caged bird whenever she had to stay into any closed space for more than ten minutes.

Sansa stood up and said goodbye to the children. Missandei stood up too.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 27

The group headed for the adjacent room, where the children sick with measles had been put. Missandei indicated Sansa to sit down on the chair, but Sansa shook her head and signaled to Missandei to sit down herself. The children looked at the group of newly arrived with curiosity and answered to their greetings.

None of them seemed to be more than eight years old, and all of them were swarthy and thin. There were two boys and two girls.

"How do you feel?," asked Sansa, kneeling at the foot of one of the beds so she could be at their level.

It was evident that they had a temperature, as their eyes were brilliant and they had the tired expression that fever gave to faces.

"The maester has given us a remedy. It tasted terrible, but he said that we'll feel better soon," explained one of the girls.

"When I was a little girl and my siblings and I fell sick, my mother made us swallow medicines that tasted awful," related Sansa. "My sister always protested and didn't want to drink them, and my mother only managed to have her drink them by threatening her with not allowing her to shoot with the bow for a week."

"What was your sister's name?," asked the girl, curious.

"Her name was Arya and she was a bit like you, Runna. She had dark hair, was quite rebellious and she loved fighting. She hated wearing dresses and she didn't want to be a lady, she wanted to be a warrior." Sansa was using the same patient tone of voice than in the lessons.

Judging by her smile, it seemed that Runna felt amused with the fact that the mistress had such an unruly sister.

"I also want to be a warrior," affirmed her, bluntly. "I'd like to be a part of the Mother's army when I'm older."

Sansa gazed at her, perplexed. She did not know about any army in which there were women, but the girl's aspirations were worthy of being taking into account. Perhaps Daenerys might change the rules in that aspect also, as she was changing them in many other things. Sansa turned to look at Tyrion and he shot her an understanding blink. He knew what she was thinking. Later they might talk about that question, and Tyrion could set it out to the queen. Women in the army. Why not? They would not be the first warrior women. In fact, she had met one in King's Landing, called Brienne of Tarth, who was as tall and hefty like Jaime Lannister and she had taken him safe and sound to the capital from Robb's camp in the Riverlands, which was very far away. Undoubtedly she knew how to fight, better than many men. And the women of house Mormont were warriors too. One of them had died in the slaughter in The Twins, but Sansa in that moment did not want to think about that.

"It's an interesting idea, Runna. I believe that the Mother would like to listen to it."

"Really?" Liveliness returned to her dark eyes, setting aside the sad expression provoked by the
fever.

"The Mother is interested in good ideas. I'm sure she'd listen to yours," assured Sansa, smiling.

"Thank you, mistress."

"Not at all. When Lord Tyrion lays it out to her, he'll tell her that it's been your idea." Sansa looked again at her husband and he nodded, smiling at her with sparkling eyes.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 222

Meereen: Day 27

"And you, have already thought about what would you like to dedicate yourselves?," asked Sansa to the rest of them, to distract them for a longer while.

"I'm not very good in fighting," confessed a boy. "Ser Barristan knows, but he says that it doesn't matter that not all of us are good at it, that the important thing is that we at least learn how to defend ourselves, and I'm trying. But what I truly like is carving and sculpting."

"Ah. Do you carve wood?," asked Sansa, very interested.

"Yes. And I sculpt stone. I want to be a carver."

"I hope you achieve it. Have you thought about joining the brotherhood of stone carvers and quarry workers? Some of them devote themselves to make very delicate sculptures and engravings in stone," informed Sansa.

"Yes, I want to join there. I hope they accept me."

"Of course they'll accept you, Mikus. The brotherhoods accept everyone who have a flair for any of their jobs. When you reach the proper age, you'll start your training." Mikus was eight years old and the brotherhoods had agreed that their apprentices should be at least ten years old. "Meanwhile, learn the lessons of the school and Ser Barristan's and Podrick's, which will be also useful to you," recommended Sansa.

"Of course, mistress." The kid nodded.

The other two children must have no desire to speak, as they limited to listen without saying anything. Sansa feared that they had a high temperature and got closer to touch their foreheads. The skin was not excessively hot and that calmed her down a bit. They simply must be tired. It would be better to let them sleep.

"Well, we should go now. You need to rest to get strong." Sansa turned to Missandei. "Do they have everything they need? Is there anything with which my husband and I can help?"

"You've already helped coming to see them, my lady. I'll stay for a longer while and later the older children will stay with them and will bring to them whatever they need."

"Great. Let's hope no one else falls ill," said Sansa.

"Let's hope not. Let's see how the day comes tomorrow and we'll know if there'll be new cases," said Missandei.

"Yes, tomorrow we'll know. Have a good afternoon, my lady," said Sansa as a goodbye, nodding.

"The same for you," corresponded the young woman. She addressed them a smile and sat down on the chair.

The visitors went out and walked back to their chambers.

"What do you think about Runna's idea, Tyrion?," inquired Sansa. They were walking hand in
"It's very bold, but precisely because of that Daenerys might like it. Though I reckon it won't be easy for the male soldiers to accept without prejudices women among their ranks. That will be the greatest problem, to achieve that they accept and respect them," ventured him.

"Yes, I'm afraid it'll be that way. Of course, in order to be a part of the queen's army they'll have to display excellent skills, like any other soldier. It's not going to be precisely a gift for them."

"It'll be very harsh. But the women who really are engaged with being soldiers, will fulfill it," affirmed Tyrion. "I'll lay it out to Daenerys in our next meeting." Tyrion caressed her hand, looking at her with pride. "You're amazing, darling. Since we escaped from King's Landing, you haven't stopped astonishing me."

She reddened with the praise, and she also felt the tingle in her lower belly due to the way those caressing and ardent eyes were gazing at her.

"Really, Tyrion. When we lived in King's Landing, didn't you ever think that I was boring? Surely everyone else thought it. Besides, I didn't even barely talk to you."

"No, Sansa, I never thought it. Did you consider me so much blind?," asked him, with his mocking tone.

"No, my love, I didn't consider you blind, but I was a sad girl who wished to be elsewhere, anywhere so I didn't have to set foot on the Red Keep again. I wasn't a very pleasant company at those times. Moreover, what incentives could a shy northern girl have for a worldly-wise man like you?"

He stopped, took both her hands and looked her in the eye.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
"I can appreciate people's qualities. And I'm specially sensitive toward women's qualities. Many people could think that the fact of having frequented brothels is due to that I don't care about being with a woman or another, but they're flatly wrong. I've always perceived the good qualities of each one, at least when I haven't been so drunk as to prevent me from noticing it," admitted him, with his mischievous grin. "Where the others perhaps saw in you a dull girl, I saw a stubborn and brave fighter. Bravery is needed to endure quietly all the humiliation and the obvious contempt of such a sadistic betrothed like Joffrey, and to find strength to go on getting up every morning, getting dressed and tidying oneself up as if one were going to spend a peaceful day among dear people, instead of fearing to go out of the bedroom to cope with the rats nest. You had to be very valiant to go out from that room every morning, knowing what was awaiting you. Yes, Sansa, I admired you. Do you know that when I asked you if you wanted to end your betrothal to Joffrey, and you blurted to me your speech about your loyalty to Joff, in that very moment I'd have fallen to my knees at your feet? I murmured for myself: *Lady Stark, you may survive us yet.*"

"Oh, Tyrion. But I was like a parrot, always repeating the same sentences. I wasn't even good at lying. You more than anyone must've noticed what a bad liar I was," opposed Sansa, but his praise kept her cheeks flushed and got a delighted smile out of her.

"It wasn't about you were a better or worse liar, honey. It was that, even in that moment when you felt so vulnerable, after being brutalized and beaten, you weren't carried away by the natural impulse of collapsing and lowering your guard. You kept your survival instinct, not letting yourself be tricked by my tempting offer to break your engagement. What by the way, was an honest offering and I fully intended to rid you of Joffrey and send you with your mother. But of course, you did well when you mistrusted me. You didn't know me really and I was a Lannister. You kept a cool head and your dignity as well. I admired you because of that."

"That was horrible, Tyrion. I was kneeling there, with Joffrey aiming at me with his crossbow, Lancel telling plenty of lies about my brother Robb, all those people looking at me as if I were a sideshow, Ser Meryn beating me and ripping my dress, Joffrey enjoying himself with my suffering... I was sure I was going to faint. But I kept telling to myself: *Resist. Hold on. Don't surrender.* And then you arrived and put Joffrey firmly in his place and you made a fool of Ser Meryn. I would've kissed you if I weren't so frightened and full of rage." She squeezed his hand, addressing him a grateful smile. "The bruises that Ser Meryn's beatings left me lasted several weeks. Luckily he didn't beat me on the face, because Joffrey wanted me to keep being pretty," added her, with irony.

"I should've killed that son of a bitch who wore a white cloak," said Tyrion, with his jaw tense out of retrospective fury. "But before that, I'd have subjected him to a slow torture which would've implied depriving him of his male attributes with a red-hot knife." On his lips danced a harsh smile.

"He was an evildoer promoted to a kingsguard, the ideal henchman for Joffrey. After all, the fact that Ser Barristan was dismissed was positive for the old knight. He didn't have to carry on serving in that parody of the Kingsguard."

"It's true. For the Kingsguard had ended the golden times of Ser Barristan *The Bold* and Arthur Dayne *The Sword of the Morning*," agreed Tyrion.

"I know that your brother also is a part of that parody, and it's not my intention to offend him. But I
don't reckon that Jaime has felt greatly fulfilled during all these years."

"Certainly, he hasn't. I doubt that spending the days by the door of a whoremonger and drunkard king, hearing day after day how he cheated on our sister, is a kingsguard's dream. However much he bore all that in order to be near Cersei, Jaime also loves his vocation, even though he hides it under his mask of cynicism. My brother, with all that poise he has already lost, hasn't seen his dreams fulfilled. He has been forced to love Cersei secretly and to share her with another, and he neither has written great deeds in the White Book of the Kingsguard. And that hurts. But he does the same I've always done: laughing at himself and using cynicism as a shield."

They bade farewell to Pod and Leena and followed their way to their rooms.

"And nor my father obtained what he wanted," continued Tyrion, while he was opening the door. "All his children were a disappointment for him. Jaime refused to leave the Kingsguard and inheriting Casterly Rock, Cersei always has been a bitch who bred a sadistic, and I killed my mother and was born a dwarf. At the end, no one has fulfilled its dreams save me."

They went in and Tyrion took her hands again, staring at her in the way that melted her.

"Don't undervalue yourself, my love, among many other things because you have contributed to fulfill the greatest dream in the life of this man you have before you. I daresay that's enough for me not to think that you're boring." Tyrion smiled at her with desire reflected on his eyes. "And now, my lady, if you fancy it, you might prove to me how boring you're in bed."

"Oh, my lord! You're impossible," scolded her, with the heat in her lower belly getting her wet in an instant.

She knelt before him and kissed him eagerly, and he buried himself into her once more, until losing all sense of time and of the outside world.
Chapter 224

Meereen: Day 28

Tyrion woke up at dawn, as it was his habit, and immediately was invaded by the excitement of that day. Sansa was turning fifteen and he had organized for her the best birthday he had been able to come up with, taking into account their limitations. As soon as he went out of their rooms, like any other ordinary day in which he went to the city to carry out his morning tasks, he would be awaiting the orders that the artisans had to send to the pyramid, and when they arrived he would go with Pod, Leena, Mhyraz and Dara to decorate and tidy up the chamber and place the gifts so Sansa saw then when she entered there.

He wondered how the boy would be managing with the special present, but he was sure that he would be enjoying its care, and it would cost him an effort to part with it to give it to the mistress, though Tyrion had assured him that he could go on taking care of it whenever he wanted, and in fact Sansa and himself would need help. The boy would be more than glad to give them a helping hand.

That was too the day when she would quit drinking the moon tea from then on. The previous night had been the last time, and Sansa had performed a sort of comical goodbye ritual and had put the herbs in a drawer of the cupboard where they put away the bottles of wine and some cups they reserved for the visitors, along with the jug of water to drink and another jug with honey they sometimes used for erotic purposes, remembered Tyrion with his lecherous smile and getting hard after recalling the times he had spread honey on his wife's body and he had licked it until not leaving a single trace of the sticky substance and, by the way, he had driven her to the heights of pleasure. Precisely the previous afternoon they had played one of those games in which they applied each other a liquid the other one had to clean with the tongue. In fact, Tyrion had an idea for that game. It consisted of guessing by turns something that the other had set out through a clue. They counted the times they had been right. For each correct answer, different parts of the body of the one who was right were impregnated with the substance and licked, beginning with the head and going down. They agreed that the areas would be the lips, the neck, the wrists, the fingers, the chest and breasts, the belly, the bottom, the thighs and at last, the dick or the slit. In the case of wine, the exception were the genital areas, especially hers, as wine chafed such a delicate area. But with honey there weren't exceptions.

Every time one of them answered correctly, the other one spread the honey or the wine, whichever they had chosen, on the corresponding part, and he or she had to suck and lick leaving no trace. Tyrion, of course, made sure that Sansa answered correctly to the nine questions, because the highlight was reserved for the final, when he at last could plunge his mouth into her soaked and sweetened sex and carry her to the summit. On his part, he also applied himself to the answers, because just recalling her lips and tongue around his cock drove him mad with lust and of course he was not going to miss that delight.

"How diligent we are, my love," joked Sansa after he had provoked her a shattering climax and, soon later, she had provoked another to him. "We haven't failed a single answer." She was resting upon his chest.

"There have never been two students more hardworking than us," confirmed Tyrion, grinning. "With such incentives, who is not going to make the best effort to answer correctly? Especially wishing to come to the final part." He was caressing her back.
"It must be admitted that some of the questions weren't so difficult as to rack oneself's brains, Tyrion. My sister, when she learnt the names of the dragons of Aegon The Conquerer's wives, sometimes spent hours reciting them. She admired a lot Rhaenys and Visenya Targaryen. I couldn't have forgotten the names of their dragons even though I had wished to, with a sister like mine." She smiled and kept silent for some seconds. "Do you reckon there is any little chance that she escaped alive from the Red Keep?," asked her, with her longing tone.

"At the scarce times I came to see her in Winterfell, Arya looked like a stubborn and restless girl who ran around the whole castle, with the appearance of a person keen on exploring and concealing into the most unsuspected nooks. Surely a short while after arriving at the Red Keep she knew by heart at least a part of the underground passages. She probably used them to escape. But once out of the Red Keep, her chances of survival were scant. Where can a girl on her own and helpless go to?," reasoned Tyrion.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 28

"She must take with her the sword Jon gifted her, Needle. She loved that small toothpick nearly more than me, but I don't blame her for it. We had never got along very well." Sansa was smiling with melancholy.

"The streets of King's Landing weren't the safest place. Even though she had managed to blend in the crowd, many have no scruples with children. And anyway, in case she had went out of the capital... How would've she managed to head for the North or the Riverlands? Either way, destruction was waiting for her in both places, so... If she has survived, she must've gone to other place. Currently Riverrun belongs to the Freys and Winterfell was taken by the Boltons. There wasn't left for your sister any place to return to," expounded Tyrion, pragmatic as always. But he did not say yet that he was sure that Arya had been raped and killed in any alleyway of the capital or, at most, in any way of the outskirts, if she had been successful in leaving behind the ramparts of the city.

Sansa remained silent, resigned, but Tyrion knew she was not going to give up and she kept feeding the hope of her alive sister.

"It hasn't been heard any more of my great uncle Brynden The Blackfish, has it?," asked her, toying distractedly with the hair on his chest.

"I would've told you quickly if I had known anything, darling. His whereabouts are unknown. Not even the little birds have said yet a single word about him," assured Tyrion.

"If he's alive... Where do you reckon he might've headed for? He has to search for allies and support. I doubt he remains idle seeing how the family that have slaughtered his and mine and have taken over his house get off scot-free and prosper."

Tyrion remained thoughtful, brushing distractedly her back with his fingertips.

"All the minor houses in the Riverlands have had to swear allegiance to the Freys, although surely they aren't very happy with it. Almost everyone hates the Freys, but if they want to live they have to put up with the old scavenger being the owner of the Tullys' stronghold and of the surrounding lands. Your great uncle would've taken a great risk if he has stayed over there, and he also would have put at risk any minor house where he had sought shelter, so I lean toward the certainty that he has left those lands. I neither believe he has gone to the North or the Iron Islands. He's surrounded by Lannisters' henchmen everywhere. Not even the Vale is an option. Brynden isn't a fool and he surely reckons that Littlefinger was the one who murdered his niece Lysa. The only possible direction he must've been able to take is the South. But... The Reach is an alley of the Crown through the marriage of Margaery to Tommen, and he can't either trust Dorne, as I sent Myrcella to draw the Dornish people to the Crown. The southern territory is the most independent, but The Blackfish can't show up there without further ado. The Dornish people have allied with Daenerys secretly, taking advantage of the confusion there's now in the capital, but your uncle probably doesn't have any knowledge of that alliance. The only alternative he had left was to do the same as us: leaving Westeros."

"You think he's in Essos?" Sansa was surprised.

"It's the most likely. What I ignore is whether he's staying in any of the Free Cities or it has
occurred to him to do the same as most exiles and fugitives nowadays: to come to support the Dragon Queen."

Sansa's look lit up.

"Might my uncle come here? I'd love that he lived in Meereen. I'd have by my side a living relative and moreover he's so much experienced. He'd be a great ally for the queen."

"Certainly, he's a tough guy. He was very famous in Westeros. I secretly admired him a bit, since a little child. I listened to my father talking about him sometimes. Tywin rarely disdained a dangerous rival, save when he turned a blind eye to the threat of the White Walkers, certain that they were old wives' tales. But even my father respected The Blackfish." He did a pause and smiled at his young wife, happy that she had another reason to be glad, but he did not want Sansa to get her hopes up much with that. It might be that the elusive Tully had taken other path, or that he was dead. When Tyrion looked her in the eye, he knew that she was pondering those options as well, and that she was restraining her enthusiasm, because her stay in King's Landing had taught her to moderate her hopes, and besides the way to Meereen was very long. If it had turned out that her uncle had fancied taking it.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
"If he's determined to come here, he will. If nothing prevents him from it, one day he'll turn up in front of the ramparts," conceded him.

"Perhaps he has heard that I'm here. Maybe that will encourage him," speculated her, biting her lower lip thoughtfully. That gesture got him hard, like nearly all she did, and Tyrion hinted his lewd grin.

"It might be. But just now it's your husband whom is very encouraged," insinuated him with a hoarse voice, rubbing his hard dick against her belly.

They had made it once more and afterwards they had a bath, ate dinner and went to bed early. Tyrion wanted her to be completely rest and fresh for her nameday.

He got up carefully to relieve his physiological needs in the adjacent hall and wash himself a little in the basin. If she awoke in the mood for fucking, they would have time to make it once more before breakfast, and later she would put on the finest dress she had, next to the one she had wore in Pod and Leena's wedding, and Dara would style her hair with special care, because Sansa wanted to show off a radiant appearance in her birthday. Fifteen years old was an exultant age for a beautiful and happy young woman and she must celebrate it as if time could stop in that unrepeatable moment, as if her golden youth could last forever in an everlasting summer.

Tyrion would have loved to gift her a trip to the Summer Isles, where they would dress lightly, would drink exotic refreshing drinks in the shade of the palm trees, would swim in the sea, stroll through the smooth sand of the beaches and they would get a tan in the strong sun. She would be very gorgeous with her skin slightly tanned, and he would be yearning for fucking her during all day and night, how not. They would make it lying on the beach, or swimming in the sea, or lying down on a hammock, or any way they came up with... The islanders were almost naked and they worshipped a goddess of fertility who had sixteen tits and, like de Dornish people, they were quite liberal regarding their sexual customs, so it would not bother them in the least that a couple of pale continental visitors spent the day mixed up like dogs in heat anywhere arousal caught them. Sansa, of course, would not want to make it in full view of anyone as it was the dothraki fashion, and neither Tyrion was very sure of being willing to expose his wife's seductive body in front of any islander so lustful as himself, so he would seek quiet places in the open air and they could have fun there without any worries.

The truth was that that idea of the Summer Isles was very tempting. And his cock remained stiff like a mast, throbbing without respite. He gripped it and started to shake it slowly, while he was going back to bed. Though he tried to make the least noise possible, Sansa awoke and stretched out with a yawn. Tyrion stared at her amused and very aroused from a side of the bed. She turned to him her face of newly awake and he was about to pounce on her at that moment and penetrate her with no preamble.

"Happy birthday, gorgeous. You've turned the most beautiful fifteen years I've ever seen," said him smiling at her, naked and masturbating.

She shot him a naughty glance.

"Thanks, my hot husband. I'm very glad to turn fifteen by your side." She crawled toward him on
the bed, sat on the edge and drew him to her. "I can think of what may be my first gift," whispered
her in his ear, and then she kissed him and caressed his lips with her tongue. The touch of her sweet
mouth drove him crazy.

He pushed her with his hands to lay her down on the bed and groped her breasts. She threw her
arms upwards and arched.

"Then get ready to receive it," muttered him with a hoarse voice, moving his hands over the sweet
belly.

Sansa pressed him against her with her legs and he grabbed his dick again, placed it at her entrance
and introduced it all of a sudden, to the bottom.

"Here you have my first present of the day, honey. Take it," offered him, allowing himself to be
wrapped by the familiar wet heat.

"Oh, yes," moaned her, arching more against him. "Fuck me hard, Tyrion. Penetrate me very
deeply."

"As you wish, my lady. You like it this way?" He was plunging into her with slow and deep
thrusts, almost pulling completely out of her to sink once more until they could hear the sound of
their bodies colliding.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 28

"I love it. Squeeze my tits," commanded her, sliding her hand towards her clit.

He obeyed and squeezed them tightly, feeling the hard nipples on his palms. "I want to suck them," pleaded him.

She sat up straight and encircled his shoulders with her arms. Tyrion went on thrusting and submerged his face between the breasts. Then he licked the nipples and heard and felt her moans. Sansa laid down again and continued to rub herself, receiving his strong rammings. Aware that her husband must be very near the edge, she sped up the movement of her fingers on her clit and provoked her own climax, giving in to her own cries and pressing herself against him, with a need to feel him deeply. Soon later, he followed her, moaned her name aloud and trembled into her. His seed flowed in her insides and she felt delighted with the thought that since that very instant they might be conceiving a baby. Perhaps not yet, as her moon blood was just ending, but in a few days the chances would be highly increased. He must be thinking the same, because he looked at her with a special emotion in his pupils before lying next to her and kissing her at length.

"And you have just received your second gift of the day, my lady," joked him, embracing her.

"Until now you're maintaining a very high level, my lord," said her, smiling.

"And this is nothing. Wait and see." He blinked a wicked eye.

"I'm thrilled as a child," confessed her, caressing his beard.

"What we've just done it's not child's play. I'd say that you're all woman," lauded him. "But I like that you keep some sensations of your childhood, darling. I want to give you back your happy birthdays." He put his hand onto hers.

"My fourteenth was when we were traveling along the Kingsroad towards King's Landing. My father had just had Lady put down and the atmosphere was so tense than nobody was in the mood for parties. I was very sad and angry, Joffrey was ignoring me, Arya and I didn't talk to one another and my father tried several times to get close to me with no success. I pretended he didn't exist. In the city, he bought that doll for me, both as a birthday present and as a way to ask for my forgiveness. And I despised his gesture. I wish I could've brought the doll with me. It was the only thing that remained of him for me, along with the necklace he gave me some years ago and which I wear nearly every day." Her blue eyes were showing sorrow.

"No, my love. Don't get sad today. Think that your father would be glad that you're safe and sound and happy, and that your headstrong husband is willing to love you, care for you and pamper you every day. Even though he wouldn't like the fact that I'm a Lannister," added him, half joking.

"He'd realize you're not like other Lannisters. That you're not your father or your sister. You're indeed an atypical Lannister, my love," asserted her.

"I'm already imagining the songs about the atypical dwarf Lannister and his great love story with the beautiful Stark girl. The first match between both houses in living memory, and besides with the strange couple of fugitive lovers who have gone across half the world towards a city at war, with a queen who does have three dragons. You reckon it's enough stuff for juicy songs, my dear?"
He was grinning.

"Bah, too much boring," jested her, and they burst in laughter. Afterwards they got up, washed themselves, got dressed and waited for breakfast.

Tyrion bade farewell to devote himself to his morning tasks, and before going out he said:

"When I'm back and the lessons have finished, you must be ready, because there are still some surprises in store for you. You didn't believe that a sublime sex session was going to be my only gift for today, did you?"

"Oh, of course not. I know you very well. At the very least you'd gift me several sessions of sublime sex, my love." Her malicious grin was turning him hard again.

"Yes, you know me very well, naughty woman. I wouldn't be satisfied with a single session of sublime sex. And you're lucky that I have to go now, because otherwise we'd be already in the second session." He lowered his hands to her buttocks and squeezed them with relish.

Sansa burst laughing once more and pushed him towards the door.

"Come on, lustful husband, go now, before I put my hand beneath your pants and pull your dick out," challenged her. And she closed the door laughing, leaving him on the other side hard as stone and thinking in earnest of going in again and laying her onto the carpet like a wildling. He breathed deeply several times to subside the lust that was running through his blood, and he walked to the chambers where Mhyraz lived, to see how he was managing with the special gift.
Chapter 228

Meereen: Day 28

Tyrion went to the children's room and visited the sick ones. Three other children, including two guests, had contracted measles, and the maester was with them in those moments. The ones who had fallen ill the previous day were progressing favorably and they would recover in a few days. Tyrion thought that the improvement in their diet and in their life conditions since Daenerys had taken them in must have contributed to strengthen them and make them more robust. The children who grew up in an environment of poverty used to die due to diseases and varied infections, no doubt set off by malnutrition and the dire hygienic conditions, as well as by the extreme situation of negligence and abandonment to which those families had to resign themselves, lacking maesters and healers who tended for them. The majority of them resorted to hucksters and quacks whose treatments, at best, consisted of using leeches, that seemed to be the universal remedy for everything.

Tyrion reflected on the alarming shortage of healers for such a large population. The Citadel of Oldtown was the most eminent in the world regarding the training of maesters, but by any reckoning those who got to finish their learning and earn their chains were insufficient and besides the vast majority only served in manors, disregarding the common people. In any rare case in which the lord was enough kind-hearted, he allowed the maester of his house to visit the ill peasants who depended on the estate, but that was an exception.

In Essos, the healers were people who practiced any religion, especially priests, priestesses, sorcerers and witch doctors, who trusted more the power of praying, mystical rituals and witchcraft than a genuine knowledge of diseases and the effective search for treatments.

Mhyraz shared his room with Dara and some other children, and when Tyrion went in found a commotion. Everybody, except for Dara, who was styling Sansa's hair in those moments, were playing with the mistress gift, which undoubtedly had had an overwhelming success among the youngest people in the pyramid.

"How has he behaved? Has he been a nuisance?," asked Tyrion, amused with the spectacle.

The children turned to him and immediately recovered their composure. They greeted him politely and he answered with a smile.

"He has behaved very well, master. He has slept through almost the whole night and has drunk all the milk we've given him," explained Mhyraz.

The puppy looked at him with his very pale blue eyes, even paler than Sansa's. He was the breed of dogs most resembling wolves he had been able to find. The fur was light grey, with the claws, the belly and the snout white as snow. Sarik had assured him that the beastie had been born around a month ago and he had been bought to a merchant who went into dog rearing and training. That fine specimen had been difficult to find in Meereen and was not cheap, but Tyrion did not care. The dog trainer had assured Sarik that he had done him a lower price out of respect to the buyer. Seemingly, the entire Meereen knew about the small queen's counselor and he was very respected among all the freedfolk. In King's Landing the common people called me Demon Monkey and were certain that it was me who incited Joffrey to commit atrocities. But he was not going to permit any bitter thought to spoil his day.

The little dog was lovely and when he grew up he would became an impressive male adult. He was
not a direwolf, but he would be a family's loyal friend. Initially he had consider to choose a female dog, in honour to Sansa's she-wolf, but he thought better. A female dog would get pregnant at least once a year and... What would they do with so many dogs? Tyrion was sure that Sansa would pity the little puppies so much that her heart would break every time they had to get rid of them. And Daenerys could not maintain a kennel in the pyramid. So he went for a male.

The beastie got close to sniff at his feet and Tyrion scratched him between the ears. The dog, excited, rose up on his hind legs and rested his front legs onto his new owner's belly.

The children were surrounding them and they were staring at the scene, grinning.

"Soon you'll meet the lady of the family. You'll like her. I believe she's going to pamper you more than necessary, so you're a lucky dog," said Tyrion to him, and the puppet looked at him intently, as if he could understand what his owner was telling him.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 229

Meereen: Day 28

"When the other orders arrive, Dara and you will take them to the birthday chamber and, if you
don't mind, you'll help me to place some things." Mhyraz nodded. "As the lady and me will need
help so the dog gets used to relieve himself only where he's indicated, and besides someone will
have to take him out to the yard so he can have a stroll and exercise, I've thought of entrusting you
that task. Some mornings I'll take him with me when I carry out my visits to the city, while you're
at school, and you both could take turns when in the afternoons I need that you take him out for a
walk. At night he'll sleep with the lady and me. What do you think, Mhyraz?"

The boy nodded, very thrilled.

"It sounds good to me, master," said Mhyraz. "It will be an honour to take care of him."

"Remember that, as you're a part of our house and our family, you can consider him your
responsibility as well. So it'll depend on all of us that he grows up healthy and happy, all right?"

"Yes, master," said the boy, and hugged Tyrion shyly. This one returned the gesture to the kid,
moved.

"All that remains is to name the dog. But that task belongs to the lady, as this is her gift. Do you
know that she once had a gorgeous female wolf? Her name was Lady. But she died and the poor
mistress misses her a lot," explained Tyrion.

"A female wolf?," asked the boy, surprised. "How did she get her? I've heard that wolves are very
fierce."

"The mistress' father found a litter of cubs beside their mother, that had just died. The lady and her
siblings adopted the little wolves and reared them. They belonged to a rare species known as
direwolves. They only exist far North of Westeros, where it's very cold, and they are special
animals, more intelligent than any other existing animal species, along with dragons."

"Then, are you going to gift her this dog because it resembles her wolf?," asked the boy.

"Yes. I wish I could have found a direwolf for her, but it's impossible here. So the closest is a dog
like this."

"He's very nice, master. And he's clever and likeable. The mistress'll love him," assured Mhyraz.

"I'm sure she will. And so that this little rascal don't make mischiefs throughout the whole pyramid,
we'll have to train him. The truth is that I don't know anything about training dogs," admitted
Tyrion, smiling. "At least the lady is experienced, and she can teach you to accomplish that this
little scamp obeys you," recommended Tyrion. "And me too, because I'm afraid that he'll do with
me what he wants, especially because in a short while he'll be bigger than me," joked him.

The boy nodded again, smiling.

"The orders won't take long, but meanwhile I need you to keep the puppy with you. Dara must've
explained to the lady that today you both will skip school because I've asked you for it as a favour,
so she won't be startled when she sees you aren't there, or get afraid believing that you've fallen ill.
But the most likely is that she scolds me later for making you miss today's lessons." Tyrion ruffled
the kid's hair, and this one smiled shyly. "By the way, are you feeling well? Today there are three new children sick with measles."

"I feel well, master. And I think Dara feels well too," affirmed Mhyraz.

"Great. But if you feel any symptoms, send word to the lady and me, all right?"

"All right, master."

"Very well. Stay with our little friend. Right now I'll go for a stroll by the entrance of the pyramid, to wait for the orders to arrive. As soon as they're here, I'll come to notify Dara and you." The girl wouldn't take long to finish styling Sansa's hair and she would come back soon to the room she shared with Mhyraz and with eight more children. As they had been regrouped due to the sick ones, who took up two chambers, those days the healthy children had to share their rooms with more brothers and sisters.

"Yes, master. We'll be waiting for you." The boy began to play with the puppy and Tyrion got out to the corridors, walking toward the front door.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 230

Meereen: Day 28

Ser Barristan was in his usual place on the parade ground, exercising with Pod to keep fit. From that area the entrance to the pyramid was seen, so Tyrion could chat with his friends while he was waiting. The three of them greeted.

"Soon the rest of Sansa's presents will be brought. I'll stay here until they arrive," clarified Tyrion.

"The rest? Any of them has been brought already?," asked Ser Barristan.

"Yes, the most important one is here since yesterday. It's a dog, of a breed very likely wolves. Sansa lost her direwolf because of my lovely nephew Joff and my sweet sister," explained Tyrion, ironic.

"Yes, I heard that all the Stark youngsters had direwolves, even Jon Snow. An odd fact," pointed out the old man.

"Yes, it was an exceptional fact. It seems that it's very rare that those beasts lurk south of the Wall, and the Starks found a dead female wolf, that had recently given birth, and its six alive cubs, which in addition coincided in number as well as in sex with the young Starks, four boys and two girls. And even one of them was different from the others, white, mute, red-eyed and marginalized, and that one was which Jon Snow kept. During Ned Stark's and his daughters' trip to King's Landing, the two girls lost their wolves. Sansa's was put down and Arya's escaped. When Robb was assassinated in The Twins, his wolf was also slaughtered, and it's been heard nothing more about Bran's and Rickon's ones. The only one known to be alive is Jon Snow's."

"It seems that not even those formidable animals were able to protect those poor kids from their fate."

"It was very few what they could do against the Lannisters' cruelty. Nothing against Joffrey's stupidity and sadism, or against my sister's meanness, or especially against Tywin's cold wrath," admitted Tyrion. "You see what a cute family I had. But now Sansa is my family."

"You're more like your mother than you might imagine. She was very different from your father. She had a generous heart and was sensitive to others' feelings. No one who knew her could despise her, unless one had a stone heart or was consumed by resentment, like Rhaella Targaryen when rumours were spread about her brother-husband Aerys taking Joanna as a lover." The knight kept silent for some moments. "She laughed a lot and loved jokes, like you. In fact, I believe she was the only person in the world who made your father smile."

Tyrion gazed at the old man with curiosity, glad to know that he had inherited his sense of humour from her and so laughter bound them together as well.

"You always speak of my mother almost with devotion, Ser Barristan. Are you sure you didn't love her even a bit?", joked him.

The knight nearly reddened, embarrassed.

"Oh, no, no, Lord Tyrion. I assure you that I never fed that sort of feelings for her, but Lady Joanna was one of the people I respected most. I had the chance to have contact with her when she was princess Rhaella's lady companion in the Red Keep. I was a kingsguard of her father, who was
Aerys’s father too, king Jaehaerys, and I had the opportunity to observe them all carefully. The princess got jealous of her, not only due to her beauty and her cheerful character, but because Aerys became obsessed with the young Lannister woman. Lady Joanna seemed evasive with him and, at least according to what I observed every time I saw them, she never gave cause for anything. If he took too many liberties or if he assaulted her, he must do it out of the others' sight. I promise you that I never saw your mother behave in an unseemly way." After a pause, Ser Barristan added: "Your eyes are almost exactly like your mother's. Had nobody told you that?"

"No. My father had strictly prohibited to everyone to mention my mother, at least in my presence. Not even my uncle Gerion dared to disobey him. So I didn't even know how my mother's eyes were, although as she was of Lannister blood as well, I supposed that her eyes must be green," said Tyrion.

"The eyes of other members of your family are green with golden dots. But Lady Joanna's had a special green tone, like emeralds, and only you have inherited it. The ones of the Green Grace of the temple are the same tone, if you have noticed."

"The truth is that I've never looked much in the mirror, so I don't recall very well how my eyes are. Anyway, they surely don't look the same in me than the way they looked in my mother," joked Tyrion.

"I'm sure Lady Sansa doesn't think the same as you," signaled the knight, grinning.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
"Certainly, love works miracles, Ser Barristan. I believe she's the only person in the world who thinks I'm handsome." Tyrion grimaced with astonished incredulity.

"Joffrey was handsome. But Lady Sansa in the end would see him as ugly as a monster, wouldn't she? Beauty resides where each one believes beauty is. If Lady Ashara had been an insufferable bitch, she'd have disappointed me over time."

"Yes, everything is how we believe it to be or how we perceive it. The eyes see what they see, but there are other ways of seeing. And one ends realizing that those ways of seeing are what count," reflected Tyrion. "Age and maturity teach us those things, after having stumbled a thousand times over the way."

"You're lucky that your wife has matured soon," congratulated him the old knight.

"Very lucky. What other fourteen-year-old beauty would fall in love with me? But she had to mature the harsh way in King's Landing. After that, I had the chance that Sansa started to see me as a handsome man, me, the Imp. Until then, she wasn't doing very well with handsome-faced boys." He was smiling, malicious. "I must admit that I hit the jackpot. Even though Sansa had been less pretty, I'd have loved her as well, as soon as she had given me the chance. But I never dreamt of having by my side someone so gorgeous, nor I believed I deserved it. So I'm glad that she sees me as more handsome than I am, because thus I have a clearer conscience." Tyrion wondered if his mother had had that same fondness for snide humour and if his father had found her amusing.

"Yes, that young lady is a gift from the gods," asserted Ser Barristan.

"She is. Because of that today I want to give her a mite of what she deserves. And speaking about that, the orders are here. Pod, come with me. Let's go to take them inside," requested Tyrion to the squire.

Tyrion and Pod bent before the knight and this one saw them depart, with his sad expression of which never disappeared the nostalgia for what he had never had.

Them both carried the packages and Tyrion thanked the messengers, whom he paid generously for their services. They headed for the children's rooms and Mhyraz and Dara went to meet them, taking the little dog with them. Pod stroked the soft fur of his back and the beastie started to jump, excited.

"Hi, little friend," greeted the lad.

The four of them shared out the packages and ascended with the dog running around ahead of them, sniffing at everything.

"I'll notify Leena to come to help us, my lord. Don't worry, Lady Sansa won't see the packages."

"Very well, Pod. We hurry up."

They went up the ramps and corridors to the chamber and got down to work. They put a table in the garden and prepared it with some of the orders, which were themselves some of the gifts. Later,
they placed some bouquets of flowers in vases around the table, and they waited for Pod and Leena so they hanged on the branches of an orange tree the other twoo special gifts, of which Tyrion felt nearly so proud as how he felt regarding the dog. The craftspeople had made a magnificent work, and all the more having into account that they had made it in a really short time.

When the couple arrived, Leena admired the table set for two and the bouquets of flowers, that she retouched a bit with her woman's touch. As soon as she was satisfied with the result, she helped Pod to hang the gifts that remained unplaced yet. They looked very pleasing next to the table, fluttering a little with the slight breeze.

"This is a beauty, Tyrion," admired the young woman.

"If you like it, Leena, I can order something alike for you both. I'd be offered a reasonable price simply for being me," joked Tyrion.

"Oh, no, thank you, but it isn't necessary. It would be too much," opposed her.

"I'll pay for it. But that reasonable price wouldn't be a bad idea," said Pod, with his shy smile.

"Oh, Pod. We don't have to." Like every time Pod wanted to gift her something, Leena felt touched to the verge of tears.

"Of course we have to. I think we should begin with having a proper wedding trousseau, and we might start with that," said the young man.

Leena clinged to his neck and kissed him on the lips.

"I don't understand why adults do that. Kissing on the mouth," commented Mhyraz, as if that were the most unpleasant thing in the world.

*Obviously, he's still too young,* thought Tyrion, amused. He was remembering that some times he had caught his twin siblings kissing in the shadows of any corridor, and a sensation of disgust had ran through him. For a while, he believed that the kisses on the mouth were something revolting. Some time later, when he started to have erotic dreams and to spy on the handmaidens, he stopped thinking that kisses were so disgusting. And he quit thinking of it definitely when Tysha and he kissed for the first time.

"One day you'll understand it, Mhyraz." Tyrion blinked an eye to him and the boy returned an skeptical look, as if he was pointing out that not even in a thousand years.
Chapter 232

Meereen: Day 28

"Get ready, gorgeous. The rest of your presents are waiting for you," he told Sansa as soon as he entered their rooms. She leaned forward and they shared a kiss.

"Oh, Tyrion. What for I have to get ready?," asked her, with a suggestive voice, holding his face between her hands.

"Sansa, I'm getting hard and I'd love to gift you another session of sublime sex this very moment, but we'll have to wait a bit. And I can't believe it's me who is saying this," joked him, piercing her with his lewd gaze.

"Are you sure that whatever it is can't wait for a little longer?," teased her.

He gathered all his willpower in order not to surrender.

"Later I'll gift you a glorious fuck, but now we have to go. By the way..." He went to one of the drawers and took out one of the cloths they used in their sex games, when they blindfolded one another. "When we arrive at the place, I'll blindfold you, because I don't want you to see anything until I tell you to, so the surprise is bigger, all right?" That did not contribute to soothe the erection which was pressing against his breeches mercilessly. Imagining her with the cloth on and at his mercy... Gods, it's going to cost me a great effort not to fuck her as soon as we go through the door of the birthday chamber. Or in one of the corridors, before we have arrived. He smiled with lust.

"Go? Where?," inquired her, almost hopping with thrill.

"You'll see. It's a part of the surprises, so I can't tell you. And now... Are you ready, honey?"

"Of course I am. I'm always ready for you, my love." The intention she brought to her sentence ended up provoking him a full and almost painful erection.

"Very well, to hell with everything. The surprises can wait for a few more minutes. Come here, my provocative wife. Now you'll have what you're looking for."

He laid her on the bed, pulled her shoes, the cotton tights and her underwear off, lowered his own clothes and penetrated her in an instant. Sansa was laughing uncontrollably and moaned when she felt his hot and demanding cock inside of her, and his fingers spinning around her pulsing clit.

"Do you want another gift? Then here you are, my insatiable wife," murmured him, thrusting against her, pounding into her flesh.

"Ah, that's it, Tyrion. I love this present," moaned her, squeezing her breasts and resting his feet onto his shoulders.

"Then you're going to like it even more." Tyrion imposed a fast rhythm to his fingers onto her clit and kept it until he felt her pressing him in the convulsion of her wet insides, he felt each wave on his own cock, he enjoyed her cries of pleasure and the wild rapture that was sweeping her along. And only then he gave in too and emptied himself into her, he melted so deeply in that warmth that it was an effort to come back again and pull out of that ardent and slippery home where he felt better than in any other place.
"How many presents have I given to you already, darling? I've lost count," said him, blinking a lewd eye to her, moving away from her reluctantly.

"I've lost it too," admitted her.

Laughing and panting, they tidied up their hair and clothes and, momentarily relieved from their urgency, they went out to the corridor.

Tyrion offered his hand to her and she took it.

"Is the place far from here?," asked her, inquiring, unable to suppress her curiosity.

"All in due time," answered him, maliciously evasive. He guided her along the corridors and ramps.

"We're going up," commented her. We're not going to the queen's rooms, are we?"

"You're a too much curious girl. You want another prize before we've arrived?," threatened him, starting to get hard again.

"Oh, it's only noon and there are so many corners where you might reward me one more time...." challenged her.

"Shit, Sansa. Don't tell me twice or I swear that we won't arrive. If not because some guys are waiting for us, right now I'd lay you down even onto the hard floor." Tyrion was breathing deeply to try to ease the fire in his veins and his crotch.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"Are there people waiting for us? Do we have guests?" Sansa smiled observing the erection he was trying to control, with her naughty sparkle in her eyes.

"You can say yes, somehow, my horny wife. You want them to stay there awaiting? It'd be a little impolite on our part. And, since when Lady Sansa Stark is impolite?," needled him, in an attempt to distract himself from his lust.

"I thought I was a Lannister now," replied her.

"It sounds marvellously. That means that you admit you're only mine, Sansa Lannister."I'm afraid that doesn't help me very much to cool my wish to fuck her in all possible ways.

"And you're only mine, Tyrion Lannister."

"You know I am, my pitiless wife. Why do you insist on torturing your poor husband?," complained him, addressing her a fake downcast expression.

"Oh, poor thing. I'm so evil for having my man hot all day long."

"Yes, you are, for provoking me and getting me horny wen you know I can't pounce on you to devour you alive," protested him.

"I thought you were braver. I know who is going to win the sex bet in two weeks."

Tyrion pushed her against the wall and gripped her breasts with both hands.

"You're talking with a hero of the Battle of Blackwater, gorgeous. And moreover, every valiant soldier needs a woman to warm his bed up after battle. He has to release all the accumulated tension."

His hands descended over her belly and her hips.

"Really? And are you planning to release with me the tension accumulated in battle?," provoked her.

"By then I couldn't release myself, because my face was split in two." And with Shae I barely could do anything since then. I was pissed off, Tywin was there with his ill-fated presence and his hatred toward me, stealing all my merit in the defense of the city, I had lost all my power as Hand, my sister and my nephew wanted to kill me and shortly after I was betrothed to Sansa. Everything was going downhill. "Of course I'm planning to seek compensation with you, gorgeous. In your body I'm going to make up for a few things." He introduced his hand beneath her skirt and started to caress her sex above her undergarment. Sansa gasped and grabbed his shoulders.

"Tyrion. We might be seen," moaned her in whispers. He did not stop the movement of his hand.

"You aren't so provocative now, eh? And what if I make you finish right here?,"challenged him, lowering her underwear beneath her dress and masturbating her against the wall.

"Oh, Tyrion." Sansa closed her eyes and gripped his shoulders.
"Come on, honey. Finish for me." His fingers were slipping into that drenched delight and his other hand was groping the breasts over the fabrics of the dress, and soon later she convulsed, restraining her shouts to avoid being heard.

"Gods. You're terrible," protested her, laughing. "You always have to get your own way, don't you?"

Tyrion put her the undergarment on again and smoothed her skirt.

"Always. You already know I can't resist this wonderful body of yours that is always pleading with me to fuck it."

"But you haven't relieved yourself, my lord. Do you want me to give you a helping hand?," asked her, naughty.

"Of course, Sansa. You can give me a helping hand and all you want. But... Are you sure to do it here?" His breath was already fast, anticipating what she was going to do to him.

"I'm afraid we'll have to take the risk." She looked at both sides of the corridor and took his hand to lead him to a more discreet corner, hidden from view by a column. She knelt before him, lowered his pants and grabbed his erect dick, which was more than ready for her.

She began to stroke it up and down, with a fast swinging movement and looked at his eyes while she was doing it. He was staring at her enraptured. Sansa went on and on. "You're not so cocky now, my lord. Now you're in my hands."

"Oh, yes, darling. I am. Go on this way. I'm going to finish," moaned him.

She introduced his cock into her mouth and carried on with the swinging movement, caressing his basement with her fingers. He grabbed her head and rested himself firmly against the wall, because ecstasy weakened his knees. He felt the powerful wave and Sansa received all his seed in her mouth and her throat. She swallowed it while she went on sucking, until his ecstasy diminished and Tyrion returned from the heights, gasping.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 234

Meereen: Day 28

"Damn, my lady. Do you think any time we'll arrive at the place where we have to celebrate your birthday properly?" He looked at her smiling, recovering. Sansa was tidying up his clothes and smoothing his dishevelled hair.

"I thought we were celebrating my birthday properly," replied her, with her feigned air of innocence and standing up.

Tyrion wiped the sweat from his forehead, shooting her his malicious gaze.

"You're a very naughty girl. Practically you've assaulted me in an almost public place. Do you imagine that an Unsullied or a Second Son had come this way?," said him, with fake reproach.

"I think I remember you've assaulted me first," scolded her.

"There are left still some corridors ahead of us," threatened him.

She burst in laughter, gave him a shove and got going, swaying her hips with every intention.

"Oh, wicked woman. Don't do that. You have a fantastic arse, did you know? Too much fantastic."

"I'm glad you regard it that way, my lord." They were holding hands again and went on walking forward.

_Luckily, or unfortunately, we're almost there. This woman is my perdition._

"It's not about I regard it that way. It's that anyone who looks at it carefully might have erotic dreams with it later," affirmed him.

"You think so?," asked her, still flushed by the quick sex sessions and flattered.

"Indeed I think so. I'm still considering in earnest locking you up so nobody can look at that magnificent arse of yours except for me, so I reckon that proves how incredible it is."

"I love you're always so romantic," said her, laughing.

"And I am. I might compose nice poems in praise of your incredible arse."

"Oh, you fool."

They had arrived. _At last. It was time_, thought him, very satisfied, due to the glorious sex in the corridors as well as what was awaiting Sansa on the other side of the door. _And we still may share some other session in the birthday room._ There was a couch and some chairs that could serve for those purposes.

"Kneel, honey. I'm going to blindfold you so you can't see anything until I tell you to take the cloth off."

She did what he asked her and covered her eyes and tied the cloth behind her head.

"Come on," hurried him along. He took her hand and guided her to the chamber.
When they entered, Mhyraz went close to them with the dog and the little animal began to sniff at Sansa's skirt. She sensed that something was moving at her feet and was emitting little noises and snorts.

"What...?"

"You can remove the cloth, darling," said Tyrion.

She did and looked down. Her eyes dilated.

"Oh! It's so cute!" She knelt and took the animal in her hands, getting it closer to her face to watch it closely. Two thick tears threatened to run down her cheeks. It was one of the nicest dogs she had seen, and it resembled her Lady so much... The tears dropped. The animal writhed restlessly in her arms and she put it on the floor. She turned to Tyrion, took his face between her hands and kissed him with all the emotion that gift had aroused in her. "You've found it for me. Thank you."

"I wish he were a direwolf," said him, staring at her with reverent eyes.

"No, no, he's perfect." She shook her head and smiled at him through her tears. "And you couldn't find a direwolf so far from the North, my love. But it mustn't have been easy either to find a specimen of a snow dog in Meereen."

"Well, you know, I have my influences," joked him, drying her tears with his fingers. "Well, now you'll have to think of a name for our new little friend. Look at him, he adores you. Indeed, the little dog was rubbing himself against her skirt, drawing her attention. Sansa laughed and caressed the soft back.

"He's like a little ray of hope. Like the rays of sunlight announcing spring, or the light of the morning. His name will be Ray," announced her, solemnly.

"A very suitable name. Welcome to the family, Ray," greeted Tyrion, and the aforementioned looked at him and licked his hand. "It seems he likes his new name."

They all laughed, Mhyraz and Dara as well, who were watching the scene. Tyrion took Sansa's hand and made her stand up.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
"Now you can bring lunch," indicated him to the children. They nodded and went out.

"Come here," said Tyrion, guiding her without loosening her hand towards the sunny terrace. She observed the table, the ornaments, the bouquets of flowers and the two objects which were fluttering softly, hanging on the branches. Both of them took her breath away.

They were two tapestries. In one of them was a family tree, with the names of the members of the Stark family from her great grandparents. The Stark direwolf was above, and under it the tree spread largely, with a branch for each member of the house. His own name was beside hers, and beneath there was a gap to weave new branches and new names, those of the children they would have.

The other tapestry was a banner with the grey direwolf and the golden lion face to face, and the background was half white and half crimson.

Sansa leaned forward to give him a fierce kiss.

"I have no words, my love. All this is too much," murmured her, overwhelmed.

"It's not even the least part of what I want to give you," said him, taking her face between his hands. "But you haven't yet looked properly at the tablecloth," added Tyrion, smiling at her.

"Oh. The tablecloth is a gift as well? You're awesome." She kissed him again and got near the table, to examine the fabric. It was a thick cotton fabric dyed light grey, and in the middle stood out a large embroidery that made her open her eyes wide. *Lady* was there, or at least a very similar female wolf. She was sitting on her haunches and looked at the observer squarely, with her blue eyes, her white snout and her greyish fur perfectly defined.

"And don't forget the silver cutlery and the cups," added Tyrion, pointing to the utensils. "You can consider them as a part of your trousseau, if you want. In the package there were some more, for six people in total, but the rest are kept away, because right now we're only two."

"Oh, for the gods, Tyrion. All this must have cost a fortune and surely has been difficult to find artisans who made these things. But what you don't achieve, no one can either," said her, gazing at him with renewed admiration.

"I've already told you, I have my influences," answered him, grinning.

"And to round the task off, tell me that for dessert there will be lemon cakes," jested her, trying to lighten the intense emotion that was filling her.

"Clever girl. And I think that after this I've at least earned my favourite desser for later, haven't I?," suggested him, with his insinuating voice.

"Oh, indeed," affirmed her, feeling again the heat in her belly and getting lost in the emerald eyes.

*Ray* attracted their attention in that moment, raising on his hind legs onto Sansa's skirt and launching little groans.
"Oh, dear me, little devil. You're also hungry, aren't you?"

Tyrion and her laughed, observing amused the eager expression of the beastie, and they sat by the table, with Ray at their feet. Sansa stroked Lady's embroidery and turned to look at the superb family tree.

"Do you know by heart all those names of members of my family, Tyrion?" She was beside herself with astonishment.

"Well, I admit that Jorah has helped me a bit. As an old vassal of your house, he knows your family pretty thoroughly. I only needed confirmation for some names, but I knew most."

"I was sure you had cheated a little," joked her, taking his hand above the table.

"Eh! I've only cheated very little," complained him, caressing her knuckles.

"Later I'll have to punish you, my lord."

"I love when you punish me." He was roaming her with his lecherous gaze.

"Then get ready," challenged her.

"I'm always ready," boasted him.

She released his hand to take off a shoe. Tyrion observed her movements, and then she planted a foot on his crotch under the table. He jerked up.

"Sansa! You want me to fuck you in front of the children? They must be about to come."

"It wouldn't be very decorous, my lord." She went on rubbing him with her foot. He moaned, making a great effort to restrain himself and then Sansa moved away the foot brusquely. Just in that moment the children got in with lunch.

"You're not going to get rid of my dessert, hot and sassy woman, It'll be me who will punish you," whispered him with a hoarse voice, and she showed her best innocent expression while she turned to look at the kids, who started to put the fragrant and steamy dishes onto the table. Ray emitted a hungry groan and everybody laughed.
Meereen: Day 28

Lunch included Sansa's favourite dishes, along with Arbor gold and lemon cakes. They ate in the pleasant winter sun of Meereen, with the soft breeze that blew almost warm at that hour. Tyrion felt himself floating in happiness when he stared at his young wife who was eating with delight, with her flamboyant shining reddish hair, her beautiful face rosy due to the pleasures she was enjoying that day, sexual as well as spiritual and gastronomic. Her cute sky blue dress emphasized the pale tone of her eyes and she was chatting and laughing. As always, the knot of emotion blocked his throat when he looked at her. He had witnessed her quick transformation from a scared and unhappy girl to a strong and happy woman and, even though she only was fifteen and hardly a year ago no one of them both would have imagined, not even in their strangest dreams, that the twists of fate would join them together, at present time Tyrion could not envision life without her. He would have never imagined that he might love so much a fifteen-year old lass, whose age he doubled in addition. He had never felt inclined to very young lasses. Even Tysha had been a little older than Sansa, as she must be around sixteen, and moreover being a prostitute and surely having experienced a very difficult childhood, she looked like an older person. And Tyrion was sure that not a single one of the many women he had possessed in the following years was younger than Tysha. At the least some of them would be about seventeen, like the noble girl who had been a guest in Casterly Rock along with her father and who had bedded Tyrion out of simple curiosity. Shae had not revealed to him her age, though he reckoned that she was at least twenty-three, nor had she confessed details of her past, keeping inscrutable regarding her origins. The only he could guess was that she was from Lorath, through her accent, which was a lot like captain Letho's. Perhaps was that feature of stubborn reserve one of those which gradually distanced him from her, the fact that Shae never gave herself completely, she kept nearly everything for herself and Tyrion at bottom knew that she did not trust him, as she did not trust absolutely anyone, and she perhaps was awaiting the blow that would come unavoidably, like so many others she had received in her rough and hazardous life as a mistreated girl. Her soul was hopelessly stained and the fact of having gone across half the world practically alone from Lorath to King's Landing had shielded her heart and in it nested a harshness that never softened. Tyrion understood it and did not force anything she did not want to offer him, but with the passing months he started to realize that he did not have enough with sex or a little company when he returned to his rooms of the Hand of the King. He needed a more solid and deep spiritual connection, he wanted to share everything with her, but he found walls he could not jump or demolish, because his paramour did not let him. He would have loved her to open herself, to confess her sorrows to him, to speak to him about her truncated childhood, about her father who surely beat her and raped her, about her mother who pretended that she did not see what was happening, or maybe she had not known her parents, or these had abandoned her or kicked her out from home. Who knew? Tyrion missed knowing all those details about her, but he did not ask her, aware that she did not want to talk about any of that. At their first night in the tent in the Lannister camp, Shae had made it very clear for him that if he said the least thing about her father or her mother, she would rip his eyes out, and he had taken seriously her threat. Judging by the way she had looked at him, she seemed very capable of doing it. So he never asked her a single question about her life. Nor she ever revealed anything. When they spoke, it was him who told her all sorts of things and she listened and sometimes gave him some advice or expressed her opinion about this or that. Or Shae told him about Sansa, toward whom she had developed a deep fondness, as if the Stark girl were her younger sister, and she described to him what she had done throughout the day at the teenager girl's service, and the people this one had interacted with. And little more.
(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 237

Meereen: Day 28

No, it was not enough for Tyrion, and he neither was sure that he was enough for Shae. He had cut short the woman's wish to flee together with him to the Free Cities, with which he made clear that he did not love her so much as to leave everything behind for her. Shae must have realized it, but despite all she chose to stay with him in King's Landing. Whether she did it out of love or out of fear for losing what she had, simply because it was very doubtful that she was able to find another man willing to maintain her indefinitely, Tyrion ignored it. But it must not be easy for her to admit that she did not fill her man's heart. She was a whore and if he got tired of her and left her, where would she go? Back to the beginning, to search for crowds of men for whom she would have to open her legs? What was left for a woman like her, who had nothing?

Both of them became resigned to their situation. He did because whenever he went back to his rooms it was pleasant to have a pretty woman to fuck and with whom he could share a bit of the love he was longing for giving, and she did probably because she had no other place to go and she must be tired of so many stumbles and men from all walks. All right, he did not deny that she might have come to love him, or even to desire him, but his inner voice told him that what kept her by his side was mainly the fear of returning to the streets, and especially the comfort and stability she had found with him.

And there were other barriers that came between them. He was a Lannister and he would not marry her. No, he was no more the naïve young lad who had married a whore. They had to keep their relationship a secret, they could not see each other as often as they wanted and in front of the others they pretended not to know one another, when they were in the same room. Shae would not be more than his whore, though he called her my lady. He felt selfish for not having loved her enough and for having put her life at risk taking her to the snake pit.

By the time he returned to the Red Keep as Hand of the King, he started to pay attention to the young Stark girl, though at the beginning what he experienced for her was compassion above all. But the girl was growing up, she was blossoming visibly, in spite of her constant sadness, and Tyrion, who was not at all immune to women's charms, began to desire her secretly, guiltily, pushing aside furiously the waves of lust that made his skin tickle when he looked at her. He noticed the quiet inner strength of that girl who was defending herself alone in a hostile environment, and he craved for offering her his friendship. And something more than friendship too, don't deny it, lustful dwarf. He discovered himself wondering what her true hopes were, her most hidden dreams, how she would be if she were not forced to pretend at all times. He wondered if every time she went to the sept or to the godswood she prayed for Joffrey's death, for an earthquake to tear down the Red Keep with almost all of them inside and she was set free, for Robb to go rescuing her, for Stannis to win the war and return her to her mother, for a courteous knight in a shining armour to come and take her away onto the back of his steed... No, Tyrion was sure that she had stopped believing that nonsense. That she had stopped believing that there were knights willing to save a prisoner girl without planning to sleep with her in exchange, or that there were men willing to love her only for herself, without thinking of Winterfell. Yes, she was very young and of course she felt fascinated toward comely knights like Ser Loras, and she could be deceived by the splendour. But she was no more the girl who departed from Winterfell.

He struggled to cast aside those rebellious feelings at the bottom of his mind and he went on with his routine. He felt very comfortable as Hand, enjoying his post as he had not thought he would, every night Shae heated up his bed and he felt useful for the first time in his life... And some time
later his face was wrecked in the Battle of Blackwater, his father came back to continue to spit at him his contempt and he kept resisting in the snake pit because, despite all the shit, he liked to be a part of all that. And because he did not love Shae truly. If he had truly loved her, he would have left for Pentos with her.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 238

Meereen: Day 28

When he lost his position of power, he still wanted Shae, especially because he was a man who endured badly the fact that the other side of the bed were empty, and having Shae was better than having no one and resuming his visits to brothels. But he started to fear for her seriously, because Tywin was there at last. And Tyrion felt worse with each passing day.

His sudden engagement to Sansa sank him into an even greater confusion, and to his worries he had to add the dilemma of unfaithfulness and the position where Shae was left into that situation, which was anomalous in itself since the beginning. Shortly after the awkward moment in which he on his own announced the cumbersome betrothal, in an outburst of guilt he bought the gold chains and offered them to Shae, in a desperate attempt not to feel so despicable. For a moment he deceived himself. Had he truly believed that he could be unfaithful to Sansa as if nothing happened, as if the girl had not suffered enough humiliations already? Had he truly believed that he could live happily keeping Shae as a lover secretly and even having children with her, and going back to Sansa's side without feeling mean-spirited? Had he truly believed that Shae would resign herself to those scraps?

It was Shae herself who opened his eyes when she refused his gold chains and his stupid promises. She would always be the whore. And Tywin would hang the whore and would choke his own grandchildren in their craddles. What did you expect, idiot? Shae had dignity. Maybe she was desperate, but she wouldn't degrade herself to that extent. It was you who degraded her.

After marrying Sansa, his sense of responsibility increased and, moreover, his want for the northern girl became stronger. He felt attracted to her like a magnet. The truth was that he did not feel indifferent toward his distant and sad wife. He sensed in her a beautiful inner world towards which he was dying to gain access, in addition to harbouring a pressing longing to make love to her and teach her what she might feel regarding sexual pleasure. On the other hand, he was struggling not to let himself be carried away by those incipient feelings that would not lead him to anything, as Sansa did not show interest in him. And in the middle of those inner battles, he ceased desiring Shae. As much because the vows sworn at the sept paralyzed him, as because by then everything had changed with no remedy. And there was not a place for Shae any more in his complicated life. The only he wanted was that his former paramour were safe and sound, that she redid her life in a safer place with someone who truly loved her. Or that she at least had the chance to find a better place, without the menace of Tywin closing around her neck. There was only one way out: to send her to Pentos, to a comfortable house where she could live quietly without having to sell herself to men again.

He ignored if he did all that out of pure self-interest, or for getting rid of her, or for fear of what would happen to her if she insisted on staying and Tywin discovered her though Tyrion and her were not lovers any more, or if he did it because he feared that Sansa noticed that there was something wrong between Shae and him... He had no idea, because what he felt most in that period was confusion and frustration. Confusion because his feelings were a mess, on the one hand his ex-paramour who did not want to accept that her relationship with him had ended, and on the other hand his virgin wife for whom he was consuming himself with desire, a powerful desire that not even Shae had aroused in him in their best moments together. And he was fighting with all his strength against that natural inclination of his spirit to the teenager girl.

Because when she looked at him she only saw a dwarf Lannister. A member of the enemy who did
not resemble in the least the knights of whom she dreamed when she still believed in songs.

Now he understood that the intense inclination he had felt to Sansa even before knowing her well and starting to love her was due to the fact that he very soon knew intuitively, without words, that she could fill his heart and his soul, and that he could make her happy if she accepted him, that he would be willing to give himself to her entirely. Her sweet spirit was not stained despite the blows suffered, and that quiet but not silly or insensitive young lass moved him to his deepest, and he did not even know very well why.

Now he knew why. It was because his heart guessed that she was the woman of his dreams. Of those timid dreams he had barely dared to feed before Tywin killed them.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 28

Ray, that was drinking his milk, brushed his leg and pulled him from his thoughts, which had crossed his mind for scarcely some moments while he was gazing at Sansa. And he again felt swollen with love for her. And he craved for making love to her right there, in the sun, feeling the breeze on the burning skin.

Sansa sensed his intense gaze and returned it, smiling with naughtiness and taking his hand. She knew perfectly what he wanted, and she wanted exactly the same.

"All this is perfect, my love. And the food is delicious. Do you think we might share a lemon cake?," asked her, licking her lips supposedly to wipe some sauce of the stew that had remained on them.

Tyrion recalled the last time they had shared lemon cakes and his lust shot up so much that he felt his crotch in pain.

"Only a cake? I'd share with you the entire platter. And we're going to do it just here," declared him, caressing her hand sensually.

"Out here?," asked her, grinning, with her eyes dilated with arousal. "And what if the kids come?"

"When they come back to pick up the things, I'll tell them that we want to be alone. That'll suffice for nobody to come, unless it's a case of absolute necessity."

Their breath was faster, and Tyrion felt Sansa's quick pulse on his fingers. That excited him even more and he roamed over her with his hungry eyes, stopping at her lips and her breasts, enjoying the view, conscious that she was very aware of his stare. He imagined her wet between her legs and naked in the open air, and his erection struggled to rip up his breeches. Her mouth was open and she licked her lower lip involuntarily, while he was making love to her with his eyes, on the verge of pouncing on her.

Ray distracted them once more of their current of desire when he drew their attention. He had finished up the milk and wanted caresses, surely because he was sleepy. Sansa put him on her lap and stroked his fur while she was singing softly. Tyrion listened to her sweet voice and envisioned her rocking a baby over her breast, sated with the milk he had nursed sucking the rosy nipple... Oh, shit. Mhyraz and Dara, come now, because I want to fuck my wife like a wildling and make a baby with her.

The kids seemed to listen to his pleading because in that moment they returned and Tyrion signaled them that they left on the table the lemon cakes and that they could take the other things away, and that they wished to be alone on their own. In the last moment he remembered to tell them to congratulate the cooks for him, as the birthday lunch had been superb.

As soon as the children left, Tyrion blinked a lewd eye and went in, took the thick carpet that Pod and Leena had carried there from another room to decorate a little the birthday room, and by the way he took also a few cushions from the couch, and carried everything out. He put the carpet and the cushions in the sun, next to the orange tree, the tapestries and the table, and took Sansa's hand. She had placed the asleep little dog in a sunny corner of the terrace. Tyrion made her lean back on the carpet and the cushions and she laid down, smiling and glorious in the light of the early
afternoon. Tyrion seized the platter of lemon cakes and put it beside Sansa.

He started to undress her slowly, enjoying the sight of her silken skin in the dazzling clarity. His extremely gentle gestures showed the devotion he felt for all of her, with his so expert fingers nonetheless trembling in anticipation and emotion like those of a green boy in his first time. That slight shaking moved Sansa deeply, and aroused her at the same time. She imagined the sweet young lad he must be at sixteen, with those same tender hands shaking when they caressed their first woman, and she wished to be in Tysha's place during his first time, to be loved by the insecure and nervous boy who was convinced that he was too much small and ugly for any woman to desire him. She wanted to gift him the first time he had deserved, not with a girl who was faking, but with a girl who was burning for him.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 28

She took one of his trembling hands and kissed it, closing her eyes, rubbed it against her cheek, breathed in its manly scent, licked slowly finger after finger with the tip of her tongue, looking him in the eye, and he was watching all she did, overcome with desire and awe, because it still filled him with wonder that she was there, loving him and wanting to make love to him as much as he wanted to make it to her. He would never cease saying a prayer for the joy of having her entirely.

Then she slid his hand over her neck and her bare breasts, indicating to him silently that she belonged to him, that she was yearning for his touch. Tyrion allowed Sansa to guide his hand onto her and felt her trembling under his palm, like he shivered by simply grazing her.

At that moment for him only existed her, her unbelievably blue eyes, her lips made for being kissed endlessly, her skin so soft that it caused a tingle on the fingertips, her breasts... Oh, her breasts. In the Red Keep he dreamed of them without having seen them yet. Her slit. Gods, what a slit. That slit that had bled when she gave her virginity to him on board of a ship. That blood had moved him because he had never been any woman's first time, and he knew how important the first time was.

"Oh, Sansa. You're a miracle of beauty. Next to you I feel like a tiny and ugly mortal who has been conceded the rare privilege of lying with the most beautiful goddess in the divine abodes," said him, with a reverent voice.

"And next to you I feel like an insignificant girl who has been conceded the privilege of lying with the most attractive and gentle man in the world," asserted her with no hesitation, with a slightly whispering voice due to the desire that sped up her breath.

She had let loose his hand and he continued to caress her very softly, finishing to undress her until the curls of her pubis shone like copper in the sun and the long legs appeared inch by inch.

"Every time I've possessed a woman before being with you, I've dreamed it was you, I wanted to find you in each one of them. I didn't know you yet, I didn't even know that you existed, but I was searching for you. I mocked myself for wishing for you to come to me," confessed him, with his voice so soft that it was like an intimate caress. She barely blinked, looking at his eyes with such intensity that she was melting him. "I ignored how your appearance would be, or your voice, or your name, but my heart knew that when I found you, you'd be her, because I'd feel inevitably drawn to you, I'd sense the spark of connection, of ignition, of my soul eager to sink in yours and of my skin burning for being merged with yours. But when I finally had you before me, it cost me greatly to admit that you were her. I didn't want to see it. I was scared. And I felt like a filthy and too old man for you. But my body and my soul ruined all the efforts of my reason, they made me see what a fool I was for trying to silence them. I exerted myself so much to deny the certainty because I was sure that after having found you I'd lose you without having possessed you, because you'd never be mine. You wouldn't love me." His eyes were sparkling out of emotion, recalling his dreams of true love, of the woman of his life, which he himself tried to reject because life had taught him that dreams were stupid.

Sansa put her hands upon his beard.

"I'm yours, and I love you," said her honestly. "And any dream I had about the man of my life fell very short. Because you've exceeded all my poor childish expectations and you're infinitely more than I believed a man could be. What did I know about love and passion? I didn't know anything
about this fire I feel now in my belly when you look at me like that, I didn't know one could burn
the way I burn beneath your hands, your mouth and your body, I didn't have the slightest idea that I
could feel my man so deep inside of me in every sense. I never really had dreams of true love.
Until you came to search for me, me, the traitor's daughter, to take me far away from that hell."

"I love you madly, Sansa. Since I saw you in Winterfell, I was destined for loving you in due time,
unavoidably. No matter how much I struggled. It was a lost battle."

"And now you're glad for having lost it?," asked her, provocative, lightening the intensity of the
feelings that were flooding them both.

"Are you asking if I'm glad? I've never been so glad of having lost something before now,
gorgeous," joked him, picking up a lemon cake and crumbling it onto her lips. Sansa burst out
laughing and he immediately pounced on her, licking the crumbs on her lips and plunging his
tongue to taste the sweetness inside of that maddening mouth. She moaned and then he moved
aside and made her bite the cake. She did and they ate the bit between the two, with their tongues
joined together and licking one another.

Later he dropped some crumbs between her breasts.
Chapter 241

Meereen: Day 28

"You do have too many clothes on, my lord," needled Sansa, with her sensual voice. The sun lit up her milky white and perfect skin and the crumbs of the cake awaited temptingly onto her, with some bits balancing on her breastbone, around her nipples and in her cleavage.

"It's true, my lady. I'm starting to be quite warm, especially because there's a beautiful naked woman before me," said him, taking off his doublet and his shirt.

"Is there? And how is she?", asked Sansa, with her playful tone.

"Her tits are exquisite. Round, plump, firm, with incredible nipples I can suck for hours unceasingly. I worship them and I'd dedicate an altar to them. Once I told my father, in order to piss off him, that I was the god of tits and wine. Now I know I'm the god of your tits," joked Tyrion, lowering his trousers and his breeches and throwing them aside. His cock rose up furiously stiff in the blond pubic hair. Sansa stared at it as if she were looking at a tasty delicacy. He had a long and straight penis, with the rosy glans shining in the light due to the wetness of arousal. Prior to him, she had never seen a man's penis, and in her little brothers those appendices looked tiny and thoroughly innocent. She only knew erect penises of horses and dogs and they had made her feel a sensation of disgust, as well as an intense embarrassment. Before her older brothers moved her away from the sight of the animals copulating in mating seasons, she had time to see how the males, with their members raised, mounted the females and penetrated them as if they were skewering them with a spear. Sansa in those moments felt her cheeks hot and her heart raced, and she wondered if people did that as well. She supposed that men's penises were similar to those of some kinds of animals, but until then she had believed that they used them simply to urinate. With a strange sensation which she did not know how to identify, she wondered briefly if men did that to women, but she had no idea how they did it or if it was possible that that elongated member with a threatening appearance fit between a woman's legs. Where did he introduce it? Into the duct through which women peed? She shuddered. How? That duct was too much small and narrow and moreover it must hurt and bleed a lot. Sansa was sure she could not stand it. But when she saw her mother joyful and healthy, she wavered. It did not have to be something so horrible if her mother did not seem to suffer any damage.

And if somehow the male member was introduced into the woman... How did it make a baby start to grow in the belly? She had a vague idea that those activities between males and females and men and women made babies, but the process through which it happened remained immersed in a cloud of mystery.

So she, embarrassed, tried to ignore with all her strength that disturbing facet of people and animals. But on the other hand she found it difficult to avert her eyes from the dogs and horses in heat. They aroused in her unnameable sensations that provoked a strange tingle in her lower belly, but she cast aside all that. When the septa Mordane began to instruct her on marital intimacy, she did not satisfy in the least her curiosity or soothed her fears, but left her immersed in a great confusion and apprehension. The idea of sharing the bed with her husband scared her, she who never had slept with anyone except for Arya when this one was very little and had nightmares, and then got into her bed and hugged her quietly, until them both fell asleep together. She felt terrified of the perspective of having to undress before a man, although he was her husband, and of him doing shameful and painful things in her most intimate part. If what was between her own legs made herself feel ashamed and shy, how was she going to be able to tolerate a man to look at it and
touch it, and to introduce his member into her, who knew how? Her septa did not clarify it any
more and Sansa did not dare to ask her, trying to pretend the perfect figure of propriety and
composure, but in her inside the questions were boiling like the bubbles in a cooking on the fire.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 28

Joffrey and Loras had not awakened in her a genuine sexual arousal. For her they were like the knights in her child's songs, romantic and sexless beings with whom kisses were the utmost, as well as touching betrothal ceremonies under the weirwoods and weddings in the godswood with tears and exchanges of vows, holding hands. But by their side she had not felt any fire, nothing beyond some naïve butterflies in her stomach.

It was with Tyrion, just after their escape from King's Landing and before giving herself to him, when she began to feel for the first time the fire in her lower belly, the moisture that turned her crotch slippery and which at last made her understand why her parents often had looked at each other with a special gleam in their eyes, why her mother sometimes moaned in delight in the silence of the night.

Sansa desired him strongly. Her husband was not the kind that people would regard as attractive, but her heart beat faster when she looked at him, his piercing green eyes provoked a leap in her stomach and not simple butterflies, she discovered herself craving for caressing his curly and dishevelled hair, she fixed her eyes furtively on his lips surrounded by the beard that he had stopped shaving, the strength of his muscular arms made her feel weak in her knees, and she imagined him naked. And when in other period she could not have even conceived to be in love with a dwarf man, currently she wondered how she had not seen before how handsome and desirable he was.

No, the comely knights in the songs would not have looked at her like he did, would not strip her with their eyes, would not touch her with delicate and intuitive hands which sought the highest pleasure she could reach, would not make her laugh the way Tyrion made her laugh, would not care about her feelings, would not invent naughty, funny and tremendously erotic games in bed, would not take care of her with their own lives. They would not love her tenderly. They would not feel interested in her soul.

She would not have found absolutely any of that in the sadistic Joffrey, or in Loras who did not feel inclined to women. Loras would not have mistreated her, but he would regard her as another piece of the furniture and would sneak out to be unfaithful to her with men, who would give him what he was longing for, something she could never give him.

More than once she had wondered that, if she had consummated her marriage in her wedding night with Tyrion, the act would have been so horrible as she had feared. And her inner voice shouted at her that it would not, even remotely. It was true that it was too soon, she did not know her husband yet and she was too much frightened to desire him, but now she knew that he would have been as gentle and considerate as possible, that he would have made the effort to communicate with her, trying to calm her down with any of his anecdotes and stories, and he would have awaken her instincts slowly and tactfully. She would drink some cups of wine to perk herself up and become more uninhibited. He would have put the candles out so the shelter of darkness allowed her to imagine that who was going to make love to her was a handsome knight and not her dwarf husband. When she were calm enough, as much for the soothing effect of the wine, as for his deep and reassuring voice, Tyrion would get his face close to hers, very slowly, hesitantly, and would ask for her permission with his gaze. She would restrain her fear and would nod, closing her eyes, and he would kiss her very softly, lightly, barely the hint of a brush, provoking tickles on her lips, who had never been properly kissed. Sansa would discover herself yearning for being kissed by a
true man, a man who knew how to do it well, with one of those kisses Jeyne Poole said that made one's legs shake.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 28

Little by little he would dare to intensify the kiss and she, shyly, would start to correspond. Tyrion would raise his hands to hold her head, he would sink his fingers in her hair and Sansa would put her hands on his chest and would feel his muscles under his doublet. Then he would move aside for a moment to look her in the eye and check that she was willing to keep on, he would make sure that, though Sansa were not mad with desire for him, she at least were awakening to the sexual sensations he could provoke to her. He knew very well that one could enjoy sex with a person whom did not love, and he would try to make his young wife enjoy at least a little her first sexual experience, even though she did not desire him. And that would be what he would have given her in that tentative first night, in the darkness of the bedroom. Very gradually, he would have made her open herself like a flower, getting her used to his soft hands, to his tongue into her mouth and on her skin. He would have said things to appease her, because he always knew how to make her feel good with his words. He would have undressed her very delicately and his kisses and caresses would go down her body to her spot of pleasure. He would touch it with his fingers and would respect her initial modesty, he would not force her to part her legs, but she would do it on her own when she began to feel soaked, hot and inflamed down there. Tyrion would find her clit and would stimulate it and at that moment Sansa would feel the fire spread throughout her. And she would surprise herself by wanting more, wanting to rise up the steps of delight. He, who always sensed what she wanted, would provoke her first climax with his fingers, always keeping an eye on her pleasure far before his own. And, after making sure that she had enjoyed herself, he would penetrate her trying to cause her as little pain as possible, taking away her maidenhead softly, and he would move inside of her gently, rubbing her clit again to make her up for the uneasiness, and he would finish into her, and Sansa would be caught by surprise when she felt his hot seed flowing through her insides. He, aware of the reason of her astonishment, would explain to her, still panting due to the effort and to his pleasure, that seed sprang up out of the member because when it spilled into her it could procreate a baby in her. And Sansa would discover herself thinking that all that had not been so bad as she had feared, that she even had liked it and, guiltily, she maybe would wish that he made it to her again...

Oh, yes, she was sure he would have been so tender that he would have aroused in her new sensations and feelings difficult to admit for her, but he would have already planted them into her along with his hot seed.

In those moments, during that gorgeous day of her birthday, imagining how her wedding night could have been if things had turned out differently, she was staring at her husband's cock in broad daylight and she found it cute, and she desired it inside of her.

Tyrion, smiling wickedly, sat next to Sansa on the carpet and went on crumbling the lemon cake onto her belly, and afterwards he put it near her mouth so she ate what was left of it. Once more he introduced his tongue in her mouth to taste the cake and went down her neck to her breasts, where he licked the scattered bits, and he did not waste the chance to suck her nipples and stimulate them with his fingers. Sansa arched instinctively and he put his hands on her back to press her more tightly against him and devour the breasts. Her moans were filling the air with no restraint. She seemed to have forgotten, or did not care in the least, that they were in a terrace in the open air, and she was moaning with total surrender, grasping his blond curls and guiding him over her skin. She made him slid down little by little and he ate the crumbs on her belly and those which were tangled in her pubic hair. Without shyness, she tugged lightly his hair down again and he placed himself between her legs, put a cushion beneath her buttocks, grabbed them with both hands to lift her a
little and plunged his mouth in the throbbing and reddened sex. Sansa cried out when she felt him in her folds.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 28

"¡Yes, Tyrion! I want you there. Eat me as if I were a lemon cake," pleaded her, pressing his head against her crotch.

"Of course, my love. You're more delicious than the tastiest lemon cake," murmured him, sunk in the hot wetness.

He went through all the opening with the tongue, up and down, and set a steady rhythm, barely grazing the clit, to pleasure her as much as he could, and delaying her explosion a bit.

Sansa rested her feet on his shoulders and moved her hips furiously.

"You're very hot, Sansa. I love how you move when you're enjoying sex. How you surrender to me. You know how beautiful you're?," said him still licking her. He let loose her buttocks and raised his hands to the breasts. He loved squeezing them.

"I always want to be beautiful for you, my love." Both of them were looking at each other's eyes and desire burnt in their pupils.

"You always are. And this very moment you're most beautiful than ever. When you're completely mine. When you give me your pleasure."

"I want to peak around your cock, Tyrion. I want you to fill me," asked her.

As every time she requested him what he most wanted in his life, he quivered.

"Right now, my honey. How can I be happier than filling you and feeling you around me?" He rose up a little and slid into her insides.

"You'll be when you have our baby in your arms," affirmed her, adapting herself to the rhythm of his thrusts.

"I want to make you a child just now, Sansa," said him, enraptured. "I wish we achieve it soon."

"I also want you to make me a child just now, my love. We'll achieve it very soon. Oh, Tyrion. I'm going to finish," announced her.

"Yes, gorgeous. Finish." He moved his fingers quickly and carried her to her height. She yelled his name several times, her spasms closed her insides around the dick and he gave in, gripped her hips to press himself against her and emptied himself to his last droplet.

Later he laid beside her in the sun and embraced her to give her his heat, because though the afternoon was so pleasant, the breeze was getting colder. Certainly, they had not felt cold in the slightest in the intensity of their sexual encounter.

"I got very excited imagining that we consummated our marriage in our wedding night," told her, languid between his arms.

"Really? But all that day was a disaster, Sansa. And you were terrified, I was drunk and it wasn't a
good moment to consummate our marriage. I didn't want to force you, or make you feel invaded. Simply, I couldn't fuck a scared girl," objected Tyrion, with his tone of light guilt.

"But I know that, if we had been compelled to do it, you'd been very gentle and patient, you'd have spent a lot of time to make me feel more at ease and would've awoken my senses little by little until making me desire sex truly. Even though we didn't know one another yet or trust each other, you'd have helped me to enjoy it. You yourself have bedded many women without knowing or loving them, and you wouldn't have done it if you hadn't enjoyed yourself doing it."

"It's true, it can be enjoyed though one isn't in love. I don't deny that I sought it because I love sex and I relieved myself with those women, but I did it also because I needed a bit women's warmth. I hated my empty bed. And I needed to deceive myself imagining that while I was possessing them, they came to love me a little. It was stupid, of course, but it was a way of feeling less lonely, although it were quite pathetic," admitted him, caressing her back.

"Maybe some of them did, Tyrion. Maybe some of them loved you while you possessed them." He shook his head, with bitter sarcasm, but she put a hand on his beard. "It's not so stupid or impossible as you believe. I, who am privileged to taste how outstanding you're in bed, get jealous thinking that other women had discovered what a real man you're and that they had fallen in love with you for one night, to have to let you go afterwards." She did a pause and he smiled at her with tenderness and with a flash of naughtiness. "Similarly, in our wedding night you'd have awaken me to sex sweetly, and you'd have made me want it... And surely that way you'd have sneaked in my skin and in my heart, day after day. Until I realized that it was you whom I desired. And whom I loved."

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 28

"All right, of course that, if I had to do it, I would've done it as gently as I could. But I doubt very much it had been that night. It'd be nearly like raping you, honey. I’d have felt that way." I was very confused. I desired her like a wildling but I couldn't spoil things between us more than they already were. And on the other hand, Shae was there and I still loved her, although I didn't feel for her the same as before. I couldn't make up my mind to betray her. And all that was a fucking mess in which my father had got us.

"You see, my love? With that you've just confirmed what I was telling you. That it could be very easy that a sensitive girl, who didn't have a harsh heart and who saw beyond appearance fell in love with you when you talked to her and touched her with your magical tongue and you placed your magical hands upon her. Certainly, I think I have enough motives to get very jealous." Sansa attracted him to her, possessive and grinning.

"You're going to make me believe I'm a real seducer, gorgeous," joked him, tickling her side lightly. She burst in laughter due to the tickling sensation and squirmed to escape from his fingers.

"You're a real seducer. But I'm the only one you have to seduce," declared her, kneeling on the carpet.

"I thought I had already seduced you," needled Tyrion, gazing at her with his lecherous eyes, still laying down lazily.

"Well, I see that my compliments have achieved the opposite effect. Now you have too much confidence in yourself. I'll have to be stricter with you," scolded her, smiling wickedly.

"Punish me," insinuated him, with a hoarse voice. Sansa straddled him and Tyrion put his hands on her breasts.

"That's what I'm going to do." She placed herself upon his cock, which was already hard and erect, and dropped suddenly onto it. She rocked and rubbed herself. He went on squeezing and caressing the breasts and did not tear his eyes away from hers.

"What do you think about this punishment, cocky man?" Sansa was panting over him.

"Dreadful, jealous woman. It's an agony," moaned him, transported. "You've condemned me to be trapped inside of you forever, gorgeous. I don't wish anything but the confinement of your insides."

"Then you'll stay in my insides forever." She felt the eruption and shook onto him, moaning his name loudly.

"Always, Sansa!," exclaimed him, spilling himself once more into her.

Sansa let herself fall upon him, panting. "Today you've filled me with so much seed that I'm sure there isn't room in me for any more. And at this rate my belly will start to grow soon with our baby."

"I still can fill you more, if you want," offered him, naughty.

"I'll keep you to your word, but now we have to get dressed. I don't want you to catch cold and fail
to me in the bet, within a fortnight," needled her, searching for her clothes.

"You'd better being the one not failing to me," challenged him. He put on his breeches and she passed him the trousers.

"We'll see, oldie." Sansa stood up and offered him a spectacular view of her naked body in the sun.

"Get dressed quickly, mischievous girl, or this oldie will fuck you here until sunset."

She laughed, putting on her underwear. "I think that now we should go back and take a bath, after this incredible day of sex," suggested her.

"Mmm, it sounds good. I love sex in the water," said him, with his lustful tone.

She threw a cushion at him, laughing. "You're terrible, my love."

"As if you didn't love me to be that way."

"Oh, you fool."

They finished dressing, while they continued to needle at each other, and Tyrion placed the table, the carpet and the cushions in the room again. They awoke Ray and took the tapestries, the tablecloth and the platter with the remaining lemon cakes, and they went out to the corridor, to go back to their own rooms. Mhyraz and Dara later would bring to them the cleaned silver utensils and Sansa was carrying under her arm a pair of bouquets of flowers to set them in their chambers while they were still fresh.

"It's been very nice, my love. All you've done for me. Thank you very much." Sansa wanted to take his hand, but she could not, because both of them were loaded with things.

"I would've liked to gift you a day even nicer, outside the pyramid."

"It hasn't been necessary. You've gifted me a magical day, with no need to go out of here."

"The day hasn't ended yet. It's still your birthday. I can give you one more gift," suggested him, with sparkling eyes.

She burst laughing again and exaggerated a bit her hipswinging while they were walking ahead the corridors, because she knew that turned him frenzied, and went on smiling, completely happy, until they arrived at their rooms, with little Ray trotting gaily next to them.
Chapter 246

Meereen: Day 28

"We'll hang the family tree on the wall, above the headboard," decided Sansa when they got into the bedroom, studying the available space. "And we'll place the banner in the adjacent hall. Is that all right, my love?" asked her, while she was putting away the Lady's tablecloth in a drawer of the wardrobe. She was planning to use it in the special occasions in which Tyrion and her had something to celebrate.

"Of course, darling. Any place you decide will be alright for me. The tapestry of the headboard will be easy to hang, as there's already a nail on the wall. The trace of a previous tapestry that must be there for a long time is visible. But I think that there is no nail in the adjacent hall. Pod could help me with that. I have it a little difficult to reach high places and moreover I've never been a star of housework," jested Tyrion. "I've always had someone who has made them in my place."

"You're right, the truth is that I've never envisioned you with a rag in your hand, dusting or cleaning the floor. Or driving nails," needled Sansa.

"There's a nail I'm very good at driving between your legs, sassy woman. Or have you forgotten how good I am?" said him with his wicked tone, putting his hands on her hips and drawing her to him.

"I have a very good memory, my lord. I haven't forgotten how good you're at it. But I'm afraid that that skill won't help us to hang the banner." She was grinning naughtily.

"No, I'm afraid not, my lady," admitted him. His hands were toying with the silky fabric of the dress.

Sansa leaned forward to give him a kiss, laughing, and turned to Ray, that was stuck to her legs.

"Damn the little sticky," said Tyrion to the dog, mockingly. "You aren't going to get jealous every time she kisses me, are you? Because if it's so, you'll be jealous all day long, little friend." Tyrion scratched the dog's head, between the ears.

"We'll prepare for him a corner of the bedroom so he'll sleep there," suggested Sansa. "Mhyraz could bring a large basket and a bundle of straw. We have to inform him now to search for those things and take Ray for a stroll, and tell the children to bring the bath items later. Oh, and someone will have to clean the gift that our little friend has just left on the floor." Ray had urinated near the carpet. "No, Ray," scolded Sansa, with a firm voice and moving her hand with an authoritarian gesture. "That's not done." The small dog looked at her with downcast eyes and Tyrion wanted to laugh. The beastie really looked like a child who knew he or she had been caught in a misdemeanour. "Go send word for the boy to come, will you, my love?" asked her.

"Immediately, gorgeous. And while we wait for the bath, do you want us to go up to see some of the houses for the freedfolk? I told you I'd take you there before they settle in," proposed him.

"Oh, yes. I want to see how they have been arranged," accepted Sansa.

"Very well. I'm sending word for Mhyraz to come, march Ray off and request some kids to bring the things for bathing and to clean the mess our little friend has left on the floor," informed Tyrion.

Sansa nodded and Tyrion went out to ask White Fly to seek the boy. The Unsullied departed.
quickly. He and Green Beetle took turns to stand guard at their rooms' door and to patrol the corridors of the second floor. They had acquired that habit since they were Tyrion's escorts. Sansa and him had got used to their almost constant presence in the corridors and they usually forgot that both Unsullied were nearby. Surely they heard all the sounds of their many sex sessions, thought Tyrion, smiling with wickedness, but they, true to their strict training and to their absolute discretion, did not show to have heard anything.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 247

Meereen: Day 28

He returned to Sansa's side and they sat to wait for Mhyraz, with Ray between them.

"You're going to get jealous as well when I fuck mom, Ray?," said Tyrion, with his mocking tone. "Because I intend to do it lots of times before you."

Sansa blushed. "Oh, poor thing. Don't listen to pop, Ray. He loves to needle, but at bottom he's a really nice person."

"Indeed I am. But that won't prevent me from fucking mom so many times as I want and you, little rascal, will have to resign yourself. When you get older you'll understand." Tyrion was smiling widely.

Ray was sitting on his haunches and looked at them, watchful.

"Oh, Tyrion. Do you think he'll know what we're doing when we are...?"

"Of course he'll know, because he has a highly developed instinct. But he'll have no other remedy than getting used, don't you think?" He again was staring at her with lust, as he had got aroused once more speaking about the topic.

She laughed, with her cheeks flushed. "I'm not sure of being capable of doing it with him gazing at us. It would be nearly as if someone were watching us."

"We could put him in the adjacent hall if it bothers you that he looks at us. But when he gets in the habit of our lovemaking, he surely won't pay any attention to us and will go to sleep or he'll remain quiet. For animals, copulating in view of everyone is the most natural thing."

"Well, then I'll also get used to the idea of him being present sometimes," agreed her.

"Anyway, I don't think that in those moments you even remember his presence. You'll be too much busy," insinuated him.

"Certainly I'll be." Them both were feeling the burning heat in their crotch and Tyrion was already thinking that he could take advantage of the visit to the homes on the upper floors for more than having a quick look at them. Any chair, couch or carpet would be perfect to lay Sansa and give her a quick shag.

Mhyraz arrived with Dara, they cleaned the stain on the floor and Sansa asked them for their sick brothers and sisters. The two kids answered her that the sick children were suffering the discomforts of their illnesses but they were not very bad. Afterwards they left taking Ray with them.

"Let's go." Tyrion held out his hand to her and they went out. "We have to check if the homes are comfortable enough." He glanced at her sideways, with his lewd flash.

"Oh, I know how you're planning to check it. But I'm afraid that we won't be able to check all the chairs, beds and the rest of the surfaces." She was smiling.

"I have a good mind to do it, gorgeous. Though I think my judgment wouldn't be very reliable. Any
"Yes, I recall a few sessions directly on the floor. A lovely and comfortable place, indeed," replied her.

"Well, I haven't heard you complaining," joked him. "You didn't feel the hardness of the ground because you were too much entertained with another hard thing."

She gave him a shove and passed him a bit, swaying her hips. At that moment they arrived at the third floor and they entered one of the homes.

Its size was similar to that of the chambers where they lived, and it too had two rooms. The furniture was simple and functional and there were no ornaments or embellishments.

Sansa watched the austere chambers, thoughtful.

"If I teach dressmaking and embroidery to the freedwomen of the pyramid who want to learn, they could make by themselves ornaments, curtains, clothes for winter... What do you think?," asked her to Tyrion, with the gleam of enthusiasm in her eyes. It was the gleam she had every time she undertook something new.

He looked at her with his expression of approval.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
"If you're looking forward to it, then go on. That's another of the things I'll propose to Daenerys. The list is getting long. Soon I'll have to note everything down or I'll forget about something," said him, smiling. "And speaking about teaching things, there's something that occurred to Pod and me some days ago. We thought that it wouldn't hurt that Leena and you learn basic tactics of self-defense, and you could train in the use of a launching weapon. Maybe the dagger. Though we defend you with our own lives, everyone, including yourself, would feel easier if you weren't so vulnerable. In this world we all must know how to defend ourselves if necessary. Because of that I'm in favour of girls' training in fighting techniques."

Sansa hesitated.

"I detest even touching a weapon, Tyrion. I don't know if I would be able to hold one, and I'm even less sure that I would be able to learn to use it."

"I know you loathe them, but it's necessary, darling. I don't want you to feel defenseless as you were in King's Landing. Though your spirit is strong, if you accompany it with some defensive skills, you can have more chances to fight for your life. I don't want you to feel weak again due to a lack of training in self-defense. I want you to feel that you can stand up if you have to, what I expect not to happen ever. And I also would like that you don't feel that you depend on me for nearly everything. I'd like that you have enough independence," contended him, caressing her hand.

Sansa looked at him with tenderness.

"All right, I'll try. But I don't guarantee you that I'll be very good at it."

He smiled at her, glad that she had agreed.

"It won't be necessary that you're a whizz at weapons, honey. But you can learn to take an attacker by surprise and stab the dagger into him when he doesn't expect it, for example. It's about saving your own life, what for me is the most important." Tyrion took her hands.

"Very well, I'll do it. Do you think that Leena will agree too?"

"Pod was determined to persuade her. Surely you both will be given the lessons together. He can teach you," proposed him.

"It seems that the school is being enlarged," joked her, squeezing his hands. "The morning lessons, the fighting trainings, the dressmaking..."

"We all must learn new things. That's how we move forward," affirmed him. "If Daenerys wants strong and qualified people, we have to be instructed."

"And what are you going to be instructed in, my love?," needled her, with her mocking tone. "I'll teach and will be taught. But you, apart from being a counselor, a general supervisor, taking strolls and noting down scribbles, what will you do?"

"I'll try that things in Meereen work the best possible, I'll look after the queen's matters and I'll be very busy taking care of you, flirting with you and fucking you. You think that doesn't sound like enough?" He addressed her his cocky grin.
"Oh, that sounds like you're very busy, undoubtedly."

"You want me to begin to be busy at this very moment, my lady?" asked him, pushing her against the wall and sliding his hands over both sides of her waist and up to her sides, to the lowest of her breasts.

"Don't you think you've had many activities for a single day, my lord?" She was playing to show herself elusive, because she knew that game turned him on.

"They're never enough, gorgeous."

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 28

She laughed and got rid of his hands, provocative. She strolled across the room, watching the furniture. "All the halls fitted out as homes are like this?," inquired her, with an innocent expression, as if he were not devouring her with his eyes.

"All of them are alike. There aren't many differences among them," answered him, and he seemed on the verge of pouncing on Sansa once more.

"The families will give them their personal touch, but I reassert that it will be more useful that more freed women learn how to sew and embroider. There isn't a brotherhood of dressmakers, is there?" Sansa had another idea in mind.

Tyrion looked at her surprised by her audacious idea. "No, there isn't any. There's a brotherhood of weavers, but not of dressmakers. Are you thinking of founding one?"

"Why not? People need good clothes for winter. Perhaps that way their quality of life improves during the forthcoming years and they will cope better with cold. And moreover, the way everybody dresses is important. If the majority have decent clothes, they'll stop feeling like outcasts. It will make them gain a higher identity as free people with a dignified life. Appearance has more influence than it looks," reflected Sansa out loud.

Another flash of admiration crossed his pupils.

"You're really full of surprises, honey. There isn't a single day in which I don't feel proud of you," praised him. "Definitely, my family were a bunch of blind and stupid dudes for despising you."

"I neither knew I was capable of all this, my love. In King's Landing I wouldn't have imagined it even in my dreams. If someone had told me that one day I'd be here with you planning to found a brotherhood, I'd think he was referring to a person completely different from me. Me, the traitor's daughter, doing something important, nice and useful with my life? No, I would've laughed with sarcasm and bitterness."

Tyrion took her hands.

"That's why I felt attracted to you since the first time I saw you. I had an intuition about what you concealed and what you could be. I didn't stop to analyze it at that moment, but you were the woman I dreamed of. Or you would be when you became maturer."

"And what if your father hadn't forced us to marry and you hadn't had the chance to know me the way you know me now?," inquired her with curiosity.

"I probably would've tried to dismiss or at least ignore my attraction to you. I would've gone on with my routine and would resign myself to see you go, married to another. However I doubt a lot that my father had let you escape from his claws, because he wasn't going to allow anybody to snatch him the North under his nose. He wouldn't have permitted you to wed someone who wasn't a Lannister. I don't even believe he would have handed you over to any of my cousins, though there weren't many choices, because Lancel is now a chaste sparrow of the Faith and most of my other cousins died at war. Anyway, I'm sure that, since he returned to King's Landing, Tywin started to hatch to make you his daughter-in-law. What favoured that he brought forward his plans was the
plot to marry you to Loras. And again I feel very sorry, Sansa, for all that, but I don't regret the consequences. I beg your pardon for not being remorseful for marrying you," said him, with his mocking tone but with his absolutely honest bottom.

"Yes, I've already noticed that you're not very regretful. I suppose I also have something to do with that." She toyed with his fingers, smiling at him.

"Oh, yes, a little," asserted him. She bent to kiss him and bit his lower lip. "Well, gorgeous, then... How about returning to our own rooms to make love while we take a bath? I'm afraid that we now can't make it here. The kids must be about to go to our chambers with the bathtub and the buckets of hot water."

"Of course, let's go back right now. I want to do enough, you know, so you don't regret much to be married to me."

They went out of the chambers holding hands.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
"Until now you're doing very well, but it doesn't hurt in the slightest that you go on exerting yourself every day. I like girls who put a lot of effort into things." Tyrion had his teasing and lustful smile. "And I can be very grateful."

"I know, my lord. You're very generous with this hardworking girl."

"It's a pleasure. Especially a part of me it's glad to be generous to you. And I recall a part of yours that is very generous as well. It has never denied me access since the first time it allowed me to enter."

"It's always available for you," said her. "It always wants you to enter."

He squeezed her hand, moved and greatly aroused. They had arrived at the corridor of the second floor.

"Tyrion... I have a question for you. Simple curiosity of a girl in love and a little jealous, but if it annoys you, you don't have to speak about the matter."

"Go on, ask me what you want," invited him, getting ready for the question. With regard to the hectic sentimental and sexual life he had led before meeting her, he had to be cautious with anything he revealed to her.

"After Tysha, didn't you fall in love with anybody? You only were sixteen by then. And, knowing your sensitive heart, surely you some time felt something for another girl."

"She knows me very well," thought him, pondering on an answer with which he had not to lie, but neither reveal all the truth. A half-truth, because he could not tell her about Shae.

"A while later I developed feelings for another prostitute, but that time I knew she was one, because I visited her in a brothel in Lannisport. Every time I went there I asked for her, and the procurer reserved her for me, because I paid him quite an amount of money to have her available exclusively for me during the nights I was there. I liked talking with her. With the others I limited myself to sex, but with that girl I started to open myself and I ended up telling her about Tysha. I cried upon her shoulder when I confessed that, and she consoled me quietly. She was sweet to me, but after my first and terrible loving experience I no more had hopes to love freely, because my father's sinister shadow always glided over me, reminding me what had happened to Tysha."

They got into their rooms and Tyrion continued to narrate his story. "I didn't know if Ketty loved me, nor I asked her about it. I neither was sure if I loved her. I simply had no wish to delve deeper into that. I merely visited her and she made me feel good. We never talked about our mutual feelings, but instead we developed a a comfortable friendship."

"I'm sure she loved you, Tyrion. But she resigned herself. According to what you're telling me, she was intelligent. She knew what to expect."

"I don't know, Sansa. She was a good girl, and she deserved loads more than what life gave her, and what I gave her as well. I wasn't better to her than other men. I took for granted that she was there to please me and to make me feel less lonely. I rented her time and afterwards I departed, leaving her in that sordid place."
"What happened to her?," asked Sansa softly.

"A modest merchant of Lannisport, who was widowed, fell in love with her and proposed to her. Ketty agreed and married him. Very few prostitutes have the opportunity to leave that life behind, and I was glad for her, although in those moments I hated once more being a Lannister. My surname, and therefore my father, prevented me from being happy with the women I liked. I couldn't marry anyone who didn't have a well-known surname, and girls with well-known surnames wouldn't want to have anything to do with a dwarf."

They sat down to wait for the children.

"So that was my love life, Sansa. Girls whom I payed to devote to me a while of their time, and some others who bedded me so later they could gossip with their friends about having screwed a freak of nature, and they had lived to tell the tale."

Sansa caressed his hand.

"Well, I was betrothed to a sadistic who killed my father and to a man who preferred any handsome boy rather than me. It can't be asserted that my love life were splendid either," joked her, with a sad smile.

"You and I were perfect for each other," said Tyrion, remembering with a grin the remark he did the day he went for a walk with her around the gardens of the Red Keep, just before the world shattered under Sansa's feet once more.

"Indeed we were."

He took her face between his hands and drew it to him to kiss her.

At that moment the children knocked at the door, taking Ray back and leaving the things for the bath. Dara gave Sansa the silver utensils Tyrion had gifted her and which they had used in her birthday, already clean.

"The Mother requests your presence after dinner for a private meeting, master," announced Mhyraz.

_There's important news about which she wants to talk to me, or on the contrary she wouldn't have sent word to me knowing that it's Sansa's nameday. What will it be? I've been so absorbed with the birthday that I've almost forgotten everything else._

Sansa and he looked at each other and in their eyes were dancing the same questions.
Chapter 251

Meereen: Day 28

They made love while they were taking a bath, with Sansa riding him, rubbing herself and he fondling her breasts until their culmination, and afterwards he dried and disentangled her hair. The shining copper-coloured mane came down to her buttocks already. He, on his part, soon would need to trim his beard again and perhaps she should tame a little with the razor blade his messy blond curls, which when they were wet they went down to his shoulders. Although that could wait a bit more. He loved her to grip his hair in the rapture of sexual passion.

"What about another beard trimming one of these days, gorgeous? I know you love me to look like the lion in our banner, but I'm starting to miss the razor blade in your cute hands. Hey, you're a little scary with that weapon. Are you sure Pod couldn't train you to learn to slice necks with it?"

As always, his jokes made her smile.

"Don't give me ideas, you goofy." He by then had finished brushing her mane and Sansa turned on the cushion onto which she sat every time he devoted himself to her hair. She embraced him around his shoulders and attracted him to her to kiss him. The combination of lemon scent and her own scent, along with her soft skin recently washed, enveloped him and he began to feel hard for the thousandth time that day instead of how much relaxed he was after their last sex session in the bathtub.

As if we hadn't made it... How many times today? I must be one of the few lucky dudes who lose count of the times they fuck their beautiful women in a single day, thought him, biting softly her lower lip.

Sansa moved aside a bit, staring with a smile at his green eyes. She knew that her husband's insatiable body was reacting once more with her touch and she enjoyed a lot the attraction she had on him and which always had a deep effect on her as well.

She spoke with a light tone, with her hands still resting on his shoulders.

"Dara should trim my hair too. It's too long and it's more and more difficult to disentangle and comb it."

"If you say it for me, don't worry, sweetheart. I love to devote to it after bathing," affirmed him, encircling her with his arms and joining his hands on her back.

"I know, but poor Dara has a hard work every morning. I'll tell her to trim it at the level of my waist."

"As you wish, darling. It's you who must feel comfortable." His fingers were caressing the back over the nightgown. "And I warn you that I'm getting horny, though it may seem impossible after such a day we've had. But Mhyraz is going to bring dinner right now, so you're going to get out of another session for now, unless you go on provoking me," said him, with his warning tone.

"Eh, don't be unfair, my wicked husband. It's you who is provoking me. And you'll leave me here alone and missing you while you go to the private meeting with the queen," complained her, with her suggestive voice.

He drew her to him a little more.
"How much are you going to miss me, gorgeous?" He spoke almost grazing her lips.

"Oh, more than you deserve, cruel man."

"Do a thing for me while I'm not here. Masturbate and I want you to describe it when I'm back," requested him, sliding his hands down until cupping his hands round her buttocks.

Desire dilated Sansa's pupils.

"My husband is very naughty. But I'm also a very naughty wife. I want you to think about how I touch myself when you're out there."

"I'll hardly be able to think about any other thing. Daenerys better has very important news or it will cost a great effort to me to focus on it. I'll be yearning to return here so it's me who touches you."

"That's what I want, my lord. I want you to burn with desire for me while you're far from our rooms."

"I always burn for you, my lady. And I want you to burn for me while you're touching yourself."

He had sat down on the carpet before Sansa and pushed her buttocks toward him so she wrapped him with her legs.

"Oh, neither I will think about other thing. I'll blow out the candles and I'll imagine that your hands are touching me."

Ray scratched the entrance door to their rooms and sniffed. Tyrion and Sansa looked at each other smiling, still sitting and cuddling on the carpet.

"Mhraz is coming. By golly, our new little friend is going to be very useful to us announcing the visitors before they arrive," said him. He palmed her butt with a sigh and stood up, stretching out his hand to her. Sansa took it and stood up as well.

Several seconds later, the boy knocked at the door, such as Ray had anticipated.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 28

After dinner, Tyrion said goodbye to Sansa with a long and wet kiss and reminded her to do what he had asked her while he were absent. She looked at him with the mischievous gaze that inflamed fully his crotch, so unruly on its own. As always that he had to move away from her, Tyrion went out reluctantly, but he was consoled a little on the way, thinking about she would masturbate alone. Knowing that later she would have to describe how she had done it, she surely would be imaginative. Oh, her hands in her sweet slit... Or perhaps she'll use some object. We'll have to try to do it using things. It's something we haven't tried yet. For all the hells... How am I going to appear like this before Daenerys? The bulge between my legs is more than visible. Come on, relax, lustful dwarf. The way my cock is at this moment, anyone would tell that I haven't fucked for a whole year.

He breathed deeply while he was walking along the corridor, trying with all his will to concentrate on the issues the queen wanted to discuss with him in private. His boiling blood was rushing to his restless lower regions, but making an effort of will he compelled his brain to think.

Let's see. There are lots of pending matters. The release of the captive dragons. The moving of the freedfolk. The election of the new Lord Commander of the Night's Watch. The Free Folk trying to escape from the White Walkers. The Dornish fleet, which probably must have reached by now captain Gilean's ships. This one must be about to arrive at Tolos, and let's hope he already has the help of the Dornish escorts. The slaver cities were sending war carracks to attack our vessels. On the other hand, my sister and the Tyrells are imprisoned in the black cells of the Red Keep. My uncle Kevan has set out on the return to the capital to help Tommen. My brother is missing in action. Roose Bolton and his psychopathic son Ramsay rule the North. "And what about the Iron Islands? Balon Greyjoy sent his son and daughter to sack the North. Theon fell into the clutches of the Bolton bastard, but Asha is a real iron woman. Where is she now? We mustn't lose sight of her. She's dangerous. Tyrion was achieving his goal, which was to cool himself before going into Daenerys's chambers. What must be plotting Littlefinger? His thing isn't to remain idle on the chair of the Eyrie. I have to reflect on his next move, though it's not easy at all to foresee what will be the next thing he'll do. I must keep an eye on him more than on anyone else. I'll remind the queen to stay very alert to all that concerns the lord regent of the Vale. I hope that Varys's little birds are so efficient regarding him as they are nearly with everything else. What other issues are left? The Sons of the Harpy, of course. Perhaps she has found out more things about them and the rebellion of the new slaves of Yunkai. And I mustn't forget to speak to her about the brotherhood of dressmakers, about the fighting trainings for all the freed boys and girls and the possibility to admit women in the army. Ah, and I have to suggest to her to ask Illyrio to lend her some ships... But anyway, if she has sent word to me expressly, it must be because she needs advice about an issue that worries her particularly. What can it be? Will it be related to Oberyn? Or to some secret information about the Sons of the Harpy? They're matters she can't address in the Council meetings when Hizdhar is present. Well, I'm already here. He was glad to have arrived, because the images of Sansa naked and touching herself in the solitude of the bedroom didn't stop sneaking in his mind, what complicated considerably his reasoning ability, despite which he had been able to recall, with great effort, all the important matters that were on the air.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 253

Meereen: Day 28

He had arrived at the door of the private hall and the Unsullied who flanked it gave way to him to get in.

"Good night, Your Grace," greeted him. The queen was sitting on her chair, with the cup of wine before her on the table, and Tyrion's one awaiting on the place he always took up.

She raised her look with a smile.

"Good night, Lord Tyrion. I'm very sorry for interrupting your celebration, but I've received an unexpected raven and moreover I want to comment to you other matters I've found out in the recent hours, before exposing them to the Council," explained Daenerys with an expression of apology.

"Don't worry, Your Grace. Sansa and I have made the most of the day," clarified him, with a grin in which were dancing the mischievous sparkles of his eyes.

"The children have commented to me about the new member of your family. A snow dog. A great gift for Lady Sansa."

"Yes. I wanted to make her up for the female direwolf she lost. I couldn't get another specimen of that rare species, so I chose something similar, which reminded her of her Lady, the name of her direwolf, and of her home too."

"A cute gift. And the tapestries, the tablecloth and the silver utensils have been a great gift too. The craftspeople must have used all their skills." She was smiling with pride, drinking a sip of wine.

"Thanks to them I've been able to afford this wonderful birthday for my wife. They have put a lot of effort on their work and the results couldn't have been better," praised Tyrion.

"I'd like that they made me something like that. The genealogical tree of house Stark has been a great idea. I've decided that I'll order them a big one for me, with the members of my house. Or several smaller ones, with all the generations of my family from Aegon The Conquerer. They'd decorate the audience hall, which is quite bare. And I'll show my house with pride. Many of them weren't great people or people of much importance for the realm, but they're the remainders of Valyria and they're a vital part of the recent past of Westeros, and I'm here thanks to them."

"The brotherhood of weavers will be glad to serve you, Your Grace," asserted him.

"We need captain Gilean's provisions so some of our brotherhoods can carry on manufacturing apace. Precisely I wanted to talk to you about that. The Dornish fleet has already joined our merchant captain's ships and they've managed to beat back an attack of enemy carracks, and they've just arrived at Tolos, where the most important deals will be carried out. The Dornish ships that were missing, three altogether, haven't shown up yet. They must have suffered a serious setback and they have probably sunk." Daenerys sighed for the loss of valuable men and vessels.

"Precisely I wanted to talk to you about ships, Your Grace. During Pod and Leena's wedding an idea occurred to me and I was thinking of discussing it with you as soon as possible." Tyrion drank a swig of his cup.

"Go on," invited her.
"I've come to the conclusion that Illyrio Mopatis is an ally of Varys's and he also is determined to see you on the Iron Throne. He does it for his own benefit, of course. You've been his guest in Pentos and you know well his monstrous ambition. So I've thought that we could take advantage of that ambition for our benefit."

"You've mentioned ships, and you know that Illyrio has a large fleet. Does your plan consist of borrowing a part?," inquired her, looking at him with surprise, as if saying: Damn, that idea hasn't occurred to me.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 254

Meereen: Day 28

"Exactly. Since he is so willing to help you, let's stretch out that good will a little more. Until now you haven't asked him for anything since you left his house to marry khal Drogo. I think we can afford to request him that favour, which will contribute to your cause and, therefore, to his. We need a strong and courageous fleet and, between Dorne's and Illyrio's help, we'll be able to achieve that goal," declared him. "Moreover, do have into account that, if in the future we're going to move to Westeros, we'll need lots of ships to carry so many people. Most of your subjects will want to go with you."

"It's true. A large fleet is fundamental, as much for war as for communications and transport. I wish that a shipyard could be established here, with a brotherhood of shipbuilders, but it's impossible. We don't have so much timber."

Another idea came to Tyrion's mind.

"And what if we ask Dorne to allocate a part of its naval production to your fleet from now on? We can't have a shipyard here, but Dorne will supply you with vessels hereafter."

"Brilliant. Tomorrow I'll send the raven to Doran." The queen smiled, satisfied. "By the way, the unexpected raven I've received comes from Dorne. Prince Oberyn is going to embark to here. Do you remember that a short time ago I requested Doran to send me maesters of the Citadel? Well, Oberyn is decided to take advantage of that voyage and he's going to come. He has proposed to wed me in secret and he'll remain here for a while, taking the seat in the Council I promised to Dorne. He has assured me that he'll be absolutely discreet with regards to our marriage, until it's the convenient moment for it to be common knowledge. What do you think about all this?"

Tyrion was astonished. Once more the exotic Dornish prince got him muddled up, as it was his custom. So in short we'll have the Red Viper's presence. This is going to get even more interesting. He recovered and expounded his opinion.

"You're going to marry a lot sooner than expected, but I don't think it's bad. Your alliance with Dorne is firmly consolidated and our plans for the future include to go on depending on that support, as for example my idea of making ships for you in their shipyards. I think that prince Oberyn has awaited a long time to obtain certain things he yearned for, like revenge for his sister Elia. I imagine him thinking that time and wait are things that one can afford in youth, but not at the age in which one feels that youth is slipping away. And he has come to that point. What he wants, he wants it now. In exchange, he agrees to respect the secret of your match and he'll please you in everything you need. I believe that this little change of plans won't affect negatively the state of affairs. But we must insist on secrecy, because the Meereenese nobility won't like to find out that they have lost their chances to marry one of their members to you."

"Yes, I'll insist on that point. And another thing. The prince is coming alone. It seems that his paramour Ellaria has accepted to stay in Dorne for the moment, so the situation can be less... complicated for now." Daenerys was clearly relieved for not having to cope yet with his future husband's lover.

"And what is Daario's opinion on the matter?," asked Tyrion.

"He doesn't like it. He has taken it bad that the prince comes so soon and that he wants to marry me
in a few weeks. It's costing me an effort to appease him," confessed her, sighing.

"He has to resign himself. He already knows what awaits you both. But I'm sure that he'll listen to reason. As you know, Daario is not a fool," conceded Tyrion, to calm her down a little.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
"Yes, I expect that. All this situation is confused, but kings' and queens' lives are never simple. We can't expect mine to be an exception," said Daenerys with her ironic smile.

"You're already experienced in that, Your Grace." Both of them grinned to lighten the issue. "And to all the complications we must add that the prince technically is going to be the king of Meereen, though the very Meereenese ignore it. Excuse me for my curiosity, Your Grace, but... Who'll officiate the ceremony? Even though they are priestesses, the Graces belong to the Meereenese nobility and it wouldn't be advisable that any of them is the officiant, not even that they end up finding out about your wedding."

"The prince has foreseen that problem. He's going to bring a septon along with the maesters. The pretext for his presence here will be that many Dornish people follow the Faith of the Seven and, as lots of them are going to take up residence here because they are part of the fleet, although they'll hardly have time to tread solid ground, they request me to found a sept so they can worship their gods. All of which entails another question that the prince has mentioned to me. We have to house some sailors' families who have decided to accompany them here."

"There's still room left in the pyramid. You may prepare housing here for the sailors' families and for captain Gilean's one too. He won't last long to return," proposed Tyrion.

"All right. By then the pyramid will be filled with people as well. We'll have to reorganize some spaces and I'll have to order the construction of new kitchens and storehouses in some of the rooms in the middle of the pyramid more or less, because we'll need more staff and moreover, we can't force our poor children to go up and down the whole pyramid carrying the plates, which would take a long time to arrive to their destinations from the ground floor, and they'd get cold before being put on the tables. I'm also thinking that the children of the families that live here will be who must be in charge of going to fetch food and whatever their relatives need. My poor orphans and guests couldn't cope with so many people and, after all, they are kids and they have a right to their periods of leisure, it wouldn't be fair that they spend the entire day walking up and down with no rest and tending to other people. The rest of the children of the pyramid will contribute too. That's one condition I'll demand in exchange of the privilege of residing here."

"Very well thought, Your Grace," approved Tyrion. "That way everybody will have responsibilities and the children will gain the humbleness of serving."

"It won't hurt the proud Dornish people, thought Tyrion, smiling with irony.

"Then we have clarified another question. All that takes a load off me," said the queen, who effectively seemed much more relieved than in the beginning of the conversation. "The prince and I will marry in a clandestine ceremony, celebrated by the rite of the Faith of the Seven, in which there will be scarce witnesses. Only Missandei and Ser Barristan will attend, and moreover I'd like you to attend with your wife. But I don't want you to wear any special clothes, in order not to arouse suspicion."

"As you wish, Your Grace. Lady Sansa and I guarantee you an absolute discretion," assured him.

"I know. Well, the issue of my marriage is resolved. And now, two news the little birds have sent me. One is that the sparrows of the Faith have already pronounced sentence against Cersei and the
Tyrell siblings. The other news is that more members of the Sons of the Harpy have been discovered."

Tyrion felt a shiver in his spine. As in the case of his father's death, he did not know very well what he must feel in respect to his sister's misfortunes, apart from a sensation of payback for seeing her biting the dust. He was surprised for not feeling more cheered up, but he neither felt pity.

He looked at Daenerys expectantly and silently. She seemed to understand his inner conflict, such as it had happened to her with the announcement of Tywin's death.

"They have been sentenced to thirty lashes and their heads will be shaved to deprive them of their vanity. Besides, Cersei will have to walk naked along all the way between the Sept of Baelor and the Red Keep. With regards to the Tyrell siblings, they'll have to stay in the square of the Sept for an hour, also naked, enduring the insults of the crowd."

Short ago that same crowd acclaimed Margaery and Joff, the same people who previously had attacked Joff and were about to rape and kill Sansa. Tyrion did not envy in the least the young Tyrells' fate. Being exposed for an hour to the wrath of a maddened mob, though they were protected by guard sparrows and goldcloaks, could result even in death for them. What if many of the attendees fancied throwing something more than insults? It was not that he felt specially affectionate towards the new queen and the Knight of Flowers, but Tommen loved the girl and moreover, dying of possible stoning was not a very pleasant way to leave the world. The truth was that he felt a little sorry for them. Margaery was not a complete bitch and Loras neither was a bad person.

Cersei could suffer the same fate. The route between the Sept and the Red Keep could seem endless among thousands of people thirsty for spectacle and blood. But he did not feel pity for her. His sister had asked thoroughly for everything that was happening to her.

Who was going to suffer undeservedly for all that would be his nephew. His wife, the queen, humiliated, deprived of her dignity and possibly stoned; and his mother, the same.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Daenerys respected his thoughtful silence and waited for his answer. He raised his eyes and looked at her, with sadness in his eyes.

"You're conscious of what that means, aren't you? Even though it's not a direct death sentence, the three of them could die at the hands of the crowd. Who can control a maddened mob? When they see them defenseless, punished and naked, the most likely is that they treat them brutally. What can a few guards do if people decide to throw stones or other lethal things?"

"It's very likely, indeed, Lord Tyrion. I'm also sure that that's what could happen." She showed herself neutral, without revealing her feelings in that matter.

"If it happens, it will lead to a new radical change in the situation of Westeros. We must be ready. And we should protect Tommen in the shadows. He, as we've already discussed, is only guilty of being weak."

"I can't guarantee that the boy is safe with regards to his own surroundings, but in respect to myself, I'll do what is in my hand to keep him out of danger," conceded her.

Tyrion nodded, grateful once more.

"The upcoming events in Westeros right now are a mystery. And don't forget Littlefinger. He's still in the Vale, hatching his plans. He's going to take advantage of Tommen's weakness. And if both queens fall, Littlefinger's way will be unobstructed. All that is happening is exactly what suits him."

"Well, then we'll have to keep an eye on him constantly and stop him if necessary. We have to think of a way to block or eliminate him, where appropriate," set out the queen.

"I'm sure that the lords of the Vale aren't very happy with the perspective of having him as Lord Regent and they mistrust him. Somehow we must make use of that mistrust and convince them that it was him who threw their lady Lysa through the Moon Door. We could set a trap for him, but it's not going to be easy. He's a very cunning rotter and he knows every trick in the book. Moreover, if he suspects the slightest problem, he'll sneak away in order not to put at risk his precious neck."

"But it's not so easy to sneak away from the Eyrie or the Vale. It's very difficult to access to those places, but neither it's easy to go away," opposed her.

"No, it's not. By the way, Your Grace... Do you know if the mountain clans have claimed their territories? My father promised that those lands would belong to them for being his allies."

"They have claimed them, yes. But, with Tywin dead, the lords of the Vale have denied them to the clans once more. And the clans are up in arms. They have made up an alliance among all of them."

Tyrion reflected on that subject, which gave him an idea.

"We count on the clans and their hatred towards the haughty lords who never have let them be the owners of their own mountains. My father gave them gold and weapons in good quantity. Perhaps it's not enough for them to challenge the lords openly, but they can pester them. What if instead of attacking, they start a siege against the Eyrie and they block the accesses through which people
enter and go out of the Vale? Controlling all the strategic places, the lords will have no other way
but to give in to their claims or die. Winter is already here. Neither the lords nor the occupants of
the stronghold will be able to resist indefinitely without foreign trade or without enough supplies or
fresh food. We can try to persuade the clans to allow little Robin Arryn to leave and to spare those
who decide to surrender, though it's difficult to foretell if the clans will show mercy. These could
proclaim themselves the owners of the mountains of the Vale and the lords will have to give in and
give them the territories that are theirs by right, if they don't want to die, because the clans will be
in an advantageous position and they'll control the whole territory. Moreover, Littlefinger, as Lord
Regent, will be forced to face the consequences and he'll need the support of the lords, what is
going to be complicated for him, because he's a latecomer suspected of murdering the legitimate
lady of the Vale."

Daenerys looked at him with her eyes dilated by the bold proposal.

"It's a real challenge to the Vale, I know, Your Grace. And the clans aren't distinguished by their
gentleness. But we'll benefit from the fact that at last they can stand up to those who have trampled
them since ever, and we have to corner Littlefinger and deprive him of his comfortable position in
the Vale. And, if possible, we should remove him from the board. He's the most dangerous man in
the Seven Kingdoms and he's caused more than enough damage with the War of the Five Kings,
which he started by himself. The kingdoms have been devastated because of him. It'll be difficult,
but we can't let that man roam free and get away with it."

Daenerys was lost in thought, clearly agitated.

"We'll debate it with the rest of the counselors in the next meeting, which I'll set for tomorrow
night. This topic is going to require an in-depth analysis and a careful planning. But undoubtedly
it's very bold and it probably will be a necessary measure to stop Petyr Baelish. If there's one thing
very clear for me, is that I don't want that man as a subject when I claim Westeros."

"Then we agree that we must eliminate him. Not only for personal reasons, among which is the
total fall of my wife's house, but for the benefit of the realm. Littlefinger won't rest until seeing it
burn."

Both of them looked at each other's eyes and nodded, sealing the deal.

(To be continued in the next chapters)
Chapter 257

Meereen: Day 28

Daenerys moved on to the following topic.

"I'm going to let loose the dragons. They won't be long to melt the iron bars or to open a hole in the walls, and even my men have it very difficult to get near to feed them, because the more they grow, the more they feel the effects of their confinement and they show themselves more aggressive with everybody who gets close to them. The surrounding settlements have been warned already through messengers or ravens, from here to Lhazar. Tomorrow I'll free them and I trust that they calm down once they have recovered their freedom."

"I'm sure of that, Your Grace. That's their natural state. For what we've seen regarding Drogon, they're much more troublesome and dangerous locked up than loose. Every day the Unsullied that feed them and watch over them risk their lives, so there's less danger of human victims if they live their own way."

Daenerys nodded, reassuring her decision with that gesture.

"Well, then we have another resolved issue. The truth is that since Hazzea's accident, the dilemma of my dragons kept me awake at night. But since we found the solution, I breathe calmer in that sense."

"What concerns us now is the children. The measles epidemic is spreading throughout all Meereen and several of the cases are serious. I'm afraid that we'll have to delay the opening of the school, as much because there are many affected children, as because we must try to prevent infection as far as possible. The maesters Dorne is going to send will take weeks to arrive, and they are badly needed. If they had been here when the fire in the market happened, perhaps some of those who died in the successive days and the consequences would have been milder for some of the surviving injured. And now most of the kids won't be tended to properly due to the lack of healers. It's probable that some of them die." Her voice trembled when she uttered that sentence. The sufferings of those poor little ones affected her profoundly.

"They call me Mother and I can't even save those who need me most. What sort of Mother I am?," reproached herself, on the verge of tears. She inhaled deeply to try to calm down. She could not let herself collapse or she would not be able to stop the torrent of tears once it began.

Tyrion looked at her with deep sympathy in his emerald irises.

"There are blows that not even a mother can combat. You're not guilty for the things you can't control, and diseases are one of those things," said him, to try to lighten the guilt he knew she was attributing to herself, as if she could place herself as a shield to prevent the children from catching measles.

"The gods are too much cruel, if it's them who send those misfortunes against their own children," said Daenerys, with a bitter voice.

"If there's one thing I've learnt from them, Your Grace, is that they're not compassionate. If it's true that they're there, I prefer not to have anything to do with them," assured him, with his ironic tone.

"Neither me, Lord Tyrion. I have to show them respect in public because I'm the queen and many of my subjects are devoted to them, but in my heart I quit praying a lot of time ago."

They kept silent and he drank a sip of wine and lowered his eyes to the table, allowing her a little
privacy to recover her composure.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 258

Meereen: Day 28

"At last, as I haven't received yet any news of the rest of pending matters, many members of the Sons of the Harpy have been discovered. They belong to the Merreq, Uhlez and Naqqan dinasties, and they have some accomplices among the rich Meereenese merchants. We've uncovered seven lineages and a high number of accomplice merchants altogether. It's not enough yet to deliver the death blow to them, and we'll have to wait until unmasking more involved ones, because I'm sure there are more. Seven lineages of fifteen look like not much to me. There must be at least ten or twelve. Let's suppose that between three and five dinasties have kept out of it. But even so, all of them are being investigated, because, though some of them don't take part directly, maybe they know something about those who does, or perhaps they're being subjected to extortion by the Sons of the Harpy for remaining on the sidelines. Fanatics don't allow anyone to kick over the traces, especially those who they consider as belonging to their same group and, therefore, they become traitors to their cause if they refuse to take part in it."

"Do you think Hizdhar could be subected to extortion, Your Grace?," asked him. It was a question that he had asked himself several times, and he was not sure of the answer.

"It's very possible. If he, as the head of his family after his father's death, has denied them his support, I wouldn't be surprised that he's a victim of blackmail and threats, and his family as well, probably. Because of that I can't trust him, not even in the case that he's innocent. He may be passing information to them or doing what they force him to, in order to save his neck. He has it very difficult to perform an attempt to kill me, and I don't believe he'll carry out any criminal act by himself, but something tells me that the Sons of the Harpy will try to use him to attack me somehow. We must maximize caution in the fighting arenas." She drank from her cup. "And my deep mistrust towards the Meereenese nobility is what has finally made me decide to marry prince Oberyn as soon as he arrives here. How am I going to accept Hizdhar's hand, or another's, if he proposed to me, knowing that they can stab me in my own bed during the very wedding night? What they want is a Meereenese king, not a foreign queen. Once married to me, the so-called nobleman would be king, and they could get rid of me then. No, I won't wed any of them."

"Of course not, given the circumstances, but appearances are what count. To go on making them believe that the possibility of a marriage between you and one of them is on the board. We'll have to put them off subtly if they bring the topic openly. And let's hope that, by the time they find out the truth about your wedding to prince Oberyn, we are far from here already," suggested Tyrion.

"Yes, we'll have to act in the most surreptitious way. The Meereenese mustn't know anything."

"We'll keep that secret strictly, Your Grace. Let's hope that Oberyn is equally discreet in this matter."

"I've imposed it as a condition he has to respect scrupulously until my departure to Westeros. He has sworn to me that it will be so, and I've kept him to his word."

"The prince has never been distinguished by his extreme discretion, but he's clever. He'll do what must be done, I'm sure of it. He has his own and peculiar way to do things, But he's a man of notable qualities. He'll know how to be up to the mark, especially if something that interests him intensely is at stake. And it seems that you interest him intensely," joked him.

"Or rather my crown," opposed her, sarcastic.
Chapter 259

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"Yes, I don't doubt that your crown must influence partly. But in spite of his reputation as a hot-bloody Dornishman and as a deadly warrior, he loves his family above all and he never has shown himself very interested in the hidden details of power. He hasn't interfered in his brother Doran's government. Accordingly, I conclude that for him all this business is a great adventure with which he contributes to raise the prestige and strength of his dinasty and of his beloved Dorne in the Seven Kingdoms, and by the way he's marrying a woman who is providing the whole world with a topic of conversation. He always has liked great challenges." Tyrion smiled, thinking about the exuberant Red Viper.

"Well, my challenge promises to be formidable." She was smiling as well.

"It must be, with no doubt, or the prince wouldn't have shown himself so interested in you, nor would he have brought forward your wedding so much. It's obvious that he's eager to meet you in person and to be by your side at least for a while before going back to Dorne to prepare the way for you."

Daenerys had blushed, thoughtful.

Surely she's thinking about the wedding night and the following ones, thought Tyrion. He won't wait to take her to bed, as she's not a virgin child like Sansa when she was given to me. And I have the impression that the khaleesi won't dislike too much spending the nights with the passionate Dornishman. There will be others who will have a bad time for not being in the Red Viper's place.

"Jorah mustn't find out about any of this, Your Grace," reflected him.

"No, he mustn't. The only ones who must know the secret of my moved-forward wedding are Daario, Missandei, Ser Barristan, you and Lady Sansa. Lord Varys knows about it too, of course, but keeping silent suits him."

"Well. Then in a few weeks you'll be married."

"Yes. My second marriage. I hope it's the last." She had her gaze lost in the distance, probably remembering Drogo.

"I've also been married twice," confessed him, contemplating a vague image of Tysha in his mind. He realized that he could not recall her face well. Her features had erased.

"Who was the first one, if it's not an indiscretion to ask it?," inquired her, with the curiosity of her young eighteen years.

"A girl who turned out to be a prostitute hired by my brother to gift me my first experience with women, but I didn't know anything about that plan which Jaime plotted for me to know at last how it was to be with a girl. You'll understand that I, being the way I am, didn't have a queue of candidates fighting for my favours. Well, I fell in love with her and... In short, I was a naïve. And my father put an end to all that and annulled the marriage as soon as he found out. I didn't see her ever again." He still felt that sting when he spoke about her. He always would.

That time it was Daenerys who was staring at him with sympathy.
"The first great love leaves a deep mark in us, doesn't it?"

"Yes. It leaves a deep wound in the heart."

Tyrion served more wine from the jug.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
"I have to propose to you some ideas that have occurred to my wife and me, Your Grace, though it's her who has almost all the credit," said him, with a more cheerful tone and his eyes shining again with their usual sparkle.

"Ah, great. Lady Sansa has very good ideas. Tell me," invited her.

"Talking with Ser Barristan in the parade ground, it came to my mind that in the school lessons we could add fighting trainings several times a week, for every boy and girl. The lessons could be taught by Ser Barristan, Pod and other soldiers you appoint. That way all the kids would receive a basic military training, including the girls."

"It's a very interesting idea. I'll commend Ser Barristan to organize the lessons and choose the men who will teach the children," decided Daenerys.

"We all must be ready to know how to defend ourselves. I myself have proposed to my wife to train so she learns to use a weapon, and she has accepted," said Tyrion.

The queen nodded.

"It sounds good to me. Maybe I myself will train too, if my duties allow me some remaining time." She smiled.

"It wouldn't hurt that you do. One must never feel completely defenseless when the heat is on. Sometimes it's not even enough to count on the best army in the world."

"It's true. I'll consider it."

"Moreover, after some conversations my wife and I have held with a few of the girls, we've found out that some of them dream of being part of your army one day. What is your opinion about female soldiers, Your Grace?"

Daenerys blinked, caught by surprise. She recovered quickly.

"I myself decided to be a queen in this world where men are dominant. If I managed to be respected by a handful of people who followed me across the Red Waste, I escaped from Qarth, acquired an army of Unsullied, gained the Second Sons, freed thousands of slaves and conquered Meereen, other women can achieve lots of things. Of course I believe that women can be so capable as men, in any field."

"Then, will you let the girls who wish it to be trained as warriors, beyond the basic education of the school?"

"Of course I will. The more devoted and well prepared soldiers I have, the stronger my army will be, no matter that they are men or women."

"Great. And now, an initiative that has come from Lady Sansa. She wishes to teach sewing to the freedwomen who are interested in learning, and that way she could found a brotherhood of seamstresses. It's very important that people have good clothes for winter and, in addition, that they develop an identity as free people. If they have pretty and quality garments, they'll stop feeling like
fugitive ex-slaves and they'll really start to realize that they are part of a free and strong nation," reasoned Tyrion.

"You're right, there isn't a brotherhood of seamstresses. We'll have to offset that. We'll sound out to see who are willing to receive training and Lady Sansa may found the brotherhood, and she can be its spokesperson if she wants."

"All this will make her happy, Your Grace. She's very wishful."

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
"I'm glad that my people is happy contributing to our cause." Daenerys was smiling, satisfied. But her grin faded soon, when she remembered the questions that worried her. "I hope that this measles epidemic passes soon and claims as little victims as possible. Contagious diseases are one of my biggest fears. In a city with more than a quarter million inhabitants we are very exposed to them."

"Your soldiers manage to keep the streets clean and the sewage systems work well. A good hygiene is a guarantee to prevent diseases from spreading. If the drinking water is clean and mud and litter are not allowed to accumulate, there will be less chances to suffer epidemics," expounded him.

"Yes, since I arrived here I decreed that Meeren must be a clean city, where it were pleasant to live in. Nobody wants to live in a dump if one can live in a tidy place."

"You should take a stroll around Fleabottom, and around the rest of the poor neighbourhoods, which are the majority in King's Landing. The stench reaches the highest levels of the Red Keep," said Tyrion with irony.

"A great mistake of my predecessors, to commit such negligence. One of the first things I'll do when I occupy the Iron Throne will be to promote the cleaning of the city and I'll build a good sewage and drainage system. I won't rest until the capital of the Seven Kingdoms smells as every prosperous city should smell."

"It would be a nice change. King's Landing can be a beautiful city. Sometimes, at sunset, contemplating Blackwater Bay, when the lights start to be lit and the setting sun tinges everything golden, one almost can be under the illusion that lives in a dream place. But the illusion ends soon, when one remembers what that place really is."

"Then we should try that beauty to be something more than an optical illusion. But for now, this is all we have," said Daenerys, pointing at her surroundings with a gesture.

"Yes, for now," assented him. He would like to ask her about Jaime's whereabouts, as he was concerned due to being without any news of him for so long, but the topic of the Kingslayer was delicate regarding Daenerys, as it had been her father who had died under the sword of his own kingsguard. He would wait until she by herself conveyed him that information some day, and meanwhile he had to trust his brother to be in good health. Tyrion knew intuitively that the change which had come over Jaime prevented him from staying in the Red Keep as he did before, dancing attendance on Cersei. His battered sense of honour was coming back to him and his relationship with their sister had been damaged, probably with no remedy. A man of action like him would do something. Like what?, meditated Tyrion. He made an oath to Catelyn Stark. To protect her daughters. Is he searching for Arya? It was possible. He recalled that big woman who accompanied him towards the capital and helped him to return alive, crippled but alive. Brienne of Tarth. She was an accomplished warrior and a woman of unblemished honour. She must have influenced a lot in Jaime's change, as it was obvious that a special bond existed between them both. He did not believe it was love, at least not in regard to his brother, though Tyrion was sure that she felt something more. He had not observed her very much during the period she stayed in the Red Keep, as in those times he was overwhelmed by problems, frustrations and resentment, but he caught a pair of things which made him think that Jaime would never be the one he was before, and not only because he had lost his sword hand.
(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 262

Meereen: Day 28

If he had gone away leaving Cersei behind once more, he had done it with a well defined purpose. Or it was about Arya Stark, or... Myrcella? Had his paternal instinct awoken after Joff's death, his first-born, and he had the intention to go in search for his only and charming daughter? Was he going to make sure that she was fine among the Dornish people? Jaime must know that Sansa was safe with his youngest brother, so he was freed from his duty to protect her. Wherever he went, Tyrion wished that he did not suffer any setback. Does he know already that Cersei is imprisoned and she could die at the hands of the mob? What will he do? Will he come back from his voyage at full speed? Anyway, the sparrows wouldn't let him get close to her. He couldn't do anything. He can't even fight properly any more and... How is he going to face a crowd of fanatics who have guards?

Even though Cersei's death would barely hurt himself, he would feel sorry for Jaime. He had loved her truly, though she did not deserve it.

In the end, he would see how things would develop.

"From tomorrow the freedfolk will start to move to the pyramid," announced Daenerys, suddenly remembering that issue. "Kerro has informed me this morning. He has chosen the families. We'll have new neighbours here. And regarding more events that are going to happen in the upcoming days, the minor arenas will be opened in two days and the combats will begin. The security of the city is going to be reinforced even more. The Sons of the Harpy could try some trick, though we haven't intercepted any information about that matter. They know that it's going to be practically impossible for them, but we can never be overconfident."

"No, we can't. They're very smart." He kept silent for some moments. "And remember that in less than three days it will be the first of the next month and I have to share out the wages to all the groups."

"I have it very present, Lord Tyrion. You'll count on all possible security," assured her. "Well, for the moment that's all. Tomorrow night there will be a Council meeting. Tell Lady Sansa that I approve her projects and unfortunately the school won't be started until the measles epidemic has passed. And now, go and rest well."

"Thank you, Your Grace. Good night." Tyrion made a bow and went out.

During his meeting with the queen some images of Sansa touching herself in the darkness of the bedroom had crossed his mind, and he had barely managed to push them aside to focus on the Mother's matters. But once in the corridors, he gave free rein to his wild imagination and his body burnt as if he were engulfed in the dragons' flames. The erection that was pushing his underwear and his trousers was nearly painful. He sped up his steps, wishing to arrive as soon as he could to the rooms to take pleasure in his hot wife and to listen to her description of what she had done.

He entered and the adjacent hall was dark. Ray received him enthusiastically, rising on his hind legs to rest on his belly, and Tyrion stroked his head.

"How are you, little friend? How is she? I hope you've taken good care of her."
The animal followed him but Tyrion ordered him to stay and stepped into the bedroom, closing the door so the dog were not awoken by the noises they could do and did not interrupt them in the middle of a session. For the moment and until he got used to sex between them, it was better that way.

"My lord has come back at last? Has he missed me very much?" asked her with her soft and suggestive voice. Tyrion barely could distinguish her in the shadows and his arousal shot up to critical levels.

"Do you want to verify how much I've missed you, my lady?" asked him, taking off his boots quickly and climbing on the bed in a jump.

"Oh, yes. But let me help you to get comfortable. You must be very tired after this hard day." Sansa knelt before him and began to unbutton his doublet.

"Oh, very hard indeed, of course," murmured him with one of his double meanings, allowing her to undress him slowly. She was not wearing any garment and her white and satiny skin could be seen a little, especially when his eyes started to get used to the darkness.

"What highly important matters did the queen have to consult you?," inquired her, with a cuddly voice, opening the doublet and sliding it along his arms until taking it off him.

"Before that I want what you promised me, and later I'll tell you, if we still have energy left to keep awake. For now it'll suffice you to know that they're things that can wait until after you turning me crazy with your tale and me fucking you like a wildling."

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 263

Meereen: Day 28

"It's all right, my eager lord. First I put out the candles, one by one, and I started to undress on the carpet, as if I were doing it before you. I took off my shoes and rested a foot on the bed, to remove my stockings slowly. I imagined that you were staring and I slid the dress backwards over my raised leg, to uncover the thigh. And later I did the same with the other leg."

Sansa was removing his shirt. He raised his arms and she pulled his sleeves upwards.

"You're doing it very well, sweetheart. I can visualize you with your legs seductively resting on the bed. Go on," encouraged him.

"Afterwards I untied the laces of the gown and I opened it slowly, and let it drop to my feet. I lowered the shoulder straps of the slip and I slid it with no rush, uncovering my breasts, my belly and my legs. There was only left the undergarment which covered my female parts." Her hands were untying his trousers and the brushes on his crotch were turning him mad.

"Oh, yes, darling. You're my goddess," whispered him, while she was pushing him so he laid down.

"I turned, as if turning my back on you, and lowered my undergarment very, very slowly, bending, and I imagined that you were praising my arse and my slit, which could be made out from behind." She had already removed his trousers and was pulling down his breeches. The dick jumped furiously from its confinement and pointed up.

"I climbed on the bed, kneeling, and moistened my fingers with saliva. I slid them from my lips down very slowly, over my neck, my breasts, I squeezed and fondled them and played with my hardened nipples, I went down my belly and tangled my fingers in the pubic hair." Sansa was straddling him and she was rubbing her soaked crotch against his hard and throbbing one.

"Oh, Sansa. You're awesome. I want to melt inside of you."

She put the cock in her entrance and dropped down. The sensation of the penetration always made them moan in unison. Sansa started to move up and down, rubbing herself. She leaned forward so Tyrion could caress her breasts.

"I slipped my fingers downwards, around my slit, toying with the edges without touching the middle yet. Peering into the abyss of my pleasure."

"Yes, honey. I am in that abyss. Ride me very slowly. I want to feel every inch of you. That way. Go on telling me," requested him.

"At last I touched myself between my folds with my middle finger and I dampened it. And then I did something that you'd have loved. I put my finger in my mouth and tasted it with my tongue."

"Gods, Sansa. That's so hot. Do it now. I want you to damp your finger in your wetness and suck it," commanded him, twisting his thumbs around the nipples.

She did as she was asked, grazing the dick that was going in and out, and licked her finger, and afterwards she put it on his mouth.
"Very well, darling. Move very slowly. Go on telling."

"I put again my finger in my slit and I introduced it, and then I put another finger in, and another one, and I moved them in and out of me, and I kept like that for a long while, because I did it with no hurry. I had laid on the bed and with the other hand I was caressing the rest of my body and I lowered to my clit. I began to feel the eruption inside of me, it unleashed and my pleasure crushed my fingers in my interior, and I imagined that it was your cock what my insides were squeezing... At last, I pulled out the fingers and I licked to clean them."

"Sansa, honey, finish, please. I'm going to explode," pleaded him with a groan, closing his eyes.

She sped up and freed her pleasure, shouting his name, and he also gave in and emitted an almost animal moan, grasping her hips to hold her and push her against him while he emptied himself into her, feeling each wave and each spasm as a blessing and a liberation of his body and his soul. He moaned out loud, and trembled until he remained exhausted under her, and then he let loose her hips. Sweat stuck his hair to his forehead and his breath was bated.

She fell beside him, also breathing laboriously and wet with sweat, and she was grinning.

"For the gods, Sansa. You're glorious. If you could see how beautiful you're at this moment," said him, panting and smiling at her with sweet tiredness.

"Oh, sure. Sweaty and reddened, and with wild hair," joked her, covering both of them with the bedcovers and embracing his waist.

"That's how you're most beautiful. There's nothing comparable to how pretty you're when you surrender to the bliss of pleasure," asserted him, slipping into sleep.

"Today has been a precursor of what the day of the bet will be. Do you think you'll be able to resist, oldie?" She was falling asleep as well, with a smile on her lips.

Tyrion had time to reply for the last time.

"You'll see, lecherous woman." And he fell soundly asleep.
Chapter 264

Meereen: Day 29

They awoke with the first light of daybreak, when they heard Ray scratching the door of the bedroom. Tyrion stretched out, rested and satisfied after a night of deep and refreshing sleep.

"Good morning, gorgeous," greeted him, getting close to Sansa to kiss her. He smiled when he contemplated her cute face, which for him always looked absolutely lovely when she had just awoken. She's lovely any time, actually. But when she's just awake it's as if she were again the happy child she was before my charming family entered her life. I wish our daughters are alike her and keep as long as possible that expression of genuine happiness and lightness.

"Good morning, my love. I've slept so well that waking up with such energy nearly has to be a sin," murmured her, smiling at him.

"I've also slept wonderfully. Definitely the fact that you've turned fifteen has suited us both perfectly," joked him. "I think you've taken at least ten years off me."

"Of course, because you were so oldie until yesterday," needleled Sansa.

"I see you fancy playing, naughty girl. Would you like to play with this oldie?" Tyrion encircled her waist with his arm and pushed against her his hardened member.

Sansa burst laughing and moistened her lips, seductive.

"Oh, of course I’d fancy it. But before that you have to tell me about your conversation of yesterday with the queen."

Oh, shit. She’s again playing to provoke me and turn me crazy. He gave a hint of his wicked smile.

"It's all right. I'll start with the bad news." He turned serious and went on. "The measles epidemic has spread throughout the city and there are many ill children, Sansa. It's probable that some of them, the weakest, die."

Her gaze got sad all of a sudden.

"Oh, Tyrion." She closed her eyes, trying not to spill the tears that were struggling in her eyelids. "Do you think more children have got sick in the pyramid?"

"It's likely. We'll find out later. Maybe your lessons will be canceled, and moreover the school can't be opened for now, while this epidemic lasts. Yesterday the queen announced it to me."

"Poor things. Let's hope all of them survive," wished Sansa, taking his hand.

"Let's hope it and for them to be strong enough." Tyrion squeezed her hand. "Another of the news Daenerys conveyed to me was that Doran is ready to send the maesters of the Citadel that he promised. And an unexpected visitor is going to come with them."

Sansa frowned. He loved that small wrinkle which appeared when she was concentrated or puzzled by something.

"Oberyn? He's coming to Meereen?," guessed her.
Tyrion grinned and nodded.

"Indeed. It seems that he's a little eager to marry. Daenerys has imposed to him the maximum secrecy and he agrees."

The small wrinkle on the space between her reddish eyebrows deepened a bit.

"Will they marry here? Privately?"

"Yes. The prince will bring a septon with the pretext that many Dornish sailors and some of their families, who are going to move here, are devoted to the Faith of the Seven and want the queen to found a sept. And by the way the priest will officiate the clandestine ceremony between Daenerys and Oberyn. Only Missandei, Ser Barristan, you and me will attend," explained him.

Sansa processed the information.

"That proves the great trust she puts in us, Tyrion. That day we'll have to act with very much discretion," reflected her, flattered and pleased by the queen's confidence.

"In fact, we'll wear our ordinary clothes in the ceremony. We mustn't wear anything which draws attention to us," clarified Tyrion.

"Of course. It's a pity that she can't have a nicer wedding, but the state reasons demand it. It seems that she can never have the ceremony she'd probably like." Sansa thought about the dothraki wedding and the hard time the new khaleesi had to endure that day.

"Kings and queens aren't supposed to marry for their pleasure, darling. Actually, marriage is not designed for pleasure. The majority of people marry for reasons that have nothing to do with love or the delights of sex." He smiled at her wickedly. "But we have discovered a much more pleasant use to our match, don't you think?" He caressed her belly and toyed with her navel.

Sansa started to feel again the heat and the wetness in her lower belly. His fingers were burning on her skin.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 265

Meereen: Day 29

"Oh, yes. But with no doubt we're making an effort to fulfill our marital duties," insinuated her, watching the hand that was moving slowly to her breasts.

Ray scratched the door again, sniffed and grizzled from the other side, attracting their attention.

"All right, all right, little friend. I'm going now." Tyrion got up and went to open the door for him. The dog wagged his tail and rose on his hind legs to greet him, cheerful. "Mhyraz will have to clean your corner later and put fresh straw for you. In a while the boy'll bring your breakfast, so you'll have to wait for a little while."

Tyrion went back to the bed and Ray tried to climb too, but Sansa did not allow him to do that.

"No, Ray," scolded her. "You mustn't climb on the bed because you'll stain it. You already have your own bed." Sansa was willing to stand firm on those issues of discipline. The beastie looked at her downcast and she was about to burst out laughing. To compensate him a little, she stroked his back. "And now, go back to your corner or walk a bit around the rooms, as you like. Daddy and mommy have things to talk." She made him a gesture with the hand and snapped her fingers. Ray seemed to understand, as he stood up and walked away.

"You have a way with dogs, Sansa. It's not going to be very difficult for you to train him. I think that Ray has also fallen in love with you," praised Tyrion, looking at her with amusement. "But I'm not willing to share you with any rival." He laid her on the bed and held her arms onto the pillow.

She laughed. "Oh, you fool." He descended and kissed her without releasing her wrists. He introduced his tongue in her mouth and she moaned on his lips.

"If you moan like that I'll penetrate you this very moment, hot woman," murmured him, licking her neck. She moaned again.

"I've warned you." He rapidly placed himself between her legs and penetrated her. Her depths received him so drenched and warm as usual, the way it always turned him mad. She trapped him with her legs and Tyrion moved inside of her. He sought the button of her clit and massaged it on the exact spot.

He loved seeing and feeling how Sansa arched, how she threw her head back upon the pillow, how she grasped the iron bars of the headboard and clutched him with her legs to hold him against her. He worshipped her surrender, her completely instinctive and impulsive gestures whenever they fucked. The contrast between her exquisite and decorous manners of a high northern lady publicly, and her passion and spontaneity when they were alone made him desire her even more.

Oh, every time we're for example before Daenerys or Pod or Leena and I'm craving for stripping her right there and plunging myself into her, and to hell with everything else... Those thoughts took him to the edge. He provoked Sansa's climax with a quick movement of his fingers and, when he felt her inner muscles closing around his dick and her body shaking, and her cries with his name filling the asleep morning air, he let himself go and lunged her hard until he spilled.

He rested on the mattress with his hands on both sides of her, recovering from the pleasure that had pierced him once more. She drew him to her with her arms and Tyrion rested with his head between her breasts, smiling.
"Dear me. It has been amazing, honey. But you're a little evil. How do you want me to get out of bed and go to the city after a sex session like that?", complained him, with a lazy voice.

"If there isn't going to be school these days due to measles, today I'd like to accompany you to the city, Tyrion. I need to exercise a little and go out. It doesn't seduce me to spend the whole morning here alone, not even sewing." When she felt him getting tense above her, she tried to calm him down. "Only today, I promise you, and I won't ask again for now. The city has a lot of security, the queen and yourself have affirmed it many times. We can take with us Rat Flea and Makkhan along with Pod, White Fly and Green Beetle, as we've done some other time." She caressed his beard and knew that she had managed to persuade him.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 266

Meereen: Day 29

He sighed, not very sure, but in agreement. She's right, she can't spend all days shut up here hour after hour. Sometimes she has to go out, stroll and get some fresh air. It can't be said that she doesn't do any exercise, with all the times we fuck, but these same walls sometimes weigh heavily, that's true.

"It's alright, honey. I know it's not easy to be shut away here whereas I go outside, but always remember that for me your safety is the first. I wish I could take you with me more often, darling. If only I didn't have to fear that something might happen, but as things stand in Meereen... Our lives depend on the soldiers' efficiency. Tomorrow the new season of the arenas and fighting pits will be started, and these days surveillance is reinforced. We'll take advantage of this circumstance so you can go out," consented him.

Sansa gave him an effusive kiss. "Oh, my love. Thanks for being so understanding. I'm going to wash myself and get dressed."

He roamed her with his lewd gaze.

"Are you sure you want to get dressed so soon? I can heat you, if you want," offered him, with his husky voice.

She stared at him brazenly, stopping at his hardened and erect member.

"Thank you for your proposition." She jumped down of bed and walked naked toward the pewter jug and the washbasin, with a wide grin.

"Not at all, gorgeous. Here I am, available for whatever you want, suffering because of your malice. Your smile is asking me to fuck later, don't think that I don't notice, so you won't get rid of it." Tyrion got out of bed too and went to the adjacent hall, and when he walked past her he clapped her butt. She giggled.

He sat on a chair, still naked, and Ray went next to him to be scratched between his ears.

"Hi, little friend. You're behaving very well. You're a clever boy," praised Tyrion. "Today you'll come with us to the city and you'll take care of your lady, all right? But we mustn't allow you to go far from us. You might disappear among the crowd and somebody could take advantage of the opportunity to rob, hurt or kill you. I have to make a provisional leash for you, and in the market I can request Sarik to acquire a good leather leash for you. I'm going to look for something with which I can improvise one."

He rummaged in the drawers where Sansa kept away her remnants, and he took out several long strips of fabric. He gave them some yanks to test their resistance, and he started to prepare a sort of simple harness, which was not tied around the neck of the animal, but it encircled the chest and the front legs. That way the strips would not choke him, and Ray would always be within his view and could not go excessively far.

He put the harness on him and adjusted it.

"It's not very elegant, but the brotherhood of leather workers will make cute and strong leashes for you. I know you won't like them, but you must wear them when we go out. I don't want anything
bad to happen to you, Ray. Your lady's heart would break, you understand?" As every time somebody talked to him, the little dog looked carefully. "You're smarter than it's advisable for you," joked Tyrion, patting his soft greyish back.

In the bedroom, the splashing of water sounded in a very erotic way and that did not contribute to diminish his erection.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 267

Meereen: Day 29

"What are you telling Ray? You aren't spoiling him with some of your mischiefs, are you?" said Sansa from the other room.

"Me? But I am a model daddy."

"Oh, I see, very model." She had finished washing herself and appeared at the door, smiling and wrapped in the towel. "What have you put on him? A leash?" She got near them barefooted to examine her husband's invention.

"Yes. I've improvised it with some of your leftover fabrics. I've thought that today in the market I can request Sarik to speak with the leather workers to make a harness like this, which will be useful to prevent Ray from going far from us while we're outside the pyramid. It would be dangerous to let him be loose, because somebody could rob or hurt him," explained him.

"Excellent idea, my love." Ray received her gleefully and she leaned forward to stroke him. When she did that, the towel slid a little and uncovered one of her breasts.

Tyrion pierced her with his burning gaze.

"I'm afraid that you're not going to get dressed yet, woman." He got close to her quickly and lifted her by her hips. She burst in laughter and the towel dropped to the floor.

He carried her to the bed and they made it once more, laughing and moaning and Ray was lying on the floor near them, watching them patiently with his pale blue eyes.

Tyrion also washed himself and them both got ready to spend the morning outside.

"Make sure to cover your head, because of the cold air as well as for trying that your hair goes a bit more unnoticed. You attract a lot of attention, and even though generally that's something I love, I don't like it one bit that you attract the attention of some undesirable dudes. Your height is flamboyant in itself, let alone your figure and your gorgeous hair," suggested him, half smiling but with a serious tone, to convey her that he wanted her to take to heart the advice and, at the same time, to make her see that all that was aimed to keep her safe, and that they were not mere fixations of a jealous husband.

"All right, my lord. Anyway I didn't intend to go around showing myself off like a peacock." sansa bent to kiss him.

"You'd better, my lady." He took her face between his hands and held it, extending the kiss a bit more.

Mhyraz brought breakfast for everybody and Ray lept to his bowl, hungry. The boy reported that five more children of the pyramid had been infected with the disease and the Mother had just cancelled the lessons of that day, such as Tyrion had feared. Tyrion and Sansa gifted Mhyraz the few lemon cakes still remaining from the previous day and the boy took them happily, saying that he would gave them to the sick kids. Tyrion requested him to take with him fresh straw for Ray's basket and to clean his corner when he returned and, by the way, in addition to reminding Pod that that day they had to go to the city, Tyrion asked him to search for Rat Flea and Makkhan and ask
them if they might accompany them to the city, if they did not have other duties to the Mother.

"Later, when we come back from the city, you can take Ray with you to spend the rest of the day together, if you want." Tyrion winked at him and Mhyraz went out hopping.

Dara came in and applied herself to Sansa's hair. The girl managed to make the finish plain but elegant, with delicate braids that created cute patterns. Anyway, that day Sansa would not show it in the city. It saddened Tyrion a little that she could not show her beauty beyond the gates of the pyramid, but that was how cities were. Even in peace times the streets were very dangerous, especially for any beautiful young woman. Only in King's Landing, every day were committed dozens of assaults, murders, rapes and robberies. In Meereen, violence and crime had dropped drastically, but Tyrion was afraid of the Sons of the Harpy and he did not want to put Sansa in their spotlight. She stood out in any place where she was, so she had to cover herself up under the cloak.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 268

Meereen: Day 29

Mhyraz returned to clean Ray's corner and change the straw in his basket, and he told them that he had already sent word to the squire Pod, Rat Flea and Makkhan so they would wait for them both in the corridors.

They joined the four Unsullied, Pod and Leena in the corridor. When she knew that there would not be lessons and that Sansa would go to the city, her friend decided to be up for it too. The girls greeted one another with enthusiasm, happy for their walk in the open air.

There was movement in the pyramid due to the freedfolk's relocation, and there could be seen Unsullied going from one side to another and families a little intimidated, walking along the ramps, loaded with the belongings they could carry. White Fly told that the Mother herself had received them in the gates at first hour and she had welcomed them to their new residence.

They went out to the streets and crossed paths with the queue of freedfolk who were going into the pyramid. Tyrion was leading Ray on the improvised leash. He had not spoken yet with Sansa about the other topics debated in the private conversation with Daenerys, and he could not do it until they were back in the pyramid. How would she react with the news of the sentence of Cersei and the Tyrell siblings? And when she knew that Daenerys was going to carry out a ploy to pester the Vale and trap Littlefinger? He was eager to tell her everything, because he had got so used to share with her nearly all the matters which were around his head, that he only recovered the peace of his spirit and felt complete after having listened to her opinions and impressions.

The girls were chatting, commenting about their new neighbours, and their husbands were walking behind them, smiling when they saw them so cheerful. Ray moved as far away as the leash allowed him to, which was not much, and he sniffed here and there.

"When he grows up it will be him who'll take me," joked Tyrion. "Will you do me the favour to hold the leash in some months? At least you won't risk to be dragged by him, and I don't fancy tasting the cobblestones."

"No problem, my lord. I'll take him with pleasure."

"Thanks, Pod. We can't let him loose, because I don't trust anyone. Too many harpies and vermins over here. And apart from the queen's enemies, there will be also thieves willing to steal a valuable animal to sell it. I won't let them upset Sansa," said Tyrion.

"Neither I, my lord. I'll take care of Ray as if he were mine," affirmed the squire.

"I konw you will. He's a lucky dog." Tyrion hinted his smile and changed topic. "I've commented to Sansa about learning to defend herself, and she has agreed. Have you proposed it to Leena?"

"Yes, my lord. She has told me that she will exert herself as much as she can," answered Pod.

"Sansa's not very happy with the perspective of handling a weapon, but she understands that it's necessary. Do you agree with being you who will train them? I think you're the most suitable person, because of the familiarity that there is among us, and the girls will feel less awkward with you."
"I don't mind, my lord. I'll start with the training when you want."

"Well, the sooner the better. You can make the most of the mornings in which there's no school and in which I have public audiences with the queen, because those days the girls have the mornings off and I don't go to the city, so you don't have to accompany me," planned Tyrion.

"Well thought, my lord," approved the lad.

"If they get pregnant they'll have to interrupt the trainings, but meanwhile they could start. It will be useful for them."

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 29

Pod had turned red, as always that it was mentioned something that had to do with sexual intimacy. Tyrion decided to joke a bit.

"I've always wondered what did you really do that day in Littlefinger's brothel, Pod. Take it easy, I won't try to wheedle it out of you, if you're ashamed of telling it, but you succeeded in rendering me speechless, something very few people have managed to. That some whores don't accept a client's money is so rare as snow in the Red Waste." His naughty grin widened when the boy's face turned almost as red as the Lannister half of the banner Tyrion had gifted Sansa.

"Really, my lord, I didn't do anything extraordinary. I only treated them gently and tried to please them, nothing more."

They were speaking in a low voice, so their women would not listen to the topic of their conversation, but anyway they were immersed themselves in their own chat.

"Ah, you tried? Come on, don't be so modest. Surely you achieved it with profit, although your humbleness doesn't admit it. Those girls must be purring like cats. If you had asked them to be your bed slaves for the rest of their lives, they'd have agreed to it without hesitation." Tyrion did a pause, amused. "Tell me just a couple more things and I won't mention the subject again, I promise. But I plead with you to satisfy the curiosity of a little envious dwarf who has spent half his life among whores and he has never achieved what you did in a single afternoon. Were the three of them completely satisfied?" Tyrion had introduced three beauties to him, each of whom was specialized in one specific skill, such as how to initiate green boys, how to handle the spear with great ability and how to perform the Meereenese knot.

"Well, actually they were four," admitted Pod at last, who had barely given something away when his lord and Bronn had pestered him with questions that day which seemed to have passed so long ago.

"Four? Are you telling me that another one joined the group?" Tyrion was beside himself with wonder.

"Eh... Yes. Melara, the girl with... Well, you know." Pod was choking with his words.

"Ah, yes, the dark-skinned one from the Summer Isles whose tits were so big as watermelons. Did she find out about what was happening and decided to join the party?"

"I suppose so."

"Did you have the stamina for the four of them? Don't tell me that you were able to hold on at least during four complete rounds."

The lad's smile was all the answer he offered. Tyrion, true to his promise and pitying the red-faced squire, did not ask him more questions.

They did their tour of inspection through the areas which were in construction and reform and verified their fast evolution. Kerro was in the Square of Graces, where the buildings for the brotherhoods were being constructed apace. Sansa and Leena sent their regards to Jalima and the man promised them that, when he could, he would take his wife to the pyramid for a visit, so she
could spend an afternoon with them. They had made a very good impression on Jalima the day of Pod and Leena's wedding and she wished to keep her friendship with both young women, what would serve her as an entertainment.

Koleos was supervising an area of houses which had four storeys high, and he was so focused on his work that the visitors limited to greet him and went on their way, because they did not want to interrupt him.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 270

Meereen: Day 29

At last, they went to the market, which was in full buzz, and Tyrion made the routine transactions, with Sansa holding his hand, Leena holding Sansa's other hand, Pod watching alert and the four Unsullied surrounding them. Sarik asked Sansa politely if she liked the presents of her nameday, and she answered effusively that they were a wonder, that no Westerosi artisan would have made them better and that the snow dog had moved her very much. She called Ray by his name and the little dog got close to greet Sarik, whom he had recognized, and licked his hand. Sarik smiled widely while he was stroking the head of the animal that he had got for the pretty wife of the Mother's small and likeable counselor. He had got puffed up with pride when he had heard the praise to the freed craftspeople, as if it were him who had taught them their skills, noticed Sansa, amused. Especially, the confirmation of the fact that they had nothing to envy the Westerosi had pleased him specifically. As the supervisor of the market and of the production of the brotherhoods, whose manufactures were sold in their majority in the market, Sarik must feel responsible for all of them.

When Tyrion was satisfied with the collected data, he requested Sarik to get a leash for Ray, explaining him how he wanted it to be. It must encircle the animal around his chest and his back and not his neck, in order not to strangle him. He drew a sketch in one of the papers he was wearing, and Sarik examined it. Tyrion was a good draftsman and the man nodded. After bidding farewell to the market supervisor, Tyrion proposed to visit Jorah in his area of the city, knowing that Sansa would like to see him, and they headed for the sector he patrolled. They found the knight walking along one of the streets together with a sellsword of the Second Sons. Daenerys had decreed that all the city guards always must patrol accompanied, because that way they were most difficult to be ambushed.

"Good morning, Jorah. How are you doing?," greeted Tyrion.

"Good morning." He addressed a nod to the small company, and payed attention to the puppy, whom he did not know yet.

"His name is Ray, and he's my wife's, as a gift for her nameday, which was yesterday," clarified Tyrion.

"Ah, congratulations, Lady Sansa." Jorah made a bow before her. "I hope it were a happy day for you."

"It was, Ser Jorah, thank you very much," answered Sansa.

Indeed. With many presents, most of which aren't anyone business. Tyrion was grinning mockingly.

"He's a nice dog. The Mormonts had some specimens of that breed in the Bear Island. Very noble and loyal animals, and really strong and tough. He'll take very good care of you, my lady. He won't permit anyone with bad intentions to get near you. Once a snow dog regards you as a member of its pack, it defends you to death. It'll do it as well, of course, with the rest of your family and with all the people in your inner circle. You'd be surprised of the ferocity a creature like this can develop at the slightest threat to those whom it loves. There's only an animal so faithful as the snow dog, and its the direwolf, though you know it better than me."
"I know. Ray reminds me a lot of my Lady, the female direwolf I lost because of Joffrey and Cersei," said Sansa.

"He'll always keep you a lot of company. These animals have a nobleness that most people lack. And when you have children, I assure you that, while your dog is with them, nobody will dare to get near them without good intentions. It will be the best measure you could adopt to protect your children, I guarantee it."

"I'll make sure that he's close to them at all times. That way I'll breathe easier," assured her.

Tyrion then talked about a topic he knew would interest the knight intensely.

"The queen is going to set free Rhaegal and Viserion today. She's waiting for the freedfolk of thirty disadvantaged families to settle in the pyramid and, as soon as the way is clear, she'll let loose both dragons."

Jorah did not seem surprised. Daenerys must have told him in one of the times in which they kept conversations on Pod and Leena's wedding day. The knight had seen how the beasts had been born and how they had grown, and she must think that she owed him an explanation.

"The khaleesi told me that after debating it with you she decided to free them, and she explained the motives you had considered. It doesn't seem harebrained to me, as Drogon has given much less trouble than he was expected to. Dragons are naturally used to live together with humans, even though they can't be tamed. It's especially the widespread ignorance what has given them a certain fame. And the bad use that often other Targaryens have made of them, turning them into killing machines."

"Exactly, Jorah. If dragons don't have reasons, they don't attack people. When Drogon flew over Meereen to visit the queen, he didn't cause any damage, and that taking into account that this is a large city. That was what determined us to put an end to the confinement of his two brothers. She has warned all the nearby settlements and probably in a short while the whole region will get used to their presence."

"Yes. Let's hope so."

"Tomorrow will be started the season of the fighting arenas. Will you be present among the guards who will watch over the venues?," asked Tyrion, interested.

"Yes," nodded Jorah, with a sparkle of pride in his eyes. "I'll watch over the spectators while the combats are carried out."

"I'm very glad for it, my friend. Do you think she'll let you be in the Daznak's arenas when the final is celebrated?"

"I hope so, Tyrion. I'd be very happy to be there." His voice sounded touched.

"I wish that your dream comes true. Well, friend, we're leaving now. Have a good patrol."

"And you have a good day."

They bade farewell with a nod and the group walked back to the pyramid.

*He'd better take a long time to know that she's going to be Oberyn Martell's wife. If the bad experience of her relationship with Daario was harsh, then finding out about her marriage will be even worse. Though he's conscious that he'll never marry her, losing all hope would crack him*
apart. Luckily, all the matter of the wedding has to be kept top secret. It will be better that way.

Noon in the Skahazadhan Bay was almost warm, with the sun heating blissfully the bright scenery of the rough land of Meereen while they were returning to the Great Pyramid.
Meereen: Day 29

The families of freedfolk were already settled in their rooms, which were between the third and the seventh floors, so the great flow of people had stopped, but it was sensed more liveliness in the atmosphere and some of them went up and down along the ramps, going from one side to another. Though the Great Pyramid was enormous, thirty families were a lot of people and from that day on the corridors would not be so empty or silent.

When they went into the pyramid, short before lunch, Sansa, Tyrion, Pod and Leena payed a visit to the sick children. Those who had caught the disease a pair of days ago still suffered high fever, catarrhal symptoms and even a couple of them coughed and breathed laboriously, because measles in some cases affected the lungs. The characteristic red rash covered their bodies. They felt weak and they still would have to stay in bed for a few days.

Among the five new cases, two of them were guests, and one of the three little orphans worried the maester specially, because the fever was rising a lot and not even the infusion he had given the boy managed to keep it at bay. He was trying several medicines, but he feared that the poor kid were too much weakened to endure that illness. Some months ago, while he still lived in Yunkai, he had caught cold when his master punished him to stand for a whole night out in the open, with his clothes soaked, because he spilled a bucket of water of the well. Since then he coughed and sometimes he shivered with fever. Since the Mother took him in, the maester had been tending to him and he had got a lot better. He had gained weight, he carried out his normal activities, attended Sansa's lessons and he was an excellent mate for his brothers and sisters of the pyramid, because he never quarreled and he mediated in the disputes to try to solve them preventing his mates to come to blows. He was tenacious and exerted himself. But it was nearly impossible for him to survive measles, being so weakened.

"The Mother has stayed with him for a long while this morning," told the maester, studying the poor child, who in those moments was sleeping with a restless and feverish sleep. "Visitors cheer him up. He has a stoical character and is aware of the gravity of his state. He never complaints. It'll be good that he could say goodbye to this world with someone who holds his hand and makes him feel loved and safe. It will be a matter of days, probably. One week at most, although I doubt he'll withstand so much. The Mother will come whenever she can."

Tyrion gazed ar Sansa with his compassionate eyes, knowing that her tender heart would be suffering for that child.

"I'll also stay with him. Please, send word to me if he gets worse," said her, fighting against tears.

"I'll do, my lady," promised the maester.

The boy's name was Menelan and he did not speak a lot. In certain aspects he reminded of Pod: timid, patient, loyal, very eager to learn. But his talent was not fighting, and his fragile physical condition never let him make great displays in the parade ground, though he did it the best he could. He was very intelligent and he loved reading. He absorbed Sansa's lessons and always was eager for more. He could have been a transcriber, or a teacher, or he even might have gone to study in the Citadel.

But the poor child was ebbing away visibly and fatality would snatch him all he could have become.
Tyrion squeezed Sansa's hand quietly, and they looked at each other's eyes with the same expression of sadness.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
They returned to their rooms and Tyrion respected Sansa's silence. He got ready to let her be in her own space so she could be alone with her affliction, if that was what she preferred in those moments, but she did not let go of his hand and they sat down on the bed.

"He's only seven. He has learnt to read very fast and I've been lending him one of the queen's books, because he asked me to. When he looks at you with those tranquil and wise eyes, you feel that he can read your soul as if you were a book. I think he knew he didn't have much time left and he liked observing life around him, as if wanting to retain in his memory as much as possible before departing. Oh, Tyrion." Sansa burst into tears and leaned upon him, embracing him tightly. She rested her face on his shoulder and neck and unleashed her sorrow. He caressed her hair and her back and allowed her to vent until she calmed down and the sobs ceased. They laid down on the bed and held each other until Mhyraz brought lunch. Sansa ate with lack of appetite but made an effort to finish her meal because she did not like to throw anything away, and Tyrion tried to distract her talking to her about the spectacular sunsets in Casterly Rock.

"It was my magical moment of the day. Whenever I could escape from my father's and my sister's contempt, I climbed the ramparts which faced west and stayed there staring at sundown until the night fell. It was so beautiful, Sansa. The huge golden sun turned incandescent orange and lit the waters, the waves crashed against the cliffs and the seagulls fished and threw their shrieks. In those moments I could forget what I was. I imagined that my mother's soul was in that light and flooded me with its warmth. She whispered that she loved me and she gave me new strength. I've seen many beautiful sceneries in my travels, but none of them was like those sunsets, Sansa. I wish I could show them to you." He took her hand over the table.

Sansa smiled at him with a melancholic expression.

"Didn't you get to see any sunset over the Wolfswood when you visited Winterfell?," asked her, caressing his fingers.

"No, honey. Half the days were cloudy and, when they weren't, I was doing something else right then. Surely drinking and fucking in the brothel of the village. "It would be nice to see them with you, on top of the rebuilt ramparts."

"We'll see them, Tyrion." She fixed her eyes sweetly in Tyrion's green ones and his body reacted instantly, but he restrained himself, in case she were not in the mood for sex.

Sansa, as always, sensed his desire. She moved her face closer to his and kissed him lightly. Tyrion held back in order not to hold her head and plunge his tongue into her mouth eagerly, allowing her all control and full freedom to decide if she wanted to continue or not. It was her who held his head and made the kiss more intense, licking his lips and serching for his tongue. He met hers with his, softly, without pressure, and she pressed herself more against his mouth, moaning. He did not need any other evidence that she wished to have sex.

"Oh, Sansa," whispered him hoarsely, surrendering and taking her head between his hands to devour her lips and her tongue.

In that moment Mhyraz knocked and entered, and they moved aside smiling and blushing, with their breaths agitated by desire.
"As I promised you, you can take Ray away to spend the afternoon with him." Tyrion winked at the boy, making an effort to conceal his powerful body reaction, which must be giving away clearly all he was craving for doing to Sansa.

The kid cleared the table and whistled at the dog to accompany him. Ray turned to look at his owners, searching for their confirmation, and he followed Mhyraz to the corridor.

Sansa made Tyrion lie down on the bed and he let her do, giving in to her initiative. She rode him with entrancing slowness until driving them both to the heights of bliss.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 29

Later, laying in their favourite position, Tyrion listed the other topics he had discussed with Daenerys the previous night. Sansa opened her eyes wide when she heard Cersei's and the Tyrell's sentence and the plans to harass Littlefinger.

"They must have received already the thirty lashes and their heads surely have been shaved. Do you realize that all of them could die if the crowd lynch them or throw them deadly objects?," asked Tyrion, observing her reaction.

In Sansa's face there was an expression of bewilderment.

"Yes, Tyrion. I'm aware of that. It woud be a terrible way of dying. I think that I even almost feel pity for Cersei."

"I almost as well, because death by stoning can be horrible, unless the condemned person is lucky and a well-aimed hit with a stone kills him or her instantly. But I don't feel compassionate enough for my sister as for mourning her if she dies." Right then Tyrion remembered acutely how Cersei had ordered to apprehend poor and sweet Ros, the northern prostitute who had traveled to the South to work in Littlefinger's brothel, and his sister had commanded her to be tortured, believing that Ros was Tyrion's secret lover. She had held her hostage as a threat for Tyrion if during the Battle of Blackwater Joffrey ended up injured or dead. Tyrion felt a great relief that his mean sister had made a mistake and that by then she had not discovered yet that Shae was his secret lover, but he felt equally wronged and hatred invaded him. After promising Ros, who had been beaten and whipped, that he would not forget her, he pronounced his threat against Cersei. One day, when you believe you're happy, your happiness will turn into ashes in your mouth. He had said it with all the venom which was flowing through his veins. In the eyes of the world, Ros was only a worthless whore, but Tyrion's heart hurt when he saw the poor girl, who did not deserve any of that, mistreated and brutalized. He also felt guilty for the fact that she had been apprehended because of a misunderstanding on account of him. Ros always wore a pendant Tyrion had gifted her when he visited Winterfell and laid her a couple of times. It was a pendant that had the Lannister lion carved on it. Due to that Cersei thought Ros was his lover. And poor Ros had to pay for the hatred between Cersei and him.

Another thing he was harbouring against his sister was that, the day of Joff's wedding, during the royal breakfast he had seen her pointing to Shae, who was one of the maids present in the event. He heard Cersei muttering to Tywin that the dark-haired girl was her brother's whore. Tyrion had never loathed Cersei the way he did in those moments. When he realized that his ex-lover's life was definitely at stake because his father and his sister were ready to catch her, he was burnt by such an intense hatred that he was amazed not to burst in flames right there, in that stupid and humiliating breakfast, in which the snot, to put the icing on the cake, smashed with his valyrian sword the valuable book that Tyrion wished he had not gifted him.

It was then when Tyrion detested his sister with the same deep intensity with which he had detested Tywin when he snatched Tysha from him, giving her to the guards.

He had not even felt that burning sensation so deeply when he suspected that Cersei could have commanded Ser Mandon to kill him during the Battle of Blackwater, but he admitted that such suspicion did not contribute to increase the scarce fraternal affection he could feel for her.
No, all that had gone too far and he never, never, could forgive her. Because of that Tyrion would
not feel pity if she died. He might have forgiven her or at least not hate her for other things she had
done to him. For attributing Joanna's death to him, because after all she also was Cersei's mother;
for the little tortures she had subjected him to as a child; for her scorn and her taunt. He might have
overlooked all that, because at bottom she was no more than an unhappy and bittered woman, and
in that he could feel empathy because for nearly all his life he had felt the same way. But what he
could not overlook was that she had threatened others' lives to take revenge on him.

Tyrion could not tell Sansa any of that, of course. But she understood that the hate between both
siblings had crossed the barrier beyond which forgiveness was impossible.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 274

Meereen: Day 29

"Poor Tyrells. I wish they manage to survive and get away of all this without more damage than their dignity in tatters," said Sansa.

Tyrion was meditating.

"I'm surprised that Olenna isn't plotting something. As we know, she's a formidable woman. She surely hasn't stayed idle awaiting her grandchildren to be lynched or stoned. Let's not forget that the contribution of the Tyrells has been crucial, so the Lannisters could win the war and King's Landing can endure winter. Olenna might remove all that support and it would be the end of the precarious Lannister power, which now is only a pure facade. No, I reckon that she's going to do something big to free her grandchildren. We mustn't underestimate her."

"And the sparrows? They're thousands and they stand between her and her grandchildren," objected Sansa.

"Yes. But the Tyrell's armies are thousands and thousands too, a lot more than the sparrows in the city. Olenna is desperate. I believe her very capable of organizing a great attack against the capital. Nothing matters to her more than those two youngsters locked up in the cells. She must be inciting his dumb son Mace to get moving."

Sansa pondered her husband's conjectures and then she asked another question.

"And Jaime, Tyrion? He neither will stay idle with Cersei's sentence."

"No, he won't. But no one even knows where he is now, or if he has found out something. I think that either he could be searching for your sister Arya, due to the oath he swore to your mother, or he could be traveling to Dorne to verify that Myrcella is well and perhaps try to persuade her to return to the capital. Who knows. Maybe he has turned around and is galloping back. I believe him very capable of facing the sparrows alone, though it's useless."

"Soon we'll know what will happen," said her, caressing his chest.

"Yes. Very soon."

"And you say that the queen, with Varys's help, is going to encourage the clans of the mountains to harass the lords of the Vale?"

"Yes. Littlefinger is too much lounged in the ugly chair of the Eyrie. We must prick them on their asses, as much him as the nobility of the Vale and thus we'd make the tension explode, and the best way to achieve that is by creating serious trouble. The clans will be glad to create trouble and demand that the mountains which have always belonged to them are given to them. It won't be so easy for Littlefinger to escape from the conflict, because the clans would occupy all the strategic positions," explained Tyrion.

"Let's hope all of them turn against him and dispose of him. I'll breathe more easily when that monster doesn't step over this world any more," declared her with a cold flash in her eyes.

"You won't be the only one, darling. The world wins without creeps like him." Tyrion caressed her back. "And talking about creeps, Daenerys's spies have discovered three more noble families
involved in the Sons of the Harpy, and quite more merchants who are their accomplices. For the moment none of the families are Hizdhar's or the Green Grace's. She's from the Galare dynasty. But some of the other Graces come from involved families, and because of that we can't trust even the priestesses. However much they assert to keep contact with the divine dimension and to have sworn detachment from worldly passions, they don't stop being simple mortals like the rest of us and some of them might be part of the organization. Daenerys's spies are keeping an eye even on them."

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 29

Sansa counted on her fingers, remembering what they had spoken in one of their prior chats, when he revealed to her that the spies had identified members of the organization for the first time.

"How many families are there already, Tyrion? Seven?," asked her. She could not recall the surnames of the Meereenese dinasties, since for the people who were not familiarized with the Ghiscari culture it was very difficult to memorize their names.

"Yes, there are seven. They aren't enough yet to carry out the arrest. As I told you some days ago, we can't take any action openly until we're sure that we have discovered most of them, or otherwise they'll slip away from us and, without the element of surprise, it would be impossible for us to find them. We must wait and go on uncovering involved people without them knowing," argued him.

Sansa nodded and he changed topic to cheer her up. "I proposed to Daenerys your ideas about women in the army and the brotherhood of seamstresses. She is delighted and says that you yourself could found the brotherhood and be their representative, if you want." He smiled at her with pride.

"Oh, but I think that the freedwomen who will belong to the brotherhood should vote for their representative, like in the other brotherhoods. I'm not going to impose anything to them," pointed out Sansa.

"Of course not, darling." He kissed her neck, becoming inflamed again when he felt the softness and the scent of that body which was his home. "You're so pretty when you do the things you do best," muttered him against her skin, with his naughty grin.

"And what are the things I do best, according to you?," asked her, with her sensual voice and embracing him to press him against her.

"Guess, gorgeous."

And they sank once more into the delights of sex.
out of favour.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 276

Meereen: Day 29

In the quietest hour of the afternoon, they heard some roars from several floors below, and the girls leaned out the door of the adjacent hall, with expressions between fear and excitement.

"They're setting the dragons free," explained Tyrion, amused with their reactions and with a feeling of thrill in the pit of his stomach. "From now on, they'll fly freely. The Mother can't keep them locked any more and besides, we've verified that dragons don't attack indiscriminately and that they're only interested in hunting beasts to eat. If people leave them alone, they leave people alone. All the villages and towns in the surroundings have been warned." He said that to calm down Leena and Cloe, as Sansa already knew all that and was ready.

Everyone ran to look out of the windows and they saw Rhaegal and Viserion soaring into the sky over the city and going north. Surely the sight of the three huge beasts was causing a commotion among the people who were looking at them right then. Tyrion thought that the Sons of the Harpy must not be very delighted with that evident display of power on behalf of the foreigner and usurper queen, and he smiled for himself. That maneuver was also a veiled threat from the Breaker of Chains for everyone who challenged her.

Soon before dusk, the girls went away and Sansa and him made love until just before Mhyraz returned to bring dinner and take Ray back. The boy, saddened, reported that Menelan was becoming worse.

"Oh, Tyrion." Sansa took his hand with her trembling one. "When you go to the Council meeting of tonight, accompany me to the children's rooms, because I want to stay with the boy until you fetch me when the meeting ends. I won't be able to stay calm here knowing that Menelan is suffering."

"Of course, honey. I'll take you. Ray'll be with you while you're there, do you agree?"

"It's a very good idea, my love. The boy will like that Ray keeps him company." A tear slid down her cheek and he dried it softly.

They had dinner quietly. She had withdrawn into the private space in which she took refuge when something distressed her deeply, like she did in King's Landing, and like she still did sometimes, and Tyrion, as always, respected that space into which he only got when she invited him. He limited to caress her hand to convey his love to her, and he observed her furtively. Her gaze was lost in some remote spot, very far from there, and Tyrion could not follow her that time, as she neither could follow him to the deepest of the wounds he carried inside. But he brushed her hand so she knew that she would always have a place to return to.

They stepped out to the corridors with Ray and they walked holding hands.

"Tonight you're going to debate the matter of the harassment in the Vale, aren't you?," asked her, pulling herself out of her absorption.

"Yes, Sansa. It's a very delicate plan and it requires a meticulous analysis," confirmed him. "I'm not going to allow Littlefinger to get away with all this, I promise you. That son of a bitch will pay for everything he's done. He'll pay for triggering the destruction of your family." Tyrion looked at her eyes with a fierce resolution. She smiled at him with gratitude and melancholy.
"Thanks, Tyrion. I know it's difficult and, if this plan goes wrong and Littlefinger manages to sneak away, I don't want you to reproach yourself or to become obsessed with him. We'll find some other way, with the queen's help. Or perhaps, with a little luck, others who hate him as much as us maybe will take charge of settling scores with him."

"I'll do whatever I can, honey. But I swear one thing to you: that vermin will not ever get close to you again." The flames in his green eyes almost burnt with pure hatred.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 29

Sansa squeezed his hand.

"Do you think there is any news? Do they have already elected the new Lord Commander of the Night's Watch?," asked her.

"I suppose it's still soon to know it. The process of the candidatures and the votes can be prolonged for several days, as we must have into account that in that process participate the black brothers of the three castles of the Wall and, as the brothers of Eastwatch-by-the Sea and The Shadow Tower can't be present in Castle Black, they send their votes by ravens, so the process of count is extended until all the brothers have voted," explained Tyrion.

"Yes, of course. Well, I suppose that we'll know in a few days," said Sansa.

"Very soon, yes. Since there's only three active castles, the voting has been simplified a lot. Imagine how it must be in the ancient times, when the nineteen castles were working. The process lasted weeks until they elected the new Lord Commander. It's been a long time since the Night's Watch lost its prestige and respectability, since people started to forget the White Walkers. Human memory is very short. And the monsters of beyond take advantage of that. They wait for the moment in which we're most vulnerable and unprepared, and then they return. They know that the Night's Watch now is only a poor residue of what it was and it scarcely has forces to defend the Wall. Because of that, the new Lord Commander has before him probably the most difficult challenge any of them has coped with since the Long Night, eight thousand years ago. Let's hope that the black brothers are aware of that and vote wisely," explained Tyrion.

"Do you think that Stannis's presence in Castle Black could tilt the balance in favour of Jon?," inquired Sansa.

"He only can act as a witness, but he won't achieve any more. The brothers are jealous of their institution. It's curious, but that gang consisting in its majority of former criminals and low-class hoodlums gain a strong sense of their own dignity when they wear the black. Before that, they were nothing, only poor wretches who didn't have even two coppers to rub together, and when they enter the Watch they obtain a status with which they wouldn't have dreamed in their miserable lives of peasants and famished vagabonds. It's true that nowadays almost nobody takes them seriously. But many of them do take their oaths very seriously. They are exempted from obeying anyone except for their own Commander and officers. Due to that, they don't kneel before any king. Stannis is only a guest in the Wall."

"And the King-Beyond-The-Wall, Mance Rayder? Stannis holds him prisoner there. What will he do with him?" Sansa had just remembered what Tyrion had told her about the attack of the sellswords that Stannis had hired with the loan given by the Iron Bank of Braavos, and that they had caught the former member of the Night's Watch who had managed to unify the whole Free Folk appealing to the great threat that was hovering over everyone: the White Walkers. Faced with that, all the quarrels among tribes and clans had been temporarily forgotten.

"What is done in Westeros with deserter crows, Sansa?"

"They are sentenced to death." She recalled again the day in which her father had to execute one of them for having abandoned the Wall.
"That's it. For Stannis, Rayder is only a black brother who broke his oath and has betrayed the Night's Watch and the Seven Kingdoms for joining the Free Folk's cause. The most likely is that he'll command Mance to be burnt. Since the red witch is with him, all the convicts under his order are roasted alive. I don't think that Mance's fate will be different."

"Poor man." Sansa asked another question. "Do you reckon the Watch could eventually disappear? Currently, almost nobody goes there willingly, nearly all the ones who go do it to avoid mutilation or execution or because they don't have another choice, and there are very few of them left to guard so many miles of wall." Sansa was walking, thoughtful.

"If it disappears, the gods have mercy on us. Probably its fate will be decided when the true war against the White Walkers is set off. That will be the key." Tyrion did not wish to go on talking about the probable disappearance of the Night's Watch, because it was an issue too much depressing and he wanted to cheer Sansa up. When the moment of truth came, then they would face it. But meanwhile, he did not like Sansa to be sad. It reminded him of those days when she sat for hours by the windows of the rooms they shared in the Red Keep, turning her back to him, without addressing a single glance to him, without saying a single word, wishing to fly very far from there, very far from him, from the Lannisters, from that damned place she hated with all her heart.

No, he did not like to remember those days in which she ignored him as if she wanted to wipe him off the face of the earth.

Anyway, Sansa was going to look out for a dying child. *What am I going to tell her to cheer her up, when she's about to take the hand of a dying little boy?*

They arrived at the rooms where Menelan was. Sansa bent and Tyrion bade farewell to her with a kiss.

"He'll be glad that you're by his side, darling. He won't be alone," said him, caressing her cheek.

"That's all I can give him." Sansa smiled at him with tenderness and kissed him again. She made an effort to hold back her tears, because she did not want to break to mourn before Menelan. She had to be strong. She breathed deeply, addressed Tyrion another smile and walked into the room with Ray.

Tyrion continued his way to the meeting hall, thinking that at least that little kid would not go away from this world without somebody who held his hand.
Chapter 278

Meereen: Day 29

As usual lately, Hizdhar did not attend the meeting. On the eve of the reopening of the fighting arenas, the nobleman was carrying out a task of organization and publicizing of quite a magnitude, and due to that he was temporarily exempt from taking his seat in the Council. A fact that, to be fair, did not bother in the least any of the other participants. As he was not present, the queen and the rest of her counselors could discuss the matters with absolute freedom, without feeling forced to measure each sentence for fear of what could be revealed or not. And as that night the issue of the Vale was going to be debated, as well as Daenerys's wedding, it came in handy that Hizdhar were absent. That way the queen would spare some private meetings to deal with the topics that she could not bring up when he was there.

And of course, under any concept the Meereenese nobility must find out a single word about the wedding. It would be difficult to keep such an important secret, but there was much at stake and they would try to keep it as long as necessary.

As soon as everyone who had to be there that night exchanged greetings and courtesies and, in Daario's case, flatteries to the present women, jokes and winks, and they had taken a seat around the table, Daenerys began, straight to the point.

"As I usually do, firstly I'll tackle the questions which concern us directly, and later I'll report the news I've been receiving through ravens or messengers, and my plans for Westeros. We have topics of great importance to talk about and I'm waiting for your advice and contribution." She did a pause and looked at them with attention. "The measles epidemic has spread and alert has been declared in the city. Some cases are virulent and the disease is infecting even old people and other adults with a poor health, and in all of them the symptoms appear with much more gravity than in the children that don't have complications, who luckily are the majority. Soon after the tragedy of the market, the healers are overworked again. Right here, in the pyramid, nine children have got sick already and it's probable that new cases occur before the epidemic starts to subside. One of them, Menelan, who is seven years old, is very seriously ill." Her voice trembled when she spoke about the kid and her expression showed the pain she could not hide. "The poor child escaped from the hell of his slavery in Yunkai only to very likely find death here, and I can't do anything to save him. And like him, other children are sentenced. I doubt that not even the maesters of the Citadel, though we had enough of them, could have done much more, but it's evident that Meereen needs more medicine men for such a numerous population. As you know, prince Doran Martell is going to send us a few of them, all of them acquaintances of his, as they come from Dornish houses. They are young men who recently have finished forging their maester chains and haven't had the chance to find a post yet. Doran has chosen those who have shown themselves interested in moving here, and he vouches for them and their reliability. They are ten altogether, but that's not all. With them will come prince Oberyn. With the pretext of visiting the city to take temporarily the seat in the Council that I promised the Martells, he has proposed to me to bring forward our wedding and celebrate it here. I've accepted, but imposing on him the strictest secrecy. The Meereenese nobility must go on believing that I'll remain single, so they don't lose hope to wed one of their members to me. Of course I've already decided that I won't marry any of their men, because I can't trust them, but the noble people don't need to know any of that. We'll allow them to keep the hope that a Meereenese aristocrat will be a king. I'll have to put them off subtly, and I expect that, when my marriage to prince Oberyn is discovered, we're far from here by then." She kept silent once more for some seconds, studying the reactions around her. The only one who ignored that news was Kerro, because he did not live in the pyramid and his many duties kept him away for the whole
day, and he did not have time for private meetings with the queen. "He'll stay here for a while and will attend the Council meetings, pretending to be simply the representative of Dorne's interests and a guest of honour. And after that he'll return to his country again, to await me to prepare my march on Westeros."

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It was evident that Daario did not feel comfortable at all with anything of that. His tense jaw proved it, but he held back. He was making an effort to become resigned to the idea, and Tyrion had the impression that the sellsword finally was listening to reason. He had to accept that since the moment in which the Red Viper would arrive at the city, he himself would become a second choice for her and he should be content with the short times the queen could devote to him. Similar situations had happened before. The Targaryens used to practise polygamy, apart from incest between siblings. If a king had several sisters, he sometimes married all of them, like Aegon The Conquerer. A queen could do the same, but as Daario had no royal or noble blood, she could not marry him, but there was nothing that forbade her to have him as a lover. Tyrion hid a sarcastic smile. He did not imagine himself with more than one woman, nor the idea seduced him in the slightest. He could never stab Sansa like that, or to be interested in another woman. For Bronn it was very easy, remembered him. When I told him that I had to marry Sansa and that I felt confused by the impact that was going to have on Shae, he downplayed the issue blithely. He didn't see any problem in the situation, quite the opposite. According to him, I'd have two women for myself. One with whom fulfilling my duty and on whose behalf I'd rule the North until the son I'd make into her by force were of age. And the other one for pleasure, for fucking and entertaining myself whenever I fancied, when I got very bored and needed a distraction. Two women and a kingdom for me. The truth was that if Bronn had thought all that sounded tempting for him, he was completely wrong. Nothing could sound worse. For any other man, that mess would have been an excellent opportunity to obtain a great power in Westeros, with the incentive of having two beautiful women for whatever he fancied. Any other guy with scant scruples would have not thought twice. But he felt as if suddenly he had been loaded with a lot of stones on his back. Bronn, how not, had laughed at him and at his absurd squeamishness.

He had always been a hopeless romantic fool. His sarcastic smile sweetened when he thought about Sansa. I'm not such a hopeless case, after all. I have her.

Kerro asked a question.

"Will not that make the Dornish prince the king of Meereen, Mother?"

"Yes, technically it will. But I've also made clear that issue. Along with respecting secrecy, he has agreed not to claim the title, and he has assured me that he's not interested in being a king here. He says that governing isn't something which attracts his attention specially, and that I am the only thing that interests him." Daenerys blushed furiously. It was obvious she felt quite embarrassed. Tyrion observed her carefully and noticed a brief flash of satisfaction and delight in the light-green eyes, which she was trying to conceal. The attentions of the sensual Dornishman don't leave her indifferent. This is going to be funny. "I'm not naïve," added her. "He likes what I represent, and he doesn't hesitate to admit it. In principle there isn't anything which makes me suspicious of his intentions, as they're blatant. Moreover, in many years he's never meddled with the governing of his eldest brother Doran, and I'm certain that a deep affection and respect exists between them both. Prince Oberyn has never put power ahead of his family or of love. Another one more ambitious and with less scruples wouldn't have resigned himself to be the second son, but he's always been happy in his situation. He also loves his land, he loves Dorne that has given him so many years of happiness, a happiness which would have been complete if war hadn't snatched from him his sister and his niece and nephew." Tyrion knew that she had not pronounced Tywin's name out of respect for him, but the fact that his father had given the order to kill Elia Martell and her children was not
a secret for anybody. "Because of that love he feels for his native land, he's willing to improve its prestige and the best way to do that is to offer his hand to a queen. Dorne is a very proud nation and it doesn't submit easily. For centuries a close alliance has existed between houses Martell and Targaryen, that are closely related. In fact, through the Martell's blood runs quite Targaryen's blood, and vice versa. We're natural allies and there's no better way to seal that alliance than a royal matrimony." Daenerys had put on the table openly all the motivations of the southern people. Though of course her modesty prevents her from expounding the other reasons. Oberyn not only wants to increase Dorne's prestige above the other kingdoms. He as well wants to fuck every day a pretty, intelligent, brave and powerful woman and he doesn't mind wedding her to achieve it. Tyrion's grin widened.

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Daenerys picked up on her argument.

"Without allies, my entrance in Westeros would be fruitless. Ser Jorah pointed that out once. The Westerosi people aren't waiting for me with open arms. Most of them don't even know yet about my existance, and for those who have heard of me, I'm little more than a tale that huddles make up to hang out around the campfires. Surely they don't believe that dragons have been reborn. They aren't eager for a young woman who has grown up in exile to sit on the Iron Throne. They don't call for the return of my lineage. They're too much hurt by war to worry about a queen who is a foreigner for them. They won't endorse me without a solid support inside of the kingdoms. And Dorne is that support I need."

She kept silent again to measure everyone's expressions. Daario and Ser Barristan were the ones who felt less comfortable, but they understood the necessity of that alliance.

"Lord Tyrion has suggested me a new condition I can include in the contract. The shipyards of Dorne will build ships for my fleet from now on. As we can't build our own shipyard here due to the lack of woods, others might provide us with vessels. If I'm going to be a Dornish princess and the future queen of those territories, I have the right to claim a part of their production. A strong realm needs a large fleet, and I have every intention of having one, both for commercial objectives as warlike and defensive ones and also thinking about the future move of my subjects to the Seven Kingdoms. I can't transport tens of thousands of people magically."

"An excellent measure, Your Grace," pointed out Ser Barristan, addressing Tyrion a subtle nod and a smile. The old man already knows those plans since soon after I communicated them to her, of course, as for Daenerys he's the father figure she never had, thought Tyrion.

"And that's not all," continued her. "There's another person who is going to lend ships to us. Illyrio Mopatis." As Kerro must be the only one who did not know that yet, the queen had the courtesy to explain that plan. "Those in this hall who haven't heard of him or don't know him well, must know that he's a very rich merchant from Pentos with many contacts. He's monstrously ambitious and, with the reason of getting richer, a long time ago he decided to support my brother's cause and mine too. He took us in his house, but not out of charity. For him nothing is disinterested, and everything has a price. He got a slice of my brother's plan to sell me to khal Drogo. He even gifted me the dragon eggs as a wedding present, a gesture which meant that, when my brother were a true king, Illyrio must be one of the main favoured by his reign, as he had been so generous with us." Daenerys emphasized the word with irony. "I reckon that there was an error in his plans, and it was that he didn't expect the eggs to hatch. If he had known that, he wouldn't have gifted them to me, I don't have the slightest doubt. He wouldn't have served on a silver platter three dragons for the beggar Targaryen siblings. But nobody believed by then that dragons could be reborn, so for him the eggs had another purpose, not simply decorative." He did another pause. "Illyrio expected me to die in the Great Grass Sea, or my brother to claim the eggs for himself and give them another use, like for example selling them to buy ships and contacts, if he was astute enough. The fact that Viserys died didn't disrupt Illyrio's plans actually. I had taken my brother over and proved to be much stronger than him. The dragons were born and the merchant saw his great opportunity. I changed into a very suitable candidate for the Iron Throne. Dragons are one of the most powerful weapons in the world, as my ancestors showed. And because of that Illyrio decided to support me. And I intend to take advantage of that support. If he gets a slice of me, I'll also get a slice of him."
I'll borrow some of his ships. Such a prosperous merchant has hundreds of them. He can afford to lend me a few."

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"Do you think that the merchant, if he's so greedy as you say, will get rid of a big part of his fleet, aware that it will be a lifelong lending? Those ships will not be given back to him, will they, Mother?" asked Kerro.

"Let's say that those lendings don't work like ordinary lendings. He knows that he won't see those ships again, but he expects a payment through other means, which he hopes I'll fulfill when I sit down on the throne of the Red Keep. He's not a fool at all, but I'm not either, and I'll keep constantly an eye on the merchant, so he will not overstep the marks. I'll return a fair payment to him, but not more."

"We must be very careful with those tricky guys. They steal your shirt on an oversight," said Ser Barristan, who felt a deep contempt for people so much greedy and self-interested.

"If you ever need someone to slice his throat in case that butterball overstep the marks, you already know whom you can count on, Your Grace," offered Daario, with the dangerous flash of his dark-blue eyes. The usual mocking expression was shining in them again.

Daenerys addressed him a subtle smile.

"Thank you, Daario, but I don't think it will be necessary to reach that extent. Mopatis is very fond of his belly, and of the rest of his skin." Daenerys was smiling with sarcasm.

"He'd better." Daario was smiling too, and he addressed the queen a knowing wink. She reddened, as usual.

"Well. With that question solved, I'll move on to other recent matters. Today the families have settled in the pyramid at last. There haven't been any incidents worthy of noting. They themselves are fitting out some of the rooms of the fifth floor to turn them into kitchens and storehouses, because with so many people it's more comfortable to have more installations. The former owners of the pyramid didn't care a damn that their slaves had to spend the whole day walking up and down the ramps, loaded with things and running balancing the dishes on their hands so the food arrived still warm at the masters' tables. But the pyramid can be set up perfectly for whatever we want to use it. And as my poor orphan and guest children won't spend the entire day running up and down the pyramid with no rest, there will be new kitchens and warehouses higher, and besides the children of all the families that will live here are going to collaborate. Nobody will remain idle. Everyone will contribute with whatever he or she can. And I trust that the coexistence between these walls is the most peaceful possible. Just in case, I've increased the number of soldiers who will patrol the corridors to make sure that the routine in the pyramid is tranquil."

Daenerys addressed Kerro again.

"Picking up the issue of the ill children, I've sent word that the school will not be opened for now, until the epidemic is over. When there are no more cases of measles, we'll return to normal and you will organize the movement of the kids and the teachers to the pyramid." Kerro nodded.

Daenerys continued. "Today I've also set free the dragons. Rhaegal and Viserion have flown to the north and we have no news for the time being. I imagine that they're going to join their brother Drogon. All the settlements have been warned and I hope those measures are sufficient." She kept
silent once more to gaze at all her counselors. "Tomorrow the fighting arenas will be reopened. All the security measures are ready to be applied. We have to anticipate the movements of the Sons of the Harpy and prevent any possible attack, and the large presence of soldiers in the city will complicate considerably the realization of any of their despicable plans. Hizdhar and Daario will preside over in the boxes of the two arenas which will be opened tomorrow." She set her eyes on the sellsword. "Be extremely careful tomorrow. Don't let your guard down."

"I won't, Your Grace," assured him with a soft voice, caressing her with his stare.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
"Regarding the Sons of the Harpy, three new families belonging to the organization have been discovered. They are the Merreq, Uhlez and Naqqan dinasties, and a handful of merchants who collaborate with them. Until now, either Hizdhar's dynasty as well as the Green Grace's one seem to be above suspicion, but that doesn't discount that they are being extorted somehow. I doubt that they're left alone. For those criminal organizations, everyone who refuses to take part in them is considered an enemy. They will not limit to overlook them. If they have threatened those families, they probably are compelling them to do certain things or to act as double spies. Due to that we can't even trust the innocent ones, because they could be willing to do anything in order to survive. I'm afraid that we can't protect them more than we already do, but if any of them asks me for help expressly to keep him or her safe from the murderers, I'll do whatever I can. It must be difficult for those who stay out of the violence to be located in the middle of the skirmish, and to be scorned for wishing to preserve peace in Meereen. If so far none of them has come to request my protection, I don't think it's because they're all accomplices. It's because they're afraid of showing too obviously their liking for me. They stay on a tightrope which can be broken at any time. If Hizdhar doesn't belong to the killers, and for now the evidences don't point that Hizdhar is one of them, he's moving on a very dangerous edge, and I'm sure that he's the one who is most in the spotlight, for collaborating openly with me. Because of that I'm considering to assign him several bodyguards, if he agrees. What do you think of that?"

Tyrion intervened.

"I don't believe that measure will increase much more his supposed discredit among the Sons of the Harpy, Your Grace," signaled Tyrion, with his slightly ironic tone. "His collaboration with you, whether sincere or not, is not a secret for anyone. I don't reckon that saddling him with a few bodyguards will make him be more in danger than he already is."

"No, evidently not. Tomorrow I'll consult him," said her. "I wouldn't like to have his death on my conscience, if the Sons try something against him. But he'd better being innocent, because otherwise it will be me who he'll have to be truly afraid of." Daenerys hinted her harsh and sarcastic smile.

"Indeed," corroborated Daario, stroking the hilts of his daggers. Tyrion observed that they were made of ivory and they had the shapes of naked women, a detail he had not noticed until that moment.

"Lord Tyrion, tomorrow you'll have access to the royal coffers and you can prepare everything for the deliveries of money. You'll have the full protection of your escorts. The day of the deliveries, Daario himself will be with Kerro and with you. I'll command the freedfolk to walk in large groups and each group will have soldiers who will guard them along their way. Nobody must walk alone or in small groups. That way we'll prevent assaults and robberies."

"Excellent, Your Grace," approved Tyrion.

"My goal is that none of my subjects is hungry or in need. The groups will be responsible for the administration of the money and for sharing it out fairly among everyone, even among those who can't help themselves in any way for being incapacitated, permanently ill or crippled. If I find out that someone steals the minimum sustenance to any person who doesn't have any other livelihood, the full force of law will be applied against the thief and he'll lose a hand as a punishment. If
somebody is a repeat offender in the crime of robbery of public money, he or she will lose both hands. And the thieves' lives won't be spared a third time, because they'll be executed. That should be very clear among the population, Kerro."

"So shall it be, Mother." The freedman nodded.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
"Very well. In this city no one has the need to steal, because I do my best to achieve that the basic needs are satisfied. So there's no excuse. The law will be applied equally to everybody, also to the native Meereenese people who rob freedfolk or other Meereenese. I'll spread it and since tomorrow, any case of robbery which is reported to me in the public audiences or which comes to my attention through any means and that is proven true, will receive the sentence I've just announced. That way I intend to prevent abuse and impede the greedy people from prospering at the expense of the defenseless." She kept silent again and drank a sip from her cup to moisten her parched throat after her speeches. "On the other hand, I've received some very bold suggestions which seem very appropriate facing the prosperity and the strengthening of our people. It's something that has been seen rarely, but it's not absurd. When I open the school, all the freed boys and girls of Meereen will receive several weekly sessions of fight training, except for those whose physical condition or disabilities don't let them in any way. Ser Barristan will be in charge of organizing the sessions and will choose his helpers. Podrick will go on being Ser Barristan's assistant as long as his duties are not incompatible with his pledge of allegiance to Lord Tyrion. The squire will continue to provide his services as a bodyguard and, when Lord Tyrion doesn't need those services, Podrick will attend the children's training. A soldier can replace him in the parade ground when he's not in the pyramid." Daenerys drank another sip and some of the others imitated her, as everyone had a wine cup before them. "And there's more. I have the aim that the girls who harbour a warrior vocation continue their training, like the boys, and they also could be part of my armies in the future. Women can be so capable as men in any field and I'm willing to prove that. Moreover, my goal is that everybody finds his or her place in this society and that each one chooses its vocation or the job which is closest to its aspirations. That way people will feel more fulfilled and that will contribute to the collective welfare, what should be the main objective of every society. Happy, satisfied and encouraged subjects perform much better in their jobs and tend to a peaceful coexistence. Maybe all this just now sounds as something impractical, but at least I'm going to try. I have the opportunity to change course radically and to break the power wheel that in unfair societies of rich and poor always crushes those below."

Everybody around the table looked at her with renewed respect and admiration. If there was someone able to try something so revolutionary, it was her undoubtedly. Tyrion nodded in her direction, smiling at her. He knew that all that would be very difficult, but in Meereen there were still many chances to realize that. It was only a city. The great acid test would be in Westeros. Such a vast territory with millions of people would be a huge challenge.

But if there was someone so tenacious as to try, it was Daenerys. Tyrion felt a little optimistic for the first time in his life. The Mother of Dragons undoubtedly breathed hope. And many things could be done with hope, if the gods did not interpose too much obstacles, as it used to be their habit.

But for him all that was sufficient if it allowed him to live happily with Sansa and with the family they would have, for the rest of their lives.

Daario winked at the queen again. He seemed to have forgotten about the Dornish prince momentarily.

_He'll get used to it. Anyway, his duties as a soldier will keep him busy and he won't spend the day beside her, so it will be easier for him if he doesn't have to put up with the husband's presence._
night he'll miss her, it's true, but he'll have other moments to be with her. Oberyn will not oppose, as he's very open in those questions. For him, love is not incompatible with sexual freedom. Tyrion imagined that another man, or woman, tried to make advances toward Sansa and a strong burning feeling of jealousy pierced him. I'm very different from the Viper. I've been brought up with another sort of mindset, and perhaps it contributes my own possessive nature, so like the Lannisters. I can't conceive that another person touches my Sansa. I can't even envision it. And the same thing happens to Sansa. In that the Starks are so faithful and jealous as the Lannisters. Surely my sweet girl would tear out the eyes of any woman, or man, who wanted to lay a hand on me. He grinned, thinking about the she-wolf she carried inside of her splendid body. I'm entirely for her and she's entirely for me. I would never share my lady with anyone, neither would she share me.

The truth was that he was getting aroused with those thoughts. He imagined that they locked themselves in their rooms for days to enjoy one another with no end, forgetting about the rest of the world. Oh, no. Focus, lustful dwarf. Your dick is getting very wild once more, and now you can't fuck your lady. He breathed deeply, surreptitiously, to cool himself down a bit, and he made an effort to return to the present.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
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"And after all the questions which concern us very closely, now come the news from beyond the Narrow Sea, as I haven't received new reports from Yunkai or other cities or settlements of the surroundings. The fate of the new slaves of the Yellow City is pending, though I expect that the information comes soon. And in Astapor the situation is still very unsteady. More Astapori former slaves will escape from there and will come here, and also others who weren't slaves but they are humble people who will seek refuge in Meereen as well, so we must be ready to receive them. With the measures we've adopted, we'll be able to admit them." She did another pause. "But the most urgent now is the fate of Cersei Lannister and the Tyrell siblings, who as you know were arrested by the sparrows of the Faith. This afternoon I've received an urgent crow. Lord Mace Tyrell and his mother, Lady Olenna, have mobilized a large part of their troops to demand the liberation of Queen Margaery and Ser Loras. The high sparrow, to prevent the bloodbath in the capital, has agreed to the claim and the siblings are back in the Red Keep. The queen has imposed a condition to her young husband: not to put obstacles to the punishment the sparrows have sentenced Cersei with, but she'll have Lannister guards who will protect her during the trip along the streets. And the definitive condition: Tommen will force his mother to shut herself away in Casterly Rock under penalty of death if she leaves the territorial limit of the Lannister property. It was her who brought about the imprisonment and the humiliation they've suffered, and Margaery will not forgive her. She has threatened with retiring to Highgarden, taking all the Tyrell armies and all the economic support and the supplies her family have provided King's Landing with, for its subsistence during winter, if the king doesn't agree to the conditions she has imposed. Tommen, of course, has consented. The ex-queen regent Cersei will implement her sentence and, if she survives, she'll be sent to Casterly Rock, where she'll have to live secluded for the rest of her life. At last, Margaery is determined to throw the sparrows out of the city, though that is going to be much more difficult. We'll see how the new queen manages to check that wave of fanatics."

Tyrion felt inside of him the sweet sensation of the satisfied payback. His arrogant sister was defeated, humiliated and deprived of the position for which she had fought tooth and nail. She wanted to be the queen, without any rival who overshadowed her. But then, another one so much ambitious as herself but cleverer had arrived, and had ousted her. She would be thrown into oblivion, something which appalled Cersei.

You deserve that, dear sister. And you're still fortunate. Consider yourself lucky because the Tyrell girl has decided not to send you to the scaffold. She could have done it, as her influence on your son is absolute. He's blind for her. But if she doesn't come to that extent is because you're the king's mother. Only that has saved you from her hatred. However it's possible that you die implementing the sparrows' sentence, and not even Jaime can help you with that, not even in the case that he arrived on time at the city. And if you survive, your situation won't be so bad. You'll stay comfortably in the home where you were brought up and where you mistreated me. Many would kill for less than what you have.

His sister's fate did not move him in the least.

"Well, for now we have another radical change in the government of Westeros. Queen Margaery is going to take the reins. We'll see how she manages and let's hope that she is more concerned with the folk than her predecessors have been," said Daenerys.

"Probably it was only a facade, but she visited the orphanages of the city and sent alms to the
slums. The day of her wedding to Joff, she declared that the leftovers of the banquet would be for the poor. I ignore if she does that out of kindheartedness or for winning over the folk to keep them content so they don't revolt, but the truth is that she's cleverer than my sister, who always despised the humble without the least dissimulation," added Tyrion.

"Whether she does it out of goodness or not, she has ahead of her the challenge of winter. We'll see if she achieves that the kingdoms endure it and if she does something to prevent the White Walkers from crossing the Wall, if she's intelligent enough to support the Night's Watch. And speaking about the Watch, we don't know yet the results of the voting to elect the Lord Commander, but there's another news which has come from there. Mance Rayder, the-king-beyond-the-wall apprehended by Stannis, has been sentenced to death by fire. The execution will take place tonight. The Free Folk have lost the leader who was keeping united all the tribes but, with or without a leader, all of them suffer the same threat and many of them are determined to cross to the South. Whatever that is going to happen in Castle Black will decide if Westeros will fall under another Long Night or if it's going to resist against the darkness."

Daenerys is confirming the conjectures I've raised with Sansa. About the Tyrells and Mance's execution. I hope I'm wrong about other things, because if my fears go on being corroborated, it doesn't bode well for Westeros.

"In moments like this I'd wish that my dragons were fully grown and I knew how to control them. In that case the White Walkers would have nothing to do. They can't fight against dragon fire. Though I'm not ready for that yet, I'm hopeful that I have the most powerful weapon that exists against the monsters of night. I can defeat them. But not yet."

"They grow up fast, Your Grace," encouraged Ser Barristan.

"Not fast enough. I said exactly that to Ser Jorah, when I decided to change my ship's course and head for Astapor instead of Westeros." She kept thoughtful, staring into space. "Not fast enough." She recovered from her melancholy access and looked at them all. "Well, now only remains the last issue to deal with, very important as well for the future of the kingdoms. I'm planning to vanquish and bring Lord Petyr Baelish, the current Lord Regent of the Vale, to justice."

(To be continued)
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"Lord Tyrion is going to reveal us information of great importance, which has made me decide not to allow that man to do as he pleases. My lord, I give you the floor. Start from the beginning, to put us on record, so we can analyze his deeds."

Everyone turned to look at him and he ordered his ideas before starting his speech.

"I'm convinced that this man was who triggered the War of the Five Kings in Westeros and who provoked the fall of house Stark. Either Ser Barristan and I dealt frequently with him in King's Landing and we could envisage his personality and his ways. Now I'll expound all I know about him and what I suspect he's done." He did a pause. "Lord Petyr Baelish is currently the only remaining member of house Baelish, a minor, third-rate house located by the sea in the bare and rough region of The Fingers, northeast of the Vale of Arryn, in the lands of the East of Westeros. His great grandfather was a Braavosi sellsword who was invited to the Vale by house Corbray, a vassal house of the Arryns. The sellsword had a child, who became a hedge knight, and that knight managed to obtain a tiny lordship in The Fingers. That small possession lacked even a name, unlike all the settlements of the houses of the Seven Kingdoms. Later, Petyr's father gained Lord Hoster Tully's friendship during the War of the Ninepenny Kings, which happened more than forty years ago. That war was initiated by Maelys The Monstrous, of house Blackfyre. That house, now extinct, challenged openly the Targaryen's reign. Maelys gained allies in Essos and launched a challenge to King Jaehaerys, the Mother of Dragons' grandfather. The king acted quickly and sent his forces to prevent Maelys and his allies from invading Westeros. Among those forces was my father, also of course the heir prince Aerys, Ser Barristan Selmy over here, Lord Hoster Tully and many others either from major and minor houses. One of them was Lord Petyr's father, who served under the command of Lord Hoster, head of house Tully and my wife's maternal father. Eventually Maelys Blackfyre was defeated by Ser Barristan in single combat and that earned our knight his appointment as a member of the Kingsguard of King Jaehaerys Targaryen." Tyrion addressed a nod and a smile to the old man and he returned the gesture. Everyone else stared at the legendary knight with deep respect. Tyrion smiled, amused, when he noticed that the veteran of so many fights and great deeds felt uncomfortable being the center of attention. He had never faced his own fame very well, as the modest man he was.

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Tyrion continued his story.

"Lord Hoster and Lord Petyr's father had become friends during war and Baelish's son was accepted as a ward in Riverrun, the stronghold of the Tullys' in the Riverlands. You already know the Westerosi houses' custom of accepting children of other houses as guests. Normally they do it out of friendship between the dinasties and to strengthen the bonds, and to give some members of minor houses an opportunity to be educated in major houses. In wartime, that custom has a different connotation, as you also know well and first hand here in the pyramid, with the guests from Meerenese noble families. Well, the surviving children of rebel houses are forced to live in the fortresses of the houses which have been challenged. With that, they prevent the rebels from going back to old ways, as they are bound hand and foot, unless they don't mind that their guest children and grandchildren pay for the treasons of their unruly houses. For example, Theon Greyjoy was a guest of the Starks after the Greyjoy Rebellion and my own wife was held hostage in the Red Keep since her father Eddard Stark was arrested for treason and her brother Robb Stark declared war on King Joffrey Baratheon. But let's go back to the times of little Petyr Baelish, after the War of the Ninepenny Kings. Peace had returned to the kingdoms and Lord Hoster Tully admitted the tiny and poor descendant of the Baelishes, who was eight years old. He was so small physically that Lord Hoster's first-born, Edmure, dubbed him Littlefinger, a nickname which was stuck to him for ever. Littlefinger grew up in Riverrun and became inseparable from Lord Hoster's daughters: Catelyn, my mother-in-law, and Lysa, the deceased Lady Arryn and Lady Baelish. From the beginning, Littlefinger became obsessed with Catelyn but, as far as I know, she never regarded him as more than a brother and a childhood friend. On the other hand, Lysa developed secretly romantic feelings for the boy. Catelyn was beautiful, smart and strong, whereas Lysa always was like a shadow of her sister. She lacked beauty and intelligence and tended to mental imbalance, and due to that she envied her eldest sister. She bore a grudge against her because she always knew that the one whom Petyr admired and wanted to possess was Catelyn. Most likely when the young Littlefinger couldn't seduce the object of his obsession, or neither could he aspire to marry her, which was what he really desired, he had to resign himself to his poor consolation plan, that consisted in subjecting Lysa to his will, what wasn't very difficult. They became lovers even before Lysa had to marry Lord Jon Arryn, an honourable lord of the Vale who was much older than her. Catelyn on her part was engaged to Brandon Stark, who later was killed in the Red Keep along with his father, Lord Rickard."

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
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Tyrion, out of consideration for Daenerys's feelings, avoided mentioning that it was her father, Aerys, who had ordered the deaths of Sansa's grandfather and uncle. Everyone in that hall knew the atrocities the Mad King had committed. "Littlefinger resented not being able to get the only woman who has interested him in all his life. Not out of true love, unlike what he has shouted from the rooftops. I doubt that was true love. The only great feeling that Littlefinger has harboured is his excessive ambition. He wanted more, much more. He's never had enough and never will. His fixation about Lady Catelyn was due to the fact that she had all he coveted: she came from one of the most important houses of Westeros and, in addition, she was pretty, clever and brave. He always fed the bitterness that all that was prohibited for him. He was forbidden access to the power which belonging to a major house would have allowed him; he was forbidden to be the husband of the only woman he has been crazy about. After challenging Brandon Stark and nearly dying in the attempt, he was sent back to the Vale because of his romantic and stupid outburst. Frustrated, he conceived his plans. He already had seduced Lord Hoster's youngest daughter and them both continued to be lovers in secret after her marriage to Jon Arryn and when she settled in the Eyrie. Petyr had taken advantage of the situation, ingratiating himself with the lord of the Vale and he started to strive for recognition under his service. At last, Littlefinger traveled with the Arryns to King's Landing when Lord Jon was appointed Hand of the King by Robert Baratheon and ended up being the Master of Coin. He became very rich with his business and obtained power in the shadows but, as I've said, he always wants more. Being a simple counselor in the royal court didn't satisfy him. Moreover, after many years of peace and prosperity in the kingdoms, Littlefinger must be bored and thought that it was time to provoke a change. If he wanted to go on climbing the ladder of power, he had to do something radical. And he did it." He hushed to drink a gulp of wine, because the long story had dried his throat. "I had the occasion to treat and study him enough to affirm almost certainly what I'm about to reveal. It's true that I wasn't a very responsible inhabitant of the Red Keep, nor I stayed too much time within those oppressive walls. But I was a regular client in Littlefinger's establishments and, though I did not keep an eye on his comings and goings, I suspected that the man hid many things. Among them, his relationship with Lysa behind the Hand of the King's back. I knew they were lovers. I guessed it because she wasn't too much subtle. Every time he was near her, her eyes shone in a way they never did with her husband and, some time, when they passed next to each other in the halls or corridors, I caught some quick gesture of Lysa, some caress which practically would have gone unnoticed if not because I sometimes was there, melting with the shadows of the corners, what was not very difficult for me. I used to be drunk and I didn't notice much those gestures, and I neither cared what those two did, but I kept those details in the bottom of my mind, because I sensed that all that would lead to something which probably would overturn the events. I realized that Littlefinger was very dangerous, much more than that thin man who hated his origins appeared to be. But as that couple didn't interest me too much and I was very busy being the most disappointing son of Tywin Lannister, I did not pay attention to them." He turned to Ser Barristan. "And you, what was your opinion on him? I know you didn't take part in the meetings of the Private Council because, although Robert respected you, you had fought on the Targaryen's side in Robert's Rebellion and he did not let you be a part of the Council. So you couldn't be a witness of how Baelish acted in those meetings. But you also had chances to observe him in the Keep."

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
"Indeed. And, like you, I didn't like that man at all. I sensed in him an unwholesome aura and I was convinced that Lord Jon Arryn was wrong to trust him, but I couldn't prove anything. Littlefinger was too much astute. And I detested politics and the intrigues of the Red Keep, so I felt happy to stay out. I didn't regret that Robert had kept me out of the Council," admitted the old knight.

Tyrion took the floor again.

"I have no proof for confirming what I'm going to reveal, but I'd bet that it happened more or less the way I think it did. The more I reflect on that, the more the pieces of the puzzle fit." He breathed in, as if he were about to dive into a deep pool of icy water. "After many years of stability, Jon Arryn died, supposedly because of a sudden fever which consumed him in a few hours. Robert lost his Hand of the King, what was disastrous, as it had been his loyal Hand who had really ruled with wisdom. Robert didn't know how to do other things apart from drinking, eating, bedding all the women he could, going into the woods to hunt and rubbing us in his contempt for the Lannisters, especially for my sister, whom he could never love. He never forgot Lyanna Stark, the love of his life. Well, Littlefinger thought that it was time to change the peaceful and boring situation of the kingdoms. And to perpetrate his revenge against the Starks for taking Catelyn from him. He planned Jon Arryn's poisoning with Lysa. The Hand was Robert's and Ned Stark's best friend, though the King and the Hand hadn't seen their northern friend for years. Probably Lysa dropped into her husband's cup some droplets of an undetectable poison, like the Tears of Lys or any other of that kind. It didn't cost Littlefinger any effort to persuade her to do that. She was fed up with a husband she didn't love and in her blindness for Littlefinger, she did any thing he asked her for. They murdered Arryn and Robert, lost and disoriented without his Hand, did the only thing that occurred to him and that Baelish knew perfectly he would do: to ask his other best friend Ned to replace Arryn. Ned couldn't refuse the request and would have to leave his home in Winterfell and move to King's Landing, where he would be surrounded by an environment very different from the one he was used to. Eddard detested the intrigues of the royal court and the complications of ruling the kingdoms in the corrupt capital. He was an honourable Northerner and straight to the core, and Petyr knew it very well. He calculated that his great rival, the one who had finally stolen him Catelyn after Brandon's death, wouldn't last much time once he arrived at the city. And Littlefinger would be there to help him fall."

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
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Tyrion drank another sip. "Littlefinger's calculations were fulfilled one by one. But besides, not content with removing Ned from the home he loved, he awoke old quarrels between the Starks and the Lannisters. I suspect that, by means of Lysa, Littlefinger made Catelyn believe that my family was involved in Arryn's death. With that he intended to fan the flames of resentment, because precisely the royal entourage traveled to Winterfell, as Robert insisted on visiting his friend Ned to ask him in person to be his Hand. Once in Winterfell, the old brushes between the rival houses could start again. And I'm sure that Littlefinger lent a hand for that. He surely made Lysa send a raven to Catelyn to tell her sister her fake suspicions about my family. I couldn't help observing that the lord and lady of Winterfell, when we had been there scarcely for a few days, had become very tense, though they tried to disguise it. And soon afterwards a tragedy happened to Bran, the Stark boy who so much liked climbing. He suffered an almost deadly fall that left him crippled. A coincidence? A fatal accident? I doubt it. I don't know who pushed the boy, but that opened the definitive rift, which was what Littlefinger pretended. Maybe he didn't plan Bran's fall, but he imagined that the stay of the Lannisters in Winterfell would be enough to make the old hatred arise. And so it was. Someone tried to murder the boy while he was unconscious in his bed after the fall and the sloppy attempt has made me guess who was the author of that second attempt to kill Bran. It was Joffrey. He sent a sixpenny thug who carried my Valyrian steel dagger. The hired assassin bumped into Lady Catelyn's resistance and was attacked to death by the kid's direwolf, and the mother examined the dagger, began to investigate about her son's fall and got moving to find out the truth. By then the royal retinue had gone away back to the capital and Catelyn traveled to the South too, accompanied by the master-at-arms of Winterfell. In King's Landing she told Ned everything she knew and visited her childhood friend, Littlefinger, and he confirmed that the dagger with which the hired assassin tried to kill the boy was mine, as it had been Littlefinger's formerly and I won it in a bet. Catelyn, determined to carry out her revenge, but being unable to stay far from her home and her ill boy for longer, took the way back. In an inn nearby the Kingsroad, close to the Riverlands, she met me by chance. I was returning from my trip to the Wall and she commanded all the men present in the inn who were Lord Hoster Tully's vassals to capture me. She declared publicly that I had tried to kill her son and that she would take me to Winterfell so I would be applied the northern justice. A very cunning ploy on her part. What she really did was to take me to the Eyrie, so her sister Lysa could apply to me the justice of the Vale, and she refused to listen to me when I tried to reason with her, what was very understandable. She was a mother broken with pain."

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
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Tyrion kept silent for some moments, a sign of honest respect for his mother-in-law. "Arryn's widow had taken shelter with her spoiled son in her husband's lands and the madness she already showed in King's Landing was increasingly evident. I will not describe the days I spent in a sky cell or how Lyssa insisted on making me confess crimes I had not committed." Tyrion smiled with sarcasm. "It's enough to know that I gained my freedom and went away. But by then the chain of events had hastened. My brother Jaime had challenged Ned because of me and the Hand had been seriously injured by one of the Lannister soldiers. And my father had set his armies in motion to claim Robb Stark to set me free. The Stark first-born also had taken charge of all the northern armies. Robert had died opportunistically, of course not by accident, and my sister, with Baelish's help, plotted the scheme to arrest Ned. This one had discovered that Cersei's children were bastards born of incest, and he was determined to reveal it, depose Joffrey from his title as king, send my sister and her children to exile and give the crown to Stannis. But Ned was betrayed by Littlefinger and ended up in the black cells. It was then when the war between the North and the South started. My father led the Lannister armies against the armies of the new King in the North. Meanwhile, my sister had the intention to make Ned confess himself as a traitor and send him to the Wall as a new black brother, but Joffrey disrupted things completely and destroyed every option to sign a peace treaty when he decided to execute Eddard. Littlefinger must be relishing. And he would relish even more when the Starks disappeared and fell one by one. My wife thinks that not all of them are dead, and I wish it's true, because I wouldn't like anything more than seeing her happy face if any of her siblings reappears. " He looked at everyone present and finished his story. "What I pretend with all this is that you see that Littlefinger is contemptible enough and that he doesn't care in the least about engulfing anyone or devastating an entire kingdom, something he has already done. No, he hasn't declared war or sent armed forces, but it was him who lit the fuse, it was him who collaborated to make the North collapse, and he hasn't cared at all that thousands of people have died in war. And now I'm afraid that he's not going to stay idle waiting in the Eyrie without doing anything. It wouldn't surprise me that he's planning the death of Robin Arryn, the true Lord of the Vale and Warden of the East, though for now he won't do it; it would be too much suspicious. He'll wait for the right time. On the other hand, the Boltons have taken control of the North and Littlefinger must be rejoicing in the fact that Winterfell has been destroyed and occupied by the house which helped my father to finish the Starks off. I'm sure he's made some sort of deal with them, and that deal won't bring anything good. Baelish will do what he can to ruin the proud North he hates so much and to submit it to the yoke of the cruel Boltons. Neither I believe that the news of the threat of the White Walkers has worried him very much. On the contrary, he'd love to see how the whole North falls under the monsters and, by the way, he would neither mind that the Riverlands fell, where in his youth he suffered the disappointment of seeing that Catelyn didn't love him and where Lord Hoster felt compelled to throw him out after he challenged Brandon Stark to a duel. It's clear that Littlefinger will not move a finger for the North."

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Tyrion hushed and the queen took the floor.

"Lord Tyrion has analyzed very exhaustively the character, the motivations and the deeds of that astute man eaten away by resentment. We must act quickly if we don't want him to sneak away in the shadows. Now he must be thinking that the Eyrie is the safest place in Westeros, and we have to take advantage of that circumstance. And I'm going to urge the mountain clans to harass the lords of the Vale and to lay siege on all the strategic spots. The motivation to do it will be to promise them that the mountains where they have always lived will be theirs at last, and that it's time to claim them by force. The Vale is now in a very tense situation. They don't like at all the fact that Littlefinger is the lord regent. They're not so dumb and they suspect that Lady Lysa's death has been too much convenient and hasn't been the deed of a bard enraged with jealousy. So I'll make that tension explode and Lord Baelish will be between the devil and the deep blue sea, and in the middle of the fray it will be easier to get rid of him."

Ser Barristan intervened.

"And if the Boltons decide to send him their support, Your Grace?"

"The Boltons have their sights set on Stannis, who is determined to force them out of Winterfell and is too much close to them, in the Wall, with the army of sellswords he has gathered. Right now that is the biggest concern of Lord Bolton. He's got going for him that winter is getting worse and that will complicate things for Stannis, who is not used to cope with winters in the North. Bolton can choose between two options: either send his forces to attack Stannis's ones when these get moving toward Winterfell, or get ready for a siege. If the inhabitants of the castle are well supplied, they can resist within the walls for a long time, testing hardly an army of sellswords who serve for gold and who could reconsider their loyalties if they start to die of cold and hunger to conquer a castle which doesn't matter to them in the least. Roose Bolton is intelligent; he will not act hastily or sacrifice any of his supporters uselessly. He plays against the fact that most Northerners despise him. He has forced them to swear fealty to him, but maybe they're not very willing to give their lives for him in a battle against Stannis. Men are needed in all battles and men only fight on behalf of someone if they're faithful to him or if they've been paid for that. Bolton doesn't have many supporters, neither has sellswords. I opt for siege. But I imagine that the usurper Warden of the North has another concern: What if the Northerners decide to support Stannis to defeat the Boltons?" Daenerys left the question in the air.

Tyrion followed the course of those reasonings.

"Just now the Northerners, after their defeat, are dispersed, reduced and gravely injured. Probably most of the survivors only think about going back to their houses because they have a long and hard winter ahead of them and families to maintain. I doubt they're fit enough to regroup for another war and, though they hate the Boltons, Stannis neither is very popular. Why should they take his side and fight for him? Yes, Bolton is their common enemy, but war has killed many of them and has broken the spine of the Northerners. The true cause for which they fought, the vengeance for Ned Stark, is dead along with his son Robb, the King in the North. I think that Stannis will not have their support. Nor Bolton. All is going to be between them both, with the walls of Winterfell between them. In any case, Bolton can't look out for Littlefinger, so this one has to manage alone."
Meereen: Day 29

Daenerys set out another question.

"And Lord Walder Frey? He's now the lord of Riverrun. He rules the whole Neck and the Riverlands."

Tyrion did not have any doubts in that regard.

"Walder is a coward who only snuggles up to anyone who suits him. Now he's allied with Bolton. His arse is very well settled and he will not move a finger for Baelish, whom he doesn't consider valuable enough to take his side. House Arryn has neither appreciated much the Freys, and neither has the whole Vale by extension. The old dude is not interested in those bare mountains. He has taken the Tullys' lands, of whom he was a vassal and whom he hated because, oh surprise, they also despised him, like everyone I suppose. So he already has what he wanted. He'll dedicate to continue begetting children like rabbits, if he is still capable of that in his later years, and little else. Nowadays there isn't a power figure in Westeros for whom the old scrounger is willing to move his ass."

Daenerys nodded.

"Well, then that leaves Littlefinger practically alone. The mountain clans are who best know their own territory and besides this territory has the advantage that, being so much steep and rough, is very difficult to be attacked from outside, and it's also very difficult to escape from it if the clans station in the right places. I'm going to carry out actions as soon as possible and I hope to have news soon about the development of the events. If someone has any input to add, take it up now. We must leave this plot without loose ends, because it's essential to eliminate one of the greatest threats in Westeros. I'm neither happy that Bolton and Frey have taken possession of nearly all the northern half of Westeros. They're bloodthirsty and opportunistic scoundrels who will only contribute to the destruction of the kingdoms and to sow the ground for the White Walkers. I will not forget them or their mean ploys to seize what doesn't belong to them." She sighed, tired, as she did not sleep very well, Tyrion knew it.

"Vermins are not loyal to anyone, Your Grace," pointed out Ser Barristan. "And they even devour at each other. That's an advantage. I doubt that when the cries of war resound in the Vale, there is someone outside those territories who cares a single bit. The lords of the Vale haven't moved a finger for anyone during war. Why should the others help them? Moreover, in other places they already have enough trouble. As it has been expounded here, Bolton now is thoroughly keeping an eye on Stannis's advance and Frey is very comfortable heating up the seat of Riverrun along with The Twins. King Tommen and Queen Margaery are by now very busy with the sparrows and winter, which makes its presence felt even in the southern regions. Littlefinger is alone. That's his great weak point."

"Then let's make the most of that weak point," said the queen.

Nobody else intervened. They had been gathered for a long time and it must be midnight. "Well, that's all for now. Remember that tomorrow there will be a public audience. Lord Tyrion, you'll be present together with Ser Barristan. If there is no much news or cases very complicated to solve among the petitioners, you could leave earlier to do what you have to do in the vaults of the royal coffers. Later, an hour after noon, the fighting arenas will be opened and there will be much
activity in the city, but also a extreme surveillance. Anyway be always alert in case you detect any suspicious thing. If the Sons of the Harpy attempt something, we will not serve it on a platter for them. Be very careful." Daenerys looked at Daario, and he addressed her his carefree wink. "Rest well and have a good day."

The others bowed as a farewell and stepped out to the corridors.
Chapter 293

Meereen: Day 30

Tyrion went to the children's room, where Sansa was sitting on the chair beside Menelan. Them both were sleeping, though she was dozing in a very uncomfortable posture. The boy was not writhing restlessly like a few hours earlier, but he seemed to have got better and was resting peacefully.

Ray was laying down next to the bed, curled, and he too was sleeping placidly. Tyrion felt moved with that sight.

"What a good guard you are," reproached him mockingly to Ray, whispering with a smile. The little dog awoke when he felt Tyrion's presence and stood, stretching and wagging his tail as a welcome. Sansa, whose sleep must be light in that bad position, jerked up and opened her sleepy eyes. She blinked several times to clear her head and addressed Tyrion a tired grin, rubbing her sore neck.

"Hello, my love. How was everything?," asked her, standing up and brushing Menelan's forehead to check that the fever had not raised.

"We've spoken about many things, and there's more news. How is he?"

"The maester came to give him his medicine and told me to put a cold cloth on his forehead. After a while he stopped burning and woke up more cheerful, and he even has succeeded in taking a little soup. We were chatting for a short while and he stroked Ray, that hasn't unstuck from his side. Later he has fallen asleep without nightmares," explained Sansa.

"I'm very glad to hear it, honey. It seems that your company has done him good. Now we'll let him sleep peacefully and you also must rest, as a chair is not the best place to spend the night. Don't worry, the other children will take care of him and will send word if something happens," said Tyrion softly, offering her a hand. She took it and they got out of the room, with Ray ahead of them.

He put her on record while they were walking along the quiet corridors. He summarized all the topics they had discussed in the Council and she listened in silence until he finished.

"To push your sister aside from government and power is one of the best measures Margaery could adopt. For Cersei it will be like a sentence of banishment and imprisonment. She won't be allowed to move away from Casterly Rock and she won't exercise her bad influence any more on Tommen. We still ignore what kind of queen Margaery will be, but she can't be worse than her mother-in-law. For the moment, by throwing Cersei out of the capital she shows that she's intelligent. She has got rid of her greatest rival," reflected Sansa.

"Indeed. Cersei must be like a pain in the ass and she besides tried to get the young Tyrell removed, because she detests her. But she didn't work out that Margaery still belongs to the most powerful family in Westeros along with the Martells in the present times, after the fall of the Lannisters. Grandmother Olenna wasn't going to stay waiting for her grandchildren to be crushed by the crowd. Cersei undervalued the abilities and the love of that great old woman, who has the merit of being very tenacious and of having a tongue so sharp as mine, or even more." Tyrion smiled mockingly. "Well, I'm glad that my sister has what she deserves. And she's still lucky. She continues to keep her head on her shoulders and she hasn't been thrown to beg in the streets,
something she was worthy of. But surely her exile to Casterly Rock, far from her son and from the power she covets so much, will be for her almost like life imprisonment in the black cells. Margaery has hit her where it hurts most with no need for killing her or ordering her physically tortured."

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"It's true. It's going to be a psychological torture for the rest of her life. I can't think of a worse torture for her," affirmed Sansa.

"I hope that, with my sister offstage, the situation will improve. I trust that Margaery, with her grandmother's help, will manage to sort things out a little. We'll see how they cope now with the sparrows, who are challenging the very power of the Crown," brought up Tyrion.

"And we'll see how they face winter. The worst is yet to come," said her.

"Yes, they have ahead of them the most difficult of challenges. We'll find out if the Tyrell women are flowers that last only one day or if they will succeed in enduring frosts." He felt Sansa shivering with cold. The night temperature in the corridors was plummeting. "Let's make haste to arrive. I don't want you to catch cold." They quickened their pace.

"You can heat me up," suggested her, sensual. Tyrion got painfully hard in an instant.

"You must be very tired, honey. Remember that you don't have to make it if you really don't fancy it, only because you think I desire it." He knew it was useless to try to restrain before her the reaction of his disobedient body, which his young and ardent wife knew so well, but even so he would always make it perfectly clear to her that he respected her above all and that he was willing to abstain from sex when necessary.

"I know, my love. But I never make it simply because I think you desire it. I make it because I want to make it. And the fact that you always care about everything I want makes me desire you even more, my gallant husband. Being certain that for me you'd give up making it turns me very hot." Sansa took his hand firmly and placed it directly onto her breast, rubbing it over the soft roundness.

He began to breathe faster.

"Oh, Sansa. If not for the cold of these corridors, right now I'd push you against a corner and I'd perform to you the best handjob of your life. Even with the risk that a soldier appears, though Ray would let us know," said Tyrion, with his naughty smile.

"I'm not cold anymore. And you can perform it beneath my skirt, without removing any piece of garment," proposed her, also very aroused.

He took her by the hand to a gap in half-darkness, behind a pillar. "It's all right, incorrigible girl. Here you have what you deserve." Tyrion introduced his hand under the skirt and lowered her underwear a little. With no preamble he caressed her wet sex with his fingers and she moaned slightly, resting against the stone wall.

"You're always drenched for me. You know how much I like that? It turns me crazy." He groped for her entrance and introduced two fingers. She parted her legs a bit more. "Your insides are so sweet. They're my true home. Will you let me live in them for all my life, gorgeous?" He moved his fingers in and out, careful not to touch the clitoris yet. With the other hand he fondled her breasts over the dress and felt the nubs of her erect nipples.

"Yes, Tyrion. I want you to live inside of me." She closed her eyes, focusing on the sensations.
He added another finger to fill her even more.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 295

Meereen: Day 30

"Your slit is magical. And very soon I intend to make a child in that magical womb of yours, if I haven't yet. Do you want me to?" The fingers were accelerating. He grazed the clit with his thumb and she shivered.

"Of course I want to carry your baby in my belly," said her sighing, resting upon his shoulders because her knees were shaking.

"Imagine my seed in your insides, impregnating you. Do you want me to give you my seed later, Sansa?" The hand was sliding at a vertiginous pace, taking her to the edge. Tyrion made his thumb turn around the clit and she was about to cry out, shuddering violently and crushing his fingers with her inner walls.

"Yes, Tyrion! I want it. I adore your seed." She was gripping his shoulders and was convulsing against his fingers, making an effort not to moan too loudly, so nobody would hear her. But Tyrion, smiling, was sure that at least a pair of guards must have heard their furtive activities.

He pulled out his fingers and sucked them to taste her, staring at her eyes. She was still panting, trying to recover, and contemplated him flushed and grinning.

"You're delicious. I've never tasted anything so delicious as you," murmured him, with a wicked air, tidying up her messy clothes.

"Oh, my hungry man. That has only been the first course of this banquet."

"Of course. There are still some courses left, so make room for them, because this early morning we're going to satiate." Tyrion took her hand again and they rushed to reach their rooms.

Sansa knelt on the carpet and they undressed one another, kissing. Afterwards she lied down on the bed, rested her legs on his shoulders and she received him eagerly. He rammed her with all his accumulated desire, which had raised toward unbearable levels after the long Council meeting and, especially, after the session of manual sex in the corridors, with which he had not relieved. As always, his fingers found the prodigious small button hidden in the copper-coloured hair. He knew it so well that he might draw it even without looking at it, only by feeling it on his fingers. Many times he had wondered if men's cocks were bigger versions of women's clitoris. Their shapes were vey alike. They had a lengthened part and ended in a rounded and fleshy tip, where the feeling of pleasure was focused. But whereas in men that organ was the direct responsible for impregnating women, however in these ones its reduced version did not seem to have a function different from causing pleasure, as babies developed in their bellies, and the clit was outside, so in principle it had not a direct connection with conception, which happened though women did not feel the explosion, it was not even necessary that they felt any physical delight, what was not possible in the case of men. They had to culminate inside of women to get them pregnant. The truth was that the female sex was as complex as fascinating, and he never got tired of exploring its possibilities. Women could fake and use the weapon they had between their legs to make men fall at their feet, whether they enjoyed it or not. Men hardly could fake sexual pleasure because, without the feeling of physical delight, however little, the cock did not cooperate.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Tyrion was still surprised to admit that, in spite of being so perceptive, even after so many years bedding prostitutes, he had not always been entirely sure when they faked and when they did not. He had learnt to recognize falsehood and insincerity on their faces, in their voices, in their gestures, even in their blinks, but he ignored if they really liked what he did to please them, or if they let him do it as if it were one of the many eccentricities they had to endure from their clients, so he finally left them alone and got off. What he was sure was that normally the prostitutes who were inexperienced, unskillful, shy or that loathed their job generally did not fake the muscular contractions of the female climax, so he rarely had any doubts with them. Those poor girls who had a lost air in their demeanour moved him and he always was tender with them, and he made an effort to give them pleasure, and sometimes he succeeded, when some of them got swept away and they surrendered to his caresses, what surprised them, because weeks and months could pass without them being with a single client who regarded them as human beings.

But whores could learn even to control their contractions, like any other sexual skill. There were pleasure houses specialized in training the girls to control their inner muscles until reaching such a degree of virtuosity that they could perform truly wonderful techniques, increasing greatly the clients' pleasure. He had heard that some women in the Lysene pleasure houses were able to prolong men's ejaculation twice or thrice its normal duration simply with the movements of their insides. Some of them had become so famous with that skill that their names remained throughout the centuries. For example, it was said that a woman called Lucella, two hundred years ago, was capable of achieving that men had orgasms at least five minutes long, though Tyrion was sure that the legend quite exaggerated it. What seemed certain was that she made them have such a good time that rich men from all over the world waited in line to enjoy her sophisticated skills. Tyrion had never met anyone like Lucella, but there were veteran girls, or vicious sex addict ones, or girls who got so much into their roles that they could deceive even old hands in those affairs. They were so professional that everything seemed genuine. There were not much women who reached such degree of ability as to confound an experienced client.

Moreover, Tyrion's self-esteem was never sky high and, even in the case that some girl had truly enjoyed it and he was certain of that, he was sure that none of them would have allowed him to touch her if he had not paid for that. He was skeptical even with the ones who had bedded him without being paid. He told himself that they had faked out of pity or to make fun of him.

Even with Shae he had not been totally sure, although in the last months of their relationship he almost convinced himself that she was sincere.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 297

Meereen: Day 30

With whom he did not have a single doubt from the beginning was Sansa. She was very bad at lying and, though in King's Landing she had to develop the habit of feigning and hiding her feelings, she had realized soon after marrying Tyrion that before him she did not have to behave as a parrot which repeats the sentences that others want to hear and, although she did not open her heart to him, she at least did not lie to him or recited empty words to flatter him. When they fled, the prison which the Red Keep had been disappeared and Sansa began to feel free to conduct herself more spontaneously. And she did not need to feign that she felt love for him, nor she needed to feign desire for him, because she knew that Tyrion did not want her to lie to him, and she knew that he respected what she felt, whatever it was. Even if she never came to love him. Moreover, she was an innocent girl who ignored almost all about love and sex. Because of that he knew instantly that Sansa loved him, when she gave him the sweet gift of her virginity. Tyrion had not been with a virgin woman before, so for him it was like a first time too. His first time with an innocent girl who gave herself to him out of love.

She never had at her disposal the time or the circumstances to get the art of seduction before marrying him, neither had she become masterful regarding the vaginal movements like some women of the Lysene pleasure houses. But she was the best lover he had met, because she loved him and she opened herself for him like no other woman ever did. Not even the best trained prostitute could get close to the sensation he felt when he was inside of Sansa, because he did not only enter her body, he also entered her soul and her heart and that was what he dreamed since he was barely a child.

He knew perfectly the tiny button between those heart-stopping legs which pressed him against her, and he toyed with it applying the exact pressure, moving his finger with the right pace that turned her crazy, and he kept the rhythm while he penetrated her to the bottom, provoking a constant bump between their bodies. One of the most erotic things he could imagine was to see his cock disappearing completely into those burning walls which nobody had taught that amazing girl to use, and who some months earlier barely knew about their existence. His dick sank and reemerged, wet and slippery, and he lost himself more and more in that indescribable sensation, in that climb to the greatest delight he could experience, which he felt time after time whenever he possessed her, plunging into that miraculous cavity. How could he ever get tired of fucking Sansa, if he desired her more with each passing day? Every time they culminated, it was different. There was not an orgasm equal to another, no matter how many times they reached them. Each one had different nuances, different intensities, new joys to discover. And he always pursued to be merged with her, to get stuck in her whole being, not only in her flesh. There resided the great mystery and the great magic of sex with the loved person. With her. With Sansa.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 298

Meereen: Day 30

She cried his name desperately, with her body arched, with her legs encircling him possessively, her inner walls convulsed and transformed into a bottomless well of pleasure which not even Lucella herself, from the stories of Lys, might have outshone for him, no matter how many muscular movements she had learnt.

Tyrion ascended to a wild climax, cataclysmic, and time stopped while he flew as if he were riding on a dragon and he expanded out of his own boundaries, releasing his whole being, moaning at the top of his lungs the name of the girl he adored, sluicing down her insides with the seed of life, he felt it flow and the plenitude of such an intimate and unfathomable union enveloped him, filling him with peace.

He hardly had time to lie beside her, cover them and whisper *I love you* by her ear before them both sank into a blessed sleep.

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Tyrion almost always sensed when dawn was about to break, unless he had a very heavy sleep, which did not use to be his case. He opened his eyes in the half-light and once more he was flooded with peace when he felt Sansa by his side. All he wanted to do in that moment was to go back to sleep beside her until them both woke up later and then they could make love without worrying about the time. But that morning it could not be because he had to attend the public audience, so he resigned himself to a morning of sexual abstinence, or, with any luck, of brief and quick sex before going out for his morning duties.

*It can't be said that you've been many hours without sex precisely. Don't complain, horny dwarf. You've fucked her with no stop for at least two and a half months, since the ship heading for Myr. Two and a half months, it's unbelievable... It's a very short time, and nevertheless it seems that an entire life has passed, because many things have happened in such a short period of time, more things than I've lived in whole years, and much more intense. Sometimes I wonder how I regarded myself as alive before, when she hadn't entered my life yet... When my life had no purpose, because I was Tywin's despicable son who wasn't useful for providing the family with honour, whom his own father wanted to see dead, though not by his own hand, of course, because a Lannister doesn't kill the blood of his blood.*

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

Many days remained blurred in his memory, the days when he had got drunk until losing consciousness and he had awakened in a smelly hovel or in an unknown bed, upon his own vomit, with an unholy hangover. He did not even know what time it was, or what day it was. The notion of time became blurred for him and most days mixed up with one another, in a string of dead hours which he did everything possible to drown in alcohol and sex. A Lannister always paid his debts, and he paid a lot of money to the brothels to drink jug after jug and fuck as many girls as he could, no matter how they were. Fat, skinny, slim, tall, short, medium-height, ugly, ordinary, pretty, with big tits, medium-sized tits or flat-chested, the ass like the stern of a boat or scrawny, legs like an elephant's, like broomsticks or shapely legs, dark-haired girls, blondes or redheads, or with dyed hair. Even those who were over forty and fifty years old, though middle-aged prostitutes were not plentiful in brothels of some standing, and only were admitted the ones who kept a good appearance. Tyrion did not mind how they were, because what he was really interested in was the slit between their legs and that they knew how to perform good handjobs and fellatios. With the ones he liked, he struck up a certain degree of friendship and even of affection when he visited them often and the relations between them extended over time, but whatever way they were, he almost always had tried to treat them with respect. Though also there were some times in which he did things he was ashamed of.

For example, just after Tysha had gone away forever and he, with his heart broken, started to frequent the brothels of Lannisport and to get completely hammered drunk. There were a pair of girls who showed an evident rejection toward him for being a dwarf. Embittered and full of resentment, one night he demanded that it was them who tended to him, even knowing that they would prefer to be with anyone else. Or perhaps was that what broke the camel's back regarding his rancour; to watch contempt in their eyes. He used them both at the same time and they had to do to him all he fancied until, disgusted with himself and regretting all that, he burst into tears, asked for their forgiveness and let them go, paying them much more than their share. He never did something like that again. He did not force any girl ever more, or asked to be assisted by anyone in whose eyes he read open disdain, rejection or fear. It was not that he thought that the other girls were delighted to attend to him, but since that incident he only bedded those who went with him willingly. When he showed up in the establishment and the procurer called the girls who were available, Tyrion allowed any of them to take the initiative and offer their services to him, and he accepted whoever offered herself, no matter who she were. Sometimes two or three of them stepped forward and he nodded and let them take him to one of the rooms prepared for orgies or group sex, with the rare opportunity to have ahead of him the great deed of being pleasured and of pleasing several women at the same time. He was not a fool, at bottom that was also a lie, of course, and the generosity of his purse was well-known, so much that he never lacked volunteers and he did not have to choose. That eccentricity of going with any woman who offered herself to him in brothels was well-known too, as well as his habit of pleasing women although that was not included in the rate.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

Definitely, so was the work that those women practiced, they had to assist any clients without a word of complaint, and the clients preferred the girls who pretended to be willing. However there always were exceptions, of course. There were clients with sadistic instincts who chose deliberately those who shied away from them, because those girls' rejection caused a morbid fascination to them and they enjoyed their revulsion. Though the procurer forced all the women to be obliging, it was always easy to distinguish which of them were the least disposed, either with all men in general or with certain clients. But at least Tyrion went with the ones who did not look at him with hatred, or with pity, or with contempt, or with fear, or who knew how to conceal all that very well.

And when a girl or woman who was not a prostitute or that was not it usually offered to have sex with him, he accepted the offer without thinking twice. What for would he refuse the fruit that fell at his feet so few times?

And that was what he did, deceive himself in more and more blurred nights which left a bilious aftertaste in his throat and a daze that was nearly a blessing, because in those times he preferred to sink in oblivion.

By then he was too old to be spanked by his father or to be locked up in one of the storehouses behind the kitchens, a poky room with no light and with rats to keep him company, where he had spent more than a few hours of his childhood. But Tywin found the perfect punishment for shaming the Lannister surname day after day. He forbade him the travel he dreamed of and appointed him Master of Drains and Sewers of Casterly Rock. If with that he thought that his youngest son was going to straighten out his behaviour, he was wrong. And Tyrion took delight in the unwholesome pleasure of displeasing and pissing off the stony and honourable patriarch. The coldness between father and son was a block of ice so thick and tall as the Wall.

Some time later, Tyrion moved to King's Landing, where his siblings had lived for several years, to put as much distance he could between him and his father, and this one did not forbid him to do it, because undoubtedly he felt relieved to be rid of his presence in Casterly Rock. There he continued with his routine of books, brothels and wine, with the difference that Tywin was not there to pierce him with his icy glare, and no one cared a rat's ass what he did. Frequently he spent whole days or even weeks without appearing at the Reed Keep, and he only returned when he missed Jaime, Myrcella, Tommen and the library. Sometimes he took some books with him and, when he was not too much drunk, he read in the bed where he had just fucked the whore or whores of the moment, and he escaped from reality reading until he fell asleep and woke up at any hour of day or night. He had no schedule to keep, nor any duties to carry out, so he did not care. He could be away for weeks or months and the only ones who would notice his absence would be the three people he loved in all the Red Keep and in all the world, by the way. There was nobody else who mattered to him. Some time later, Pod joined his service and Tyrion had another person to love.

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 301

Meereen: Day 30

And so he spent his entire adulthood, in a complete apathy, until he met Shae and left behind that wild promiscuity, though he went on drinking, but less than before. Things got better for him. His father appointed him Hand of the King and at last he could perform a task he really liked, with which he felt useful. And every night a pretty woman he loved warmed his bed and kept him company. That was his best time since his two weeks of marriage with Tysha. And although those good times neither lasted too much, until Tywin returned to the capital, for Tyrion his past days of chaos and indolence had ended.

He understood that he had spent years stagnating in a wasted youth, drinking and fucking to the limit to see if he succeeded in rendering insensitive in his interior completely and in stopping the pain caused by his father's hatred, by the cruel taunts of those who laughed at him for being a dwarf, for the scant loved people he had lost and for all the good moments he had been sabotaged.

While he sensed in the half-light Sansa's face beside him, he wondered how he had been able to believe that nearly all he had left behind could be regarded as life. But he thought of the millions of people who clung to a miserable existence and whose highest aspiration was to reach the end of the day. He had not been very different from them all.

Because of that, when he woke up, he always looked at Sansa as if she were a miracle. He wanted to make the most of each minute with her. To enjoy with her as much as he could. To give her all she deserved. Because she had gifted him a true life.

His mother, Joanna, had given him the gift of life. And his young wife had given it back to him.

She awakened and smiled at him lazily.

"Good morning, my love," greeted her.

"Good morning, gorgeous," said him, giving her a kiss. "Last night your considerable charms made me forget to mention to you that today I have to attend the public audience." He made a face like a boy's, as if he had just been snatched his favourite candy from his mouth.

"Oh, poor thing. Such evil dudes, taking you out of the bed like this," joked her.

"Eh! So taking me out? Then you're thinking of staying here slacking beneath the sheets whereas your poor husband spends the entire morning with his ass stuck to the audience bench?," asked him, with his tone of fake reproach.

"Of course. Someone commented me that these days the school won't be opened. Do you have any objection? I think I guess you're feeling a little envious." Her mocking and provocative expression aroused his lust. Tyrion knelt quickly by her both sides, without letting his weight drop onto her waist, and he gripped her arms against the pillow. That gesture always excited her.

"It's not fair. I think I won't let you stay here so peacefully, at least not while I'm still here," murmured him, brushing her lips.

"I knew it. You envious man. So you won't let me take another nap?" She also was speaking with her lips brushing his half-open ones. Their breathing became agitated.
"No way. I'm not going to waste a single second of the time I have left before I have to go. And that involves you." He caressed her lips with his tongue.

"And... How will you use the time you have left?," asked her, with her fake innocent air, as he descended to her neck.

"Imagine," murmured Tyrion, opening the front of Sansa's nightgown and licking a nipple, while he pinched the other. She moaned, threw her head back, grasped his hair and encircled him with her legs. She was not wearing her undergarment and he felt the hot wetness pushing against his cock. He penetrated her immediately with a hoarse moan and they made it wildly until they got sated. Afterwards they washed themselves in the basin, got dressed, played with Ray a little and Mhyraz arrived with breakfast for everybody. Sansa wanted to visit Menelan again, who had slept placidly for the rest of the night, but Tyrion could not stay awaiting for Dara to come to style Sansa's hair, so he sent Mhyraz to ask any of his usual bodyguards if he might accompany Lady Sansa to the children's rooms when she were ready to go out. Tyrion waited for the boy to come back with the Unsullied and then he kissed Sansa goodbye.

"I'll pick you up when the audience is over but, if while you're there you have to go away from Menelan's room for any reason, don't do it without being escorted by one of our bodyguards, all right? Anyway, don't go out if it's not necessary. If something happens, send one of the kids to inform or whatever."

"All right, my love. I'll take my needlework labour with me, to go on working while I remain by the boy's side. I think I'll ask Leena if she wants to come with me," suggested her.

"Excellent idea. Well, honey, I'm leaving. Have a pleasant morning." He kissed her again.

"The same for you."

Tyrion walked out and greeted White Fly, who was standing guard by the door, awaiting for the lady to be ready.
Meereen: Day 30

Tyrion greeted those present in the audience hall and took his seat, waiting along with the others for Daenerys' arrival. He addressed Missandei a smile and she returned it.

"How are you this morning, my lady?," asked him courteously.

"Very well, my lord. A while ago I went to see Menelan and he told me that Lady Sansa was with him last night and that he felt more recovered. In effect, he looks better. The queen is starting to hope that perhaps the boy will heal."

Tyrion reflected on the power of affection and how that feeling influenced the will to live. He himself, at four years old, had decided to go on fighting for his life only because he believed that his dead mother had paid him a visit in his bedroom when he was gravely ill. And that display of affection, though it only existed in his imagination, had been enough for him. Perhaps the same might happen to Menelan, and with more reason because he was being cared for by people of flesh and blood and not by a ghost. Although the poor creature was not simply affected by measles, like Tyrion at four. The boy suffered that disease which destroyed the lungs slowly. His symptoms pointed at it. The almost constant cough and the blood he sometimes spat when he coughed left no doubt about the sickness he was enduring. Tyrion was no medical expert, but even him distinguished the symptoms of tuberculosis. It was an incurable disease that in most cases consumed the sick people to death.

Though Menelan had periods of apparent improvement, and probably the presence of a mother figure like Daenerys, Missandei or Sansa helped him to fight for survival the same way the shadow of Tyrion's mother had helped him, the kid had very few chances. But one could never give up on hope completely. The world was sufficiently strange to let amazing things happen. Like for example, that the most beautiful and wonderful girl in Westeros and Essos loves me. If that has been possible, then I expect anything. Tyrion smiled for himself.

"It might be," conceded him. "Maybe a mother's hand is really magical, as some legends tell. My own mother saved my life even after her death, don't you know? I thought I saw her in my sick boy's hallucinations and that made me want to live," confessed Tyrion.

Missandei looked directly at him with her round brown eyes, making an effort to overcome her shyness.

"I'm going to adopt Menelan," revealed her, to Tyrion's surprise. He immediately thought that it was the ideal solution for the boy, whether he survived or not. At least he would be happy knowing that he had a family. Moreover, Missandei had paired up Grey Worm and they could not have children because he was an eunuch, so adopting kids would be a good option. "I've proposed it to him this morning, and he has said yes." The young woman was very touched. Tyrion noticed in her expression that she had made that decision accepting consciously all the consequences.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"You'll be a great mother, and Grey Worm will be a great father. The boy is very lucky," praised him. "I'm sure that the happiness you've provided him with will be more effective than all the maester's remedies."

"I want him to live, Lord Tyrion. I want him to stay with me and with Grey Worm. I'd like that he one day calls us father and mother," said her, with tears in her eyes. "I know it's nearly an impossible dream, but he at least will know that we're here with him."

Tyrion addressed her an encouraging smile.

"All of us want that for him, my lady. Sansa and I will help you in whatever we can." He wished with all his heart that the impossible could happen and that Menelan grew up happily beside his new family. He was more than willing to cast aside his obstinate realistic streak, though if only to imagine that those people would be happy together for a short while.

"Thanks a lot, my lord. Lady Sansa and your dog are being of great help." Missandei smiled widely.

"Oh, yes, I think that this little scamp is becoming the pet of the pyramid," joked Tyrion.

"The children love him. Every time Mhyraz takes him to go for a walk and to do some exercise, everyone wants to play with him."

"Oh, no. Surely they're going to spoil him." But he said that with an amused grin.

Ray not only will accompany and protect Sansa and our children, but he too will bring happiness to other people. It's been a wise choice to add him to the family.

Daenerys entered the hall, escorted by Daario. The soldiers, as usual, welcomed her with a tap on the floor with the base of their spears, and Ser Barristan, Missandei and Tyrion bowed. She greeted everybody with a nod and stepped up to her bench. Tyrion stared at her carefully to detect signs of tiredness or insomnia on her face, but that morning she barely had rings round her eyes and she showed a discreet smile.

Or she has slept much better or Daario has gifted her the kind of sex session that leaves the body just like new. Or both things. And Missandei must have announced her about her intention to adopt Menelan. Moreover, today there haven't been new cases of measles in the pyramid. Maybe the epidemic is starting to diminish.

She sat down and made the sign so the soldiers allowed entry to the petitioner.

Several shepherds were present, complaining about sheep and goats burnt by the dragons and they opened their bundles of blackened bones. The queen repeated the usual formula which by then all the shepherds must know, and she pointed to the bag placed at her feet, that was present in all the audiences. The bag contained the money for the economic compensations, which Daenerys always paid immediately and that Tyrion noted down on his papers to keep track of the money spent in those expenses. One of the Unsullied distributed the coins among the claimers and the queen reminded them their duty to pay a visit to the Temple of Graces before going away from the city, to donate the three quartes of the money claim. Some soldiers would guide them to make sure that
they fulfilled their duty. The shepherds bowed and got out, escorted by the soldiers.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

After the matter of the burnt animals, were solved the usual disputes between neighbours who did not come to an agreement, complaints of unsatisfied merchants and issues of inheritances. A red priestess from Yi Ti, with strong oriental features and jet black and shiny hair which fell straight upon her shoulders, asked for the Mother's permission to preach in the streets of Meereen, at whose request Daenerys gave her consent, as long as her sermons did not encourage violence or the burning of people at the stake. After her, an emissary from Astapor asked for the Silver Queen's hand for his master, the new king of the Red City, Imarion the Clement, who according to his messenger was managing to restore order after the chaos and the bloodbaths of the last months. His wife had died recently of a fever and he wished that Meereen and Astapor joined their fates and their forces. That way he and the Dragon Queen would be the king and queen of both cities and with that they would form the most powerful alliance in Essos. Daenerys glanced quickly at Ser Barristan, Missandei and Tyrion, trying to hide her expression between irritated and sarcastic. Tyrion returned her ironic grimace and she was about to smile, but restrained herself and addressed the emissary one of her polite evasive speeches, without rejecting openly the proposal, but either accepting it, and conceding, in attention to the generous marriage offer, that she would reflect on such a vital matter. She accepted Imarion's present, an ostentatious gold necklace encrusted with jades, and she invited the emissary to rest after the journey. Tyrion knew how Daenerys would use the jewel as soon as she had worn it a couple of times to please the messenger of the umpteenth Astapori king. She would order the gold to be cast and the gems to be sold to obtain funds for the Crown coffers, of course. She scarcely had jewelry, only the ones she wore in solemn occasions and even those were plain.

After the marriage proposal, a group of five fugitive slaves newcomers to the city introduced themselves and requested asylum. The queen followed her usual protocol of commending them to the soldiers to be guided to the camps. When she finished assisting the new refugees, in the queue only remained a group of about fifty dothraki who had left their khalasar due to dissensions with the khal and who wished to live in the camps of Meereen together with the members of their people who had followed Khal Drogo's widow, whose fame was being sung by bards and whose stories were told around the campfires. After that, Daenerys gave Tyrion permission to go to the chambers of the royal coffers and organize the payments of the next day. He bowed, went out of the audience hall and walked to Menelan's room to see how the boy was doing and to inform Sansa that he was going to the treasury chambers to get the allowances ready.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

When he got into the room, the boy was awake and Sansa was speaking to him, and Leena was there too. Menelan was smiling and nodding. His breath was still laboured and he looked so fragile that he gave the impression that a gust of wind might take him. His calm resignation to his fate was reflected in his dark eyes, and Tyrion's heart sank thinking that sooner or later that would be a lost battle. Perhaps he could manage to go on living for several weeks or months, but not much more. Missandei knew it, and she had decided to gift that little boy the dream of all the helpless children in the world, so he could pass away happy.

Tyrion swallowed with difficulty the knot in his throat.

Sansa turned when she heard him entering and their eyes met. They understood one another without words. He got close and took her hand.

"Hello, Menelan. How has your new little friend behaved?" Tyrion stroked Ray's head, and this one was resting on his master's belly with his front legs to greet him effusively.

"Very well, my lord. He hasn't unstuck from my bedside." The kid spoke in a very low voice and smiled with his tired grin.

"He's a good dog." Tyrion patted the animal's back and addressed Sansa. "I'm going to the chambers of the royal coffers to get ready tomorrow's payments and I'll fetch Pod to accompany me. What do you prefer to do, to stay, to go back to our rooms or to go to Pod and Leena's ones? Whatever you want, darling."

"Leena and I will go to her rooms, now that Menelan is better. We have to speak carefully about the guild of seamstresses, and she will help me with the project, as I have to organize it, and by the way we'll take the opportunity to sew together. Ray can stay here and Mhyraz can take charge of his care. Our little friend will be much more useful keeping Menelan company than doing so with two women who will be devoted to gossiping," she said, with a mocking tone, and addressed a smile to Leena.

"A very good idea," approved Tyrion. He turned to the boy. "Now Lady Sansa, Leena and I will go, but Ray will stay with you if you want," offered him. Sansa looked at her husband with tenderness.

"Oh, I'd be delighted, master. If it's not inconvenient for you," said the little boy politely, with a flash of joy in his sparkling eyes.

"No problem. And I'm sure that this scamp will be glad to stay here with you. Take care of him for us, all right? Mhyraz will help you."

"All right, master. We'll take care of him."

Sansa arranged his bedcovers so he did not get cold, said goodbye to Menelan until she came back to visit him again and, before going out of the room with Tyrion and Leena, she addressed Ray a sign and said *stay* to him, because the little dog was hesitating about what he must do, whether following them or staying. He seemed to understand the sign, as he sat on his haunches beside Menelan and observed his masters while they were getting out of the chamber.
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The three of them headed for Pod and Leena's rooms. The girls bade farewell to their men until later and these two went first to pick one of Tyrion's account books from his adjacent hall and afterwards they went down to the treasury chambers, which were on the first underground level. Pod carried the heavy book and Tyrion took the writing utensils.

The chambers had low vaulted ceilings and they smelled strongly of damp and mold. The only illumination came from the torches they lit when they entered, and Tyrion realized quickly that he was going to have a hard work until lunchtime, because the first thing he discovered was that the piles of money were not ordered as he liked. If he organized them in his own way, the task would be faster and besides, with quick glances it would be enough to work out the exact amount of money that there was. So Pod and he got down to work and distributed all the coins on the floor in small piles of ten, separating gold from silver and copper. That took them a long while, but when they finished it, everything was perfectly ordered and Tyrion could start to put the payments into the leather bags he had ordered Sarik and which Daenerys had commanded to be placed in the chambers. Tyrion wrote onto each one the name of the brotherhood and the number of the group to which the bag was addressed. Once used, the freedfolk must give them back to be reused, as leather was not an abundant material and they had to make the most of all the available materials. Sarik would be in charge of recovering the bags through the representatives of the groups, and of replacing the ones which were broken or lost. In Meereen not even a thing so small as a leather bag was something trivial or disposable. Even the Meereenese nobility had to adapt to that new recycling system. When they were much richer than in the current times thanks to the slave trade, everything that their harsh land did not supply them with, was purchased abroad and brought by sea and by tour groups, from towns and cities of many parts of the world, even from Westeros or Asshai or other remote areas. But that wastefulness had been rooted out and they had to cut down their expenses to a large extent, so they reluctantly depended largely on what the city trade provided. And sometimes they had no other choice but resorting to the freedfolk's market, however much they regretted it, because there were products that they could not obtain otherwise or at an affordable price for their new status as nobility forced to lead a much humbler life.

Tyrion was surprised he had adapted so easily to the life of austerity he was leading since he had went far away from King’s Landing. He had never even looked at the money he spent, and in those times he admitted with his sarcastic sense of humour that he ignored what he paid to the people he hired or with whom he did business, because he was not a man who counted coins, and these slipped through his fingers without a single glance. In fact, he had been one of the richest people in the world. Maybe he was not a happy dwarf, but he was rolling in money, and that was what paid all his excesses.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

He understood that the reason why he did not miss the huge Lannister's wealth was that it only had provided him with material welfare, but it had not given him the things he really craved. Love. Respect. To feel that his life was useful for something. What for he needed wealth if he had Sansa by his side? She neither needed to be rolling in opulence. She had known that kind of life in the Red Keep, even being a Lannisters' prisoner, but she came from a very different environment. The northern lifestyle had taken root in her being and, though initially she had felt dazzled by the luxuries and the exoticism of the capital, like any little girl who goes out of her house for the first time to know new horizons, Sansa missed the snow, the thick stone walls of Winterfell, the dense weirwood forests, the warmth of the people among whom she had been born and grown up, the simple and peaceful routine in a home where everybody, lords and servants, were a large family. There she did not have silk or brocade dresses, or jewelry, or personal handmaidens who tended to her all the time. The harshness of the winters and the need to save supplies for the long months of isolation, taught those people the value of sobriety. More than once Tyrion had joked saying that he would rather becoming a septon that spending a whole winter within the walls of a northern castle, but the truth was that at bottom he had always admired the spirit of togetherness and the deep loyalty that those people professed for their relations, and their strength. There always were exceptions, of course, like the Boltons, who were the great traitors of the North.

He liked all that because he had barely known it in his own house, or in any house where Tywin had set foot in. Everyone was afraid of him and, unlike the warm northern spirit, he was colder than ice. Who needed winters having Tywin around?

Sansa had not grown up in abundance because the Starks shared their wealth, took good care of their people and made sure that those who depended directly on them to survive did not starve or endure hardships. The village settled by the walls of Winterfell was maintained thanks to the provisions stored during the summers in the huge warehouses of the castle, and lots of families of peasants sought refuge in the village, so its number of inhabitants increased considerably during winter, when they knew that the only way not to die was the sense of austerity, solidarity and care of the most important house in the North.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

Since she was born, she was used to share with others. She even had shared her room with her sister Arya. The servants were treated with affection and the lords befriended them. Sansa's best friend had been Jeyne Poole, the butler's daughter. Tyrion would never have envisioned arrogant Cersei making friends with any servant, the gods forbid it, thought him with sarcasm. Ned had in high esteem the men of his guard of Winterfell, and none of them was a knight. Although the majority of the northerners were great warriors, many of them despised knighthood, and with every reason in the world, as the order had declined over the centuries and at present very few anointed knights were true men of honour. In fact, the only one Tyrion had met in person who was truly faithful to his vows and to the spirit of knighthood was Ser Barristan. Jaime was very far from being a man of honour; his youngest brother was not blinded by love and he knew that Jaime was a complete disaster as a knight. Being a great warrior did not turn oneself automatically into someone honourable.

So there were scant knights in the North. For the northern warriors knighthood was a sort of a southern shallow nonsense, more typical of conceited and smug men than of soldiers truly committed to their cause of serving and protecting.

When Tyrion had shared a part of his eventful journey from the Wall with Lady Catelyn and Ser Rodrik Cassel, the master of arms of Winterfell, he had noticed a strong family bond between them both and the devotion of the old warrior to his lady. Tyrion had never seen anything like that in Casterly Rock, because Tywin, supported by impertinent Cersei, made sure that they kept the rabble in the place that corresponded to them, according to the lord and lady of the castle. His charming sister used to be cruel to the poor housemaids, and one of those girls lost an eye because of her. Cersei had accused her of stealing a necklace, what Tyrion doubted the poor girl had done. She was given such a beating that she remained crippled for the rest of her life. He always suspected that the robbery of the necklace was a lie and that his sister had done it out of pure wickedness, perhaps because that girl aroused her jealousy or her envy for some whimsical reason in the twisted mind of the young Lannister lioness.

Even Theon Greyjoy, who technically had been a hostage in Winterfell, had been treated with all the respect, had been given the same education and training that Ned's sons and had been permitted to mix with them on a basis of fraternity and equality. He had not been excluded. That made his betrayal to the house which had taken him in much more contemptible than if he had been despised or mistreated.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
Definitely, Sansa was the only woman he had got to know who did not care about a money that he anyway did not have any more. Or to which he did not have any access by then, while he could not go back to Westeros, nor claim what belonged to him. She was used to live simply, so, like him, she had got used easily to the idea that she could not claim her old properties, and she was perfectly happy with the two borrowed rooms where she lived with an infatuated and lustful husband who could not give her great material wealth, though he could give her plenty of richness of a different kind. He smiled, naughty.

No other woman would have resigned herself to what he had currently, which was practically nothing. Why did they have to put up with a dwarf who only had the modest salary he earned working for Daenerys Targaryen?

He thought about the wife Jorah had, Lynesse Hightower. She had felt attracted to the sparkle of the knight who won the Tourney of Lannisport, who had defeated the very *Kingslayer* himself. She let herself be seduced by Jorah's aura of lord of the Bear Island and she latched onto him like flies to honey. But she soon got tired, when she checked that the Bear Island was quite an isolated place and much less magnificent than she had expected. She was a demanding and capricious woman, fond of luxuries and wasteful spendings, and Jorah could not provided her with the wealth she coveted, and that caused the fall and the misfortune of the lord of the Mormonts. And when they had to go far from Westeros and Lynesse used him up as much as she could, and it was not enough yet although he worked as hard as a mule to earn the coins she spent as if they were water, she left him for another man who surely had his purse fuller.

Tyrion remembered when Shae proposed to escape together to the Free Cities. Assuming that they had done it... What would they have lived on? Did she suppose that Tywin would allow him to carry a cargo of gold, or that he would send to his son a pay every month? She was not a fool, she was aware that they would go with nothing but the clothes they were wearing and little more, and that he would never again have access to the Lannister gold. Tywin would have deprived him of all the inheritance to which he had a right as his son, though of course, even if any time he admitted that Tyrion was his heir, Tywin would never have given Casterly Rock to the dwarf murderer of Joanna.

Shae knew that they would not have a single copper and that they would have to start again. Doing what? What was he useful for if not for ruling or advising someone powerful? For being a jester or a strolling player, like most of the dwarves whose throats were not cut when they were born? Even though he had to fight when necessary and he was not a coward in the battlefield, being a warrior was not his thing. Working as a sellsword was dismissed, He neither knew any other profitable job, apart from his knowledge as Master of Coin. Where would he be hired to keep the books and manage money? In the Iron Bank of Braavos, which was an oligarchy of vultures? And in order to be a merchant one needed capital with which starting the business, and contacts were required to prosper, and the competition was fierce. No, what Shae proposed was madness, and it did not have any future. As soon as they saw themselves thrown in the streets and she had to prostitute herself again to maintain them both, it would be sure that her small Lannister lion would stop looking desirable for her. That could not have turned out right and they would have ended up hating at each other and they would have gone their separate ways. She would have to resume her former profession and he would get drunk every day again until dying in an alleyway, after he bumped over and over against the aversion which people harboured towards creatures like him. And he
could not go back with the tail between the legs to beg for a forgiveness that Tywin would not grant to him, because he had not even forgiven him for having been born, so his father even less would forgive him for the betrayal of leaving and repudiating his own lineage and throwing more shame onto the doubtful Lannisters’ honour.

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
He and Pod continued with the task of putting the payments in the bags, on which Tyrion wrote down the guilds' and groups' data and after that he placed them in neat rows, ready for being given to the representatives.

"What did you think when my father sent you to King’s Landing to be my squire, as a punishment for eating some bites of the ham that your first master, Ser Lorimer, robbed?," asked Tyrion, remembering the day when the shy lad arrived at the Red Keep. He remembered it but not because he was more sober than other times; he did it because that quiet and extremely respectful young boy drew his attention. He quickly perceived the deep loneliness of that boy whose father had died in the Greyjoy Rebellion when he was very little and his mother abandoned him shortly after. His uncle Ser Cedric Payne took care of him, but he died as well, and the lad started to serve as a squire of a hedge knight, Ser Lorimer, who stole a ham and was condemned to the gallows due to that. Out of deference to the Payne surname, Tywin spared Pod's life, but as for the Lannister patriarch no one whom he regarded as guilty of any misdeed escaped unpunished, Tywin sent the boy to serve his dwarf son. Once more, Tywin was wrong in something concerning his youngest son, and if there was something that gratified Tyrion especially, it was to knock down his progenitor's expectations. Since the first moment, he and Pod felt perfectly at ease in their mutual company. The lad needed someone like a father figure to whom devoting himself to, and it was impossible to find someone more discreet and loyal than him, and Tyrion had always a predilection for the people who did not fit in. Moreover, the young squire had a surprising potential, as he had shown plenty every time his lord was in danger. It was a very fruitful society from the beginning. Tyrion would not have changed his peculiar squire for any other. People stared at them both with amazement and disdain. The dwarf and the shy and apparently clumsy boy.

Tyrion liked and enjoyed being contrary to others' expectations.

"I thought it was a great opportunity, my lord. But I feared that you did not want to accept me into your service. Who would want to bother with a simple squire of a minor house, whose cousin was punished by King Aerys?" Ser Ilyn Payne, who was a distant cousin of Pod's and the King's Justice, lost his tongue when he said that Tywin was the true ruler of Westeros, not Aerys.

"That was what you were worried about, when you were sent to serve the monstrous Imp son of Tywin Lannister? Were you not afraid that I had horns and a cock with spikes?," asked Tyrion with amused irony.

"I never believed very much the things people said about you, my lord." Pod was putting quickly the last handfuls of coins in the bags which were remaining and he was smiling.

"But you undoubtedly must think that some of the things you were told had to be true, especially the part in which I was a whoremonger and depraved drunkard. Though I must admit that I conceal the horns very well, and no girl has complaint about the spikes of my cock."

"I liked you a lot since the first moment. I knew that you were the best master I might have," affirmed the boy, raising briefly his stare from his task. "And I've never met anyone with horns or spikes, whether good or bad. I didn't believe you were different."

The fact that silent Pod was joking demonstrated how much at ease they both felt.
"I'm very glad that you didn't give much credit to gossip. You're very smart, but I knew that since you appeared at my door. We're quite a pair, aren't we?"

"The best pair, my lord."

They finished placing the rows of bags and Tyrion considered the task ended. They got out of the underground chambers and went up to meet their women, who were sewing and chatting lively in Pod and Leena's rooms.
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Meereen: Day 30

When Mhyraz brought lunch, he announced that the Mother wanted to invite the mistress Sansa to spend the afternoon in her chambers, and that she also would request the presence of Leena, Cloe and Jalima, and of course Missandei would be present. Sansa looked at Tyrion with her eyes very wide.

"Oh, all of us will be there. Do you know if the queen has something important to deal with us or if she does it because she fancies our company?," asked her to the boy.

"It seems that the Mother feels a little nervous about the opening of the fighting arenas. She's afraid for her soldiers and for the humble citizens, because she doesn't trust the Sons of the Harpy. I think she needs to be surrounded by the mistresses to keep herself entertained," guessed Mhyraz, perceptive.

Of course, she must be concerned about Daario and the hundreds of soldiers that today are maximizing the tasks of surveillance throughout the city and in the minor amphitheaters. Though security has been reinforced so much, one never knows what can happen with those sons of bitches with masks, thought Tyrion. Daaro was going to preside at the box seat of one of the amphitheaters, and he would be exposed to everyone's sight. He could be the target of any unexpected attack. Undoubtedly that was what Daenerys feared most.

When Tyrion and Sansa had lunch and the boy collected the things, he was given permission to take Ray again with him and, as soon as the couple was left alone, they made love once more, before Sansa went to the queen's rooms. He laid down onto the bed and she rode him until they reached completion, and then they tidied up their clothes and hair and Tyrion accompanied her to the door of Daenerys' private rooms. On the way they crossed paths with some people who were walking up and down the ramps, especially freed children who had settled in the pyramid with their families and were carrying things, and also orphans, guest kids and several adults who surely had to carry out a transaction or that simply wanted to stretch their legs and do some exercise.

Tyrion and Sansa kissed before turning the corner of the corridor which led to the royal chambers and he reminded her not to go out under any circumstances, and to send word to fetch her when she finished her visit to the queen.

"I'll miss you this afternoon. I had the intention to devote it to certain things with you," insinuated him, caressing her hand suggestively.

"Oh, really? I thought that you had important things to do," needled Sansa, responding to the caress.

"More important ones than getting lost into you? There are no such things," denied him categorically.

"My poor husband. What will you do then?" Her scent and her erotic voice tone had got him painfully hard.

"Oh, look what you do to me." The bulge on his pants was very visible. "You're a cruel girl. You always turn me this hot. Don't you have pity on me? I'll have to manage without you, though my hand by no means is as much a good lover as you."
"Think of me while you do it," suggested Sansa, breathing faster. "I want you to tell me later, like I did the other night."

"I always think of you," affirmed him, sliding his hands down the roundness of her butt, over the fabric of the dress.

"You'd better," threatened her, pressing Tyrion's hands against her buttocks and addressing him a naughty gaze.

"Go in now, or the queen will catch us fucking very near her door, even in front of the Unsullied who guard it."

"Oh, you'd be perfectly capable," laughed her, as they were walking forward along the corridor, holding hands.

"Of course I'd be, you know that. I'd lay you down here and we'd test to what extent the Unsullied keep hieratical as they stare at a couple who makes love in front of their very noses. Damn, I'm afraid that thinking about that doesn't help to soothe my state of heat."

Sansa was smiling and flushed by her arousal.

"Oh, then... Would you do it to me in view of witnesses? Would you not mind that they saw us having sex?" needled her.

Tyrion pushed her against the wall playfully, holding her wrists.

"Of course I would mind. The only adult people who will be allowed to see any intimate part of yours will be the midwives when our children are born," sentenced him. "I'm a very jealous husband. But if you tempt me the way you're doing now, maybe it won't be so bad to fuck you before the Unsullied. After all the poor wretched don't have a cock and they can't dream of stabbing it into you."

"But they have eyes to see and you know very well that love is not only made with the cock," rebutted her, amused.

"Indeed I know it, gorgeous. Right now I'm making it to you wildly with my eyes, while I'm hesitant about stabbing another thing into you, whether there are Unsullied before us or not."

She released herself from his hands and began to walk, laughing. She swayed her hips intentionally to make him suffer a little more and she arrived at the door, where Daenerys' guards were positioned. She leaned forward to give Tyrion another kiss, mischievous.

"I'll see you later," she whispered on his lips.

"You'll do more than seeing me, wicked girl," assured him, biting her lip.

"Oh, take that for granted, lustful man."

Missandei opened the door, greeted them and Sansa stepped in, addressing Tyrion one last naughty
wink. Missandei accompanied her to the gardens, where the queen was sitting in the gazebo beside Cloe. They both stood up when Sansa went out to the dazzling brightness of the terrace.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

"Good afternoon, Your Grace. I'm glad to see you, Cloe," greeted her with a bow.

"Good afternoon, Lady Sansa," answered Daenerys. "Take a seat, please." Sansa did it and one of the orphan girls, who seemed to have appeared suddenly, hurried to serve wine to her in the cup she had before her.

"Thank you, Lania. So you serve the Mother now?," asked Sansa, smiling at her.

"Yes, mistress. The Mother wanted to know if I would be willing to serve her as a maidservant in her chambers, and I answered yes," explained the girl, very proud. "A queen needs several handmaidens to tend to her."

"I also count on the help of Kali, who has skilled fingers to style hair and dress and good taste for clothing. And I think it would be fair that I incorporate into my service a guest girl, so the noble children don't feel excluded," said Daenerys.

"It's a good decision, Your Grace," approved Sansa, drinking a sip of the tasteless Ghiscari wine and restraining a grimace of disgust.

The queen noticed her effort to hide her reaction and offered an apology.

"I'm sorry for the wine, but I'm afraid that until captain Gilean comes back with the supplies he's been acquiring, I have to ration the Dornish wine to the fullest." She sighed and continued, jokingly: "Perhaps it would be better to pour water than this."

"Any thing you offer is welcome, Your Grace," affirmed Sansa. She thought, amused, about her husband's face when he discovered on the table that poor Ghiscari wine from that day on until Gilean returned. Well, that way he'll be less tempted to fall back into drinking, reflected her, grinning. Since their escape from King's Landing, Tyrion had not got drunk again, like he did before.

She remembered when they lived together in the Red Keep and, in the nights when she had trouble sleeping, which was almost always, she heard him entering the rooms quite late and Sansa knew he came back drunk. She could smell the alcohol from afar. He tried not to make any noise when he took off his boots or when he undressed, but at that silent hour any sound was amplified, and Sansa heard the brush of the clothes. Sometimes he mumbled something unintelligible in the dark and afterwars he lied down on the couch, where he had got used to sleep every night. Shortly after, if he succumbed to sleep soon, what did not use to be his case, like her, his breathing became deep and from time to time he snored slightly, but he changed his position and then he stopped snoring. Anyway, in those occasions in which she was awake when he arrived, she knew that sleep probably would not come, or it would do near dawn, so she resigned to another almost sleepless night.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

To her surprise, she wondered if he was unfaithful to her. If the reason why he came back so late was that he spent his time in brothels. After all, throughout the whole Red Keep everybody commented Tyrion's immoderate appetite for prostitutes, and Sansa did not believe that she were a reason for him to stop all of a sudden his promiscuous activities. They barely knew one another, they had married by force, they did not love at each other. They respected each other, or it looked like that, but their relationship was chaired by a stiff courtesy that, truth be told, he tried to soften with his sense of humour and with the little gestures of kindness that he dedicated to her. Very slowly the ice started to melt, though Sansa did not want to be carried away by the natural charm she was finding in him and that she persisted in denying, because she mistrusted him. Cersei also had dazzled her with her fake charm. She would not allow again any Lannister to dazzle her.

When she wondered if he bedded other women, what would be the most natural thing as he did not touch his own wife, she was not very sure of her feelings. But a slight uneasiness, which she made the effort to push aside, sneaked into her stomach. She ignored if that was due to the fact that, in case it were true, she would feel humiliated and insulted for being the laughingstock of half the city even more than she already was. The Imp is cheating on the traitor's daughter. One more humiliation to add to the list of the ones she endured since her father had been executed. She also ignored if the uneasiness was due to the fact that, apart from her humiliation, the betrayal would hurt her. A small voice at the bottom of her spirit, which often seemed ridiculous to her, whispered that he felt true respect for her and for the vows of fidelity he had sworn in the sept. She caught herself wishing to believe that nonsense. Do you think he's going to remain celibate for you, stupid girl? For a silly girl who doesn't want to have anything to do with him? It could not be jealousy, because she did not love him. But her soul of a naïve child needed to grab the certainty that there was a little decency in the man who had stuck up for her in front of Joffrey and had prevented her from being beaten more than once in view of the entire court, the man who had gone in person to notify her of the announcement of their wedding before someone malicious did it, the man who had tried to comfort her before the wedding ceremony, just before the nightmare which was unleashed in the sept and in the awful reception. The man who, being rolling drunk, had promised solemnly to her that he would not touch her until she wanted him to, and who day after day kept his word.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

It was that she had nothing more to grasp apart from the hope to be rescued, which started to fall down when she was greatly disappointed by Littlefinger, when she found out that he betrayed her father, and her escape plans vanished, as she decided that she would not go anywhere with him. And it was infinitely worse when her mother and her brother were slaughtered at The Twins, destroying her last silver lining. She had nothing left to fight for, to live for. She felt like an idiot for wishing to expect that her Lannister husband, who was hardly more than a stranger, had some sense of honour and compassion for a pathetic northern girl trapped among enemies willing to devour her alive. What in hell did she care what he did? What in hell did the world matter to her already? She was sure that if she allowed herself to starve or if she jumped from a window, no one would care, nobody would weep for her death, not even Tyrion. Why was he going to cry for a silly girl who had traitors' blood? Well, perhaps one person would feel sorry for her. Shae had always shown concern and affection for her. She would be sad for a while, until she entered the service of another lady and she would forget her gradually.

For some reason that she did not know, something very deep inside of her grasped the hope that he were different from what her experience in the capital had taught her. She had to cling to that or she would go mad with despair. When she only saw the the negative side of things, when she could not eat a single bite or did not have enough energy to get up and she thought about the tempting embrace of death, something in her interior rebelled and refused to succumb entirely. And as Tyrion was the only family she had left, if what them both shared could be called family, her survival instinct resorted to him because she was too coward to abandon herself to death definitely.

And a few days later, during Joffrey's wedding, she was relieved to realize that her instinct, which she had tried to shut up, was not wrong with Tyrion, at least in regard to the certainty that he was not her enemy, nor he was like Tywin or Cersei. Her instinct was right with him. She knew intuitively that Tyrion really cared about her and he was making an effort to respect the promises he had made her, at least with regard to caring for her. She saw clearly how his own Lannister family, except for his sweet niece and his youngest nephew, despised him, and how in spite of that he was striving to hold his place and protect her.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 316

Meereen: Day 30

That horrible day she saw everything crystal clear. And a wild hope shouted in her ear that it must be true a rumour she had heard in passing, in mocking tones, a couple of days ago, what had disrupted her entirely. It seems that the Halfman has fallen in love. It's commented that, since before he married the northern traitor, all the whores in King's Landing miss him. Or rather they miss his purse. The two bums in question who had been ridiculing Tyrion in one of the corridors of the Red Keep should have made Sansa's blood boil but, instead, and although that cruel mockery hurt her, she suddenly felt her heart lighter.

If it's true that even the imbeciles sometimes tell the truth, it's very possible that Tyrion is not unfaithful to me.

She was not quite sure what she felt about that, or perhaps she preferred not to drill down through it, but it was obvious that the matter did not leave her indifferent, and that she was glad that he had given up on having extramarital sex.

Why does he do it? He doesn't love me, and I'm not certain either that he desires me. Sometimes I think that I catch in his gaze hunger for my body, but surely it's all in my imagination. How could he desire me? For sure he prefers women, not girls of fourteen, and moreover women who are clever and experienced, and I'm not any of that. No, of course he doesn't want me.

But when she came to that conclusion she felt overcome by sadness, for being so insignificant that it was very unlikely that he wanted her.

And why do I feel now that longing? Why do you want him to look at you with those eyes which sometimes give the impression that he sees you as if you were naked? He's still a Lannister. This is still the Red Keep and King's Landing. Don't dream more about stupid songs. Anyway, you can't ask him to bed you. What if he says yes? That terrorized her, and she did everything possible to cast aside those crazy ideas and restore a bit of her shattered emotional balance, so he could not suspect anything of the inner conflict that was struggling within her.

No, it was very soon to let him in. If she any time would want to let him in. To start with, she would have to undress in front of him and that made her very nervous. Only her mother and Jeyne Poole had seen her naked since she had stopped being a baby and had learnt to bathe on her own. And what was worse: She actually had no idea what she must do in bed to please a man, apart from taking off her clothes and laying down. What if she disappointed Tyrion, who was so used to women who knew perfectly what he wanted?

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

And at last: If she let him in, she then would be his in every sense and there would be no way back. The marriage would have been consummated and she would belong to him definitely, she would be a Lannister forever and she would have Lannister children. Any of them even could be a dwarf like his or her father. How could she want to condemn her children to endure what their father did? Every day Sansa noticed how people looked at her husband, how they laughed at him. And that must have been that way since the day he was born. She began to feel pity for him, and she did not want that punishment for her children.

All that inner battle, along with the furtive meeting with Ser Dontos that, though it was a lie, it gave her hope with the gift of the fake necklace, at least made her recover a bit and start to go out of the hole where the death of her mother and her brother had left her trapped.

And thus, when the fateful day of the royal wedding came, Sansa was leaving behind her state of self-pity and when she witnessed the treatment Tyrion was submitted to, and she was aware that he bore similar humiliations nearly all the days of his life, her heart leaned towards him. She admired the fact that, in spite of being loathed and humiliated by his own family, he was a very intelligent man who knew how to put everyone firmly in their place and who harboured good feelings. A decent man, despite all the lies people told about him. For example, they said that he was a pervert who performed all types of aberrations and nevertheless he had not forced her to do anything. Sansa even suspected that it could be true the gossip of those two stupid dudes asserting that her husband had not visited the prostitutes for a long time.

Drinking was the form of escape he had. Sometimes she would also wish to get drunk until losing her senses, but she could not afford to let her guard down even for a second. He had drunk a lot every day they had lived together after their wedding, and she understood that he suffered as well. At the beginning she barely cared what he felt or what he did, but after several weeks she realized that she stayed calmer when he returned in the early morning, as if he consoled her somehow. She realized that she felt more protected when Tyrion was present, because everybody feared his sharp tongue, and he did not permit anyone to laugh at her in her face. She realized that he sometimes tried to make her smile with his jokes because he was not a person who took delight in the misfortunes or the sorrows of those who surrounded him, even less in the sorrows of a defenseless girl to whom he had sworn to care and protect.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

The morning of the day when they later found out about the tragedy at The Twins had dawned very sunny and pleasant, and she felt almost optimistic. Tyrion, sensing her mood, asked her if she fancied strolling across the gardens, to enjoy in the open air such a splendid morning, and she accepted. She put on one of the few dresses she had, and for a moment se reproached herself for being so proud and never asking her husband for anything. How was he going to know what she needed if she did not talk with him? But she did not make up her mind to take the step and ask him for something, though she suspected that he would have given her without a word of complaint any thing she had requested him. She even was sure that he wished her to open herself a little and to express her needs, because he cared for her. Why then did not Sansa say anything? She did not dare to.

As she had so little to choose, she picked the nicest dress among those she wore daily, and thought that she could make up for the lack and the monotony of her wardrobe styling her hair in a more suggestive way. She did not understand why that day she wanted to please him, but she did not want to turn that over and over in her mind and asked Shae to make her a more striking hairstyle. The handmaiden gave her a strange glance but she did not reply and put to the task. In the months she had been her servant, she had learnt very quickly and had gone from knowing barely how to do anything to even anticipating Sansa's wishes and dressing and combing her hair with full care. Sansa treated her very well, the way she had learnt one must treat those who had no other choice but serving others to survive, and they had built an affectionate relationship between them both, so for Shae it was as if she were taking care of her younger sister, and she did it with joy.

Sansa looked at herself in the mirror and she thought she was pretty. It was the first time in a long while that she thought of herself like that. When she turned, Tyrion was staring at her in a way that made her blush furiously. Again in his eyes was that hunger she had caught in their wedding night, and in other brief occasions, so brief that she always believed that they were a product of her imagination.

*He thinks you are beautiful. He desires you.* That thought went like an arrow through her mind and kindled an unknown tingle in her stomach, but she was too cheerful to be afraid of that, and she did not try to push it to the bottom of her mind as she used to do with the disturbing thoughts.

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

Tyrion offered her his hand to guide her gallantly to the outside, and he was smiling at her. His emerald eyes sparkled with a gleeful flash and she got lost in them for a short moment, attracted by their depths. She recovered and took the hand he was holding out to her. Overwhelmed by a wave of strange feelings, she had the urge to turn to ask Shae to accompany them during the stroll, because she was afraid of herself and her handmaiden made her feel safe. The girl was frowning and she was piercing Tyrion with a hostile gaze. It's her strong protective instinct. She doesn't want him to overstep the bounds or to hurt me. She was grateful that the girl was there.

The morning in the gardens was so lovely as it promised to be and, if not for the inhabitants of the castle, who contributed to spoil the illusion, Sansa would have felt almost happy. She sensed that Tyrion wanted to please her, he joked and, when he remained silent, she noticed that he was thoughtful, but not absorbed, rather as if he were summoning the courage to ask her something, and she on the one hand was dying to know what it was about, and on the other hand she was not sure at all that she wanted to know it. She felt good that way, strolling in the sun with the man she lived together with and whose company she was starting to like truly. She did not want to think about anything more.

Ser Eldric Sarsfield and Lord Desmond Crakehall had made fun of them when they passed by and Sansa and Tyrion began to conspire against them with a very silly plot. Sansa sat down on a bench in order to be at his same height. The sun was shining fully upon him and brightened his blond hair, a bit tousled, which gave him the looks of a likeable rascal, and brought out his amazing green eyes, and for a moment she run out of breath. During that moment she did not even notice the long diagonal scar which crossed his face, she forgot his height and her heart pounded wildly.

You desire him! Yes, like he desires you. Look at him, it seems that he's going to devour you with those gorgeous eyes. She forced herself to keep her smile. No, no, no, it cannot be. He doesn't desire you, nor you desire him. He's a Lannister, don't forget that. All this is only nonsense of your child's mind which wants to see songs everywhere.

Just then Pod came running, the spell was broken, Tyrion had to go, Sansa heard the news around her while she was returning to her rooms, as everyone was starting to comment on the crime at The Twins, and all her being shattered.

(Part 9 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

"You're deeply in thought, Lady Sansa. You were very far from here," said the queen with a smile, pulling her from her thoughts.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Your Grace. They only were memories of King's Landing. The wine has made me turn back to times less gratifying than the present ones."

"Oh, I see it's a terrible wine if it makes you remember your period in King's Landing," joked Daenerys.

Sansa traced with her finger one of the reliefs of her cup.

"Not everything was terrible. Tyrion little by little made my life more tolerable, though I wasn't ready to admit it."

"He took care of you."

"Yes. He took care of me," corroborated Sansa.

Leena arrived and everyone greeted her.

"I'm sorry for the delay, Your Grace," apologized her. Her pale cheeks had reddened a lot.

Perhaps she also has had a late sexual encounter, like me, thought Sansa, amused.

"There's nothing to apologize for, Leena. This is a leisure afternoon to spend friendly in our mutual company. Each one can come when she can or she wants to," clarified Daenerys. "Sit down, please." The girl did it and Lania hurried to serve wine to her. Leena greeted the child.

"Thanks a lot, Lania," the queen said. "Now you can leave and in an hour you'll bring mid-afternoon collation, all right? From now on we ourselves will serve the wine."

"Very well, Mother." The little girl bowed and left.

"Now only Jalima is missing. I know she has to come from the camps, but it'll be good for her to entertain herself with friends. And she gave the impression that she liked befriending with us," commented Daenerys.

"Yes, in fact she said that she would like to meet us again some time," Sansa recalled.

"Well. She won't be late." The queen looked beyond the terrace and sighed. "The competitions must have been started already. I hope everything goes well." She tried to sharpen her ears, to check if she could catch the noise of the amphitheaters at that quiet hour. All the women kept silent and, effectively, a rumour of crowds could be heard in the distance, in two different areas of the city. "Listen. It can be clearly heard. They're around twenty thousand spectators between both amphitheaters, if they have managed to sell out."

Sansa knew that the queen was restless, and tried to calm her down. "I'm sure that if something happens, we'll notice a perceptible change in the rumour, by the people's uproar. If the sound goes on this way, soft and monotonous, and with occasional cheers or booing, it means that all is
normal."

"Of course. We'd know immediately. Let's hope that the noise keeps this way."

"Surely it will, Your Grace. Your soldiers are the best in the world, remember it at all times," recommended Sansa.

"That's what reassures me most, Lady Sansa. Well, let's talk about other things, I haven't made you come here to burden you with my concerns or to spend our time simply listening to the noise of the fighting arenas. A good topic to start with would be the new guild of seamstresses. Are you organizing it already?"

"Yes, Your Grace. Leena and I precisely today have started the project. The first thing to do is to carry out a survey to see how many women would be willing to take part. We want to develop it as soon as possible."

(Part 10 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

"Great. Jalima can ask Kerro to talk with the spokespeople of the brotherhoods and so they make a count of the women of their groups who wish to participate. When you have the final count, you'll have to gather them to found the guild and start the work." Daenerys remained thoughtful for some moments. "You'll need a place where you can meet occasionally for your sewing lessons or to discuss your shared matters, though you could do the rest of your work in your own houses or rooms, as there's no need for any special or large place to sew clothes or other daily things. But you could use your meeting room for larger tasks, like ship sails or any thing which takes up a lot of space. You can do it here, in any of the school halls in the afternoon, as long as you can't have another place at your disposal."

"Thank you very much for your help, Your Grace." Sansa addressed her a nod.

"I have to look out for my workers. The prosperity of Meereen depends on all of you." Daenerys smiled at her.

In that moment Jalima walked in and the greetings were repeated.

"Good afternoon, Mother and young ladies." She bowed.

"Good afternoon, Jalima. Sit down," invited Daenerys once more.

The woman took a seat and Daenerys herself served the wine to her. Jalima made a gesture of protest.

"Oh, no, Mother, You don't have to bother yourself."

"It's no trouble at all, Jalima. I like taking care of my friends. It makes me feel that I'm useful for something more than sending others to do things in my place," joked the queen.

"A queen can't do everything by herself, Mother. If the gods had wanted it that way, you wouldn't be a queen, but a goddess," Jalima said, with her sad smile.

"I guess you're right." Daenerys was grinning too. "How are things at the camps?"

"Quite well. We're very organized. The Unsullied contribute to keep order and prevent further squabbles, but among us has spread a strong sense of solidarity and collaboration and everyone cares for the collective welfare the best he or she can. Nobody is untended. We're making sure that everybody has warm clothings, food on their dishes, a fire beside which keeping warm and a shelter to sleep in."

"You're doing an excellent work, Jalima," praised the queen. "How is people coping with the measles epidemic?"

"Most of the patients are recovering well and the maesters and other people with healing knowledge visit them when they can. But the weakest patients have a poor prognosis, Mother. Some of them won't live more than a few days, especially the elderly and the babies. They are just a few, but the camp is going to experience very sad days."

Daenerys did not try to control the trembling of her chin.
"Let's not lose hope with all the cases. Some of them might recover. But anyway I have to anticipate the funerals. We'll offer them a decent burial. We'll make a procession to the consecrated land to bury them and I'll decree three days of official mourning. With calamities like this, everyone takes comfort in knowing that their beloved ones leave this world surrounded by their people and that the dead's kinship have enough time and retreat to mourn them." Jalima nodded. "And how are you, dear friend?," asked Daenerys.

"So busy that I have no time to think, Mother. And I like it. Work helps me not to go mad with sorrow."

"Of course. That's the best antidote against depression. So it's good that all my subjects keep busy. That helps them to heal their wounds. And the gods know that all the ones who have been slaves have many wounds to heal."

"A lot, Mother. And most of them are invisible. They're in the soul. Those are the worst ones," said Jalima.

"The best remedies I can offer are shelter, though it's a little precarious by now, the solidarity of our people, the protection of my soldiers and work. But there's still a long way to go, and for many people their life conditions here are harder than before, when they lived in captivity."

"Even so, they prefer them, Mother. Because they have chosen them. They lead the lives they're building by themselves, not a life others impose to them."

"I'll do my best so they can build a better life. The life they deserve."

"For a start, they're free. Their lives aren't easy, but they're their own lives. That's already a better life. It's a life they deserve."

"Thanks for your encouragement, Jalima. I always have the impression that I don't do enough." Daenerys took one of her hands, grateful.

"What you do is loads more than anyone has done for us in millenniums, Mother." Jalima squeezed her hand.

They kept quiet and watched the landscape, with the background noise of the city sounds, specially focused on the amphitheatres. The afternoon passed with sweet serenity at that height in the Great Pyramid."

(To be continued)
Meereen: Day 30

Lania returned to bring the mid-afternoon nibble. Missandei spoke to her timidly.

"Have you seen Menelan? How is he?," she asked. Doubtlessly she was eager for news. Sansa and Daenerys also payed full attention to the child's answer. Jalima observed the scene with her melancholic expression.

"He remains the same, mistress Missandei, but he's happy. Mistress Sansa's dog is beside him and Menelan strokes him from time to time. Some of the children are taking turns to stay next to his bed."

"And the other ill children? They already were much better," said Daenerys, interested.

"They soon will heal and will turn back to their tasks. And to play jokes and pull our hair," assured Lania, smiling.

"Yes, I imagine it. They're fine ones," corroborated Daenerys, amused. "Thanks a lot, sweetie. Later I'll send word to you so you come to collect the things. You can go again."

"Mother. Mistresses," said the little girl as a farewell with a bow, and she went out.

"These kids are wonderful," commented Sansa. "Life in the Great Pyramid wouldn't be even half bearable or enjoyable without them."

"I'm glad to have brought them here. At first I did it because I didn't know what else I could do with them, and I couldn't leave them out there with no relatives to care for them. I understand that the rest of freed families have enough already with their own children and I cannot force them to adopt more kids. And as in the pyramid there's plenty of space, I decided to take them in here and give them tasks and responsibilities, and I've encouraged them to take care of one another like brothers and sisters. The system has worked and now I count on diligent children who make life here happier. They only needed something which they could call a home, a little affection and some goals to fulfill, and they return all that thousandfold, because they show gratitude for everything they receive. They never had anything apart from fear, and now future is ahead of them. A bit of hope can work wonders in people. I hope to live up to the expectations of those kids and to be able to help them to reach some of their dreams."

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

"When my two older children were born, I thought: One day, somehow, these boys, and the other siblings they'll have, will be free. I'll help them to escape, I'll encourage them to travel to Lorath or any of the Free Cities where the slave trade and the possession of slaves is forbidden, or even to Westeros. I swear that they won't endure this for all their lives." The other women looked at Jalima without batting an eye, surprised by her sudden loquacity. "I swore quietly that, when the moment came, when they were old enough, I'd do whatever necessary to help them to flee from Astapor. I'd plan it in detail. I'd kill anyone who stood in my way. If necessary, I'd cause a fire in the masters’ pyramid to take advantage of the confusion. Kerro and I agreed on that plan and we didn't care what happened to us, as long as we knew that our children were on their way to freedom. For entire nights we went over the details. They would join a caravan of travelers, feigning to be a group of modest artisans in search of fortune. Once or twice a year caravans pass through Slavers' Bay. Without the neckring of slavery and with craftpeople's attires, the youngsters wouldn't raise suspicion. Besides, they wouldn't join the caravan at the very gates of the city, because the masters might search it to catch the fugitives, but we'd wait until it were at least several days away. My children would follow it closely and, if the way was clear, they would join it. If on the contrary the masters sent men to catch them, expecting to find them among the travelers, the youngsters would wait until the group arrived at Yunkai, pretending to be artisans from the Yellow City. They would blend into the people and no one had to know who they really were. Kerro and I recited that plan to ourselves to give us strength. Knowing that our children had a chance to be free encouraged us day after day. After my two older kids, the three younger ones were born, and our plans didn't change, as the five have little age differences among them. We had decided that all of them would escape together. My husband and I didn't care what happened to us when our children had gone. We knew that we would be tortured and killed for contributing to the flight of the five slaves, but we were ready. We'd die happy knowing that at least they were far from that damned city and searching for a better destiny. Being five, they would care and protect one another, and they might achieve it. At least that was what we needed to believe. But after some years, Kuro and Tebo were sold because of the master's son. They snatched them from us and destroyed our hopes. When I was invaded by hatred, the Mother came to Astapor and freed us. I regarded it as a sign and the chance of freedom for my younger children, and I restored my hope to rescue the older ones. That wish hasn't been fulfilled yet, but I have faith. Kuro and Tebo are clever and strong, and as soon as they can, they will come to ask the Mother for asylum. Meanwhile, I hope that there are good people out there who are helping them, like we help the newcomers to Meereen, those who have risked everything to stop being slaves. I hope that someone has pitted my children. When I see the orphans you have taken in, Mother, I think of Kuro and Tebo, and I'm sure again that they're alive."

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

All the women remained silent for some moments, touched.

"Believing is what makes us carry on. Anyone who wants to live believes in something, because that's what holds us up. The dothraki women say that, according to the ancient magic, who believes in something with enough strength and perseverance without ever faltering, without wavering for a single instant, will manage to realize it. Like the men who become khals because they haven't been defeated in any fight. Those women affirm that the same happens with any thing one wishes to achieve. If we don't let anybody defeat us, it will be ours in the end. I know that all people tell thousands of stories and currently it's difficult to believe in the ancient magic, but one day, some time ago, I walked into the funeral pyre of my beloved husband with three petrified dragon eggs, and when the scant people who followed me were sure that they would find my burnt bones along with Drogo's, I stepped out unharmed and with my three dragons upon my shoulders. If you want a tangible proof that all that is possible, Jalima, I offer you my own story. Before now, When I was a child who didn't possess anything and who was running away with my brother, I never believed too much that the ancient magic still existed. There was nothing which offered me a tangible proof of its existence. But when I was sold to Drogo and I at the beginning was so scared, curiously, instead of biting the dust I realized that I could improve my situation. My brother had forced me to take a path I didn't want to take. But I started to believe in myself and I thought that, if I was determined, being a khaleesi didn't have to be so bad. I began to be aware of my own strength and I used one of the weapons I could use. I wasn't a warrior, nor I had any of the skills many women learn, but I was a highborn woman with Valyrian blood and gifted with a physical appearance which is exotic to the dothraki. They're not used to silver-haired women with light eyes and white skin. And I discovered that if my khal had married me, he did it because I was different to what he knew, and not only due to my physical appearance. One of my servants, Doreah, opened my eyes. She said that he expected something different from me, though he didn't even know what it was, and moreover dothraki men are too proud to ask anything to a woman. But if the powerful khal had chosen me, it was not because of my Targaryen surname, which sounded to him like any other."

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

"The day when I was introduced to Drogo in Illyrio Mopatis' house, I had been compelled to wear a chiffon dress and my body was hinted beneath the semitransparent fabric. I was like a shy and scared little mouse, but I forced myself to go down the staircase and walk toward Drogo. He looked at me without blinking and I, with an effort, kept my eyes on his. I observed something fleeting in them, but by then I didn't know how to interpret certain dothraki gestures and ways of looking. I was not sure to be of his liking and, although I was afraid of my brother's wrath, at bottom I wished that the fierce chief warrior had disregarded me, so I wouldn't have to marry him. But it seemed that he liked me, because, according to Illyrio, Drogo had accepted me. I was wedded and I knew nothing about how to please a man. The first times with him were a nightmare in which I only felt shame and pain, but I decided that the situation would change. After all, I wasn't a dothraki and I could do things differently. And it was so simple as that. When I changed the way we made love, we fell in love. And then Drogo became my sun and stars. And I knew that I was strong, more than I had ever thought, and I left the girl behind unflinchingly. Before being a khaleesi I was nothing, Jalima, nothing but a frightened child, and now I've come thus far. If the ancient magic doesn't have anything to do with all this, then magic is a joke. But I look at my dragons, I look at my people, I look at you, and I see everywhere the proof of the ancient magic." Daenerys gave Jalima an encouraging smile. "I hope that all I've told is useful to you, dear friend."

Then Missandei spoke.

"I was born in the isle of Naath. My father was a fisherman and my mother knew four languages and she had notions of other ten ones at least. My grandfather had been a sailor who had sailed all the seas and he learnt to speak many languages and he knew how to read and write in several of them, and he seduced many women in all the harbours. One of his lovers died in childbirth and my grandfather took care of his newborn child, my mother. He took her with him in his journeys and finally, when he felt ill and tired, he decided to settle in Naath with her. My mother looked after him until he died and she met my father. They got married and had me and my five brothers and sisters. Afterwards, the slaver pirates came, killed the men who fought back, raped the women but they respected the girls and the young virgins, and they murdered those women who offered resistance or who weren't young or pretty or suitable for hard work. They stabbed their swords into my parents because they placed themselves in front of us to protect us. But the worst was what they did to the babies and the little children." Two tears were sliding down the soft cheeks of the young woman, and she dried them with her fingers.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

"They spared the lives of the children who were older and who besides had skills and strong arms. I was the only one of my family who survived that day. I was taken to Astapor in a ship and I couldn't stop vomiting because I never had sailed, but the pirates didn't whip me because they said that they didn't want to damage my skin. They wanted to sell me to the Good Masters and they payed a lot of money if they were provided with pretty, well mannered and virgin girls, so the pirates didn't hurt me, neither the other virgin girls, but they spent the whole journey reminding us what would happen to us as soon as we arrived at Slaver's Bay. I was sold at auction in the outskirts of the city and the master Kraznys mo Nakloz bought me. He raped me that same day and all the following days until he began to get tired of me and stopped visiting me daily. He made me drink the moon tea because he didn't want my body to get ruined with pregnancies, and moreover he wouldn't admit bastard children in his house. The master's wife hated me and she sometimes beat me when he didn't see us, but she was always careful not to leave marks on my skin because if she did that, the master would notice that she used to batter me and he would punish her severely. The only advantage of living there was that my work wasn't too hard. I acted as an interpreter, as a transcriber and a herald in meetings and events, so I always was well dressed and remained standing beside the master for hours. One day the Mother of Dragons appeared to purchase all the Unsullied, she deceived the Good Masters making them believe that she would give them a dragon in exchange, but the dragon burnt master Kraznys and the queen ordered the Unsullied, who only obeyed her already, to slaughter all the masters. She took me with her and since then I'm free again, she has given me back the life I was taken away, and I'm happy at last. I also believe in the ancient magic, dear Jalima."

Until that moment Sansa had known barely anything about Missandei's past, though she had imagined how it must be. Told by the sweet girl, it made even a deeper impact, because she never showed resentment or pronounced harsh or very direct sentences. But in that afternoon of friendship and confidences Sansa, for the first time, really perceived what the loyal right-hand woman of Daenerys had been through.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 327

Meereen: Day 30

Leena, driven by the initiative of liberation of the wounds that all of them carried in their souls, also felt encouraged to speak.

"You already know a great part of my story. My parents sold me to a Lysene pleasure house. The houses of high standing train the girls for years and don't allow any client to touch them until their learning has finished. But unfortunately I was sold to a third-rate brothel. I was eight years old and the first thing I remember when I entered that place was that the procurer undressed me without consideration and examined me from up to down to check that I didn't have any visible defects and to make sure that I was a virgin. My father had forced me to do things to him, but he had not come to deflower me, because he knew that brothels paid more money for virgins. After the examination, the procurer told me that I was lucky. That my first client would pay very much for the honour of taking my virginity, and I would be permitted to wear a very nice dress, reserved for the virgin girls. The world had shattered to pieces at my feet and I only could think of escaping from that horrible place, so I couldn't imagine where was the good luck that I supposedly had. The other girls and women looked at me with envy, undoubtedly wanting to turn back time, to the moment when they were still innocent children. They showed me the places where they slept, ate, relieved themselves and washed the clothes, and later they showed me the rooms where they worked and where they also washed themselves before each service. They told me that for my first time I would have at my disposal the special room, which was more spacious and was better decorated than the others. I would be allowed a whole day to adapt myself to my new home and the following day my mates would get me ready and the procurer would do something special on my honour, as he didn't use to receive workers that young: he would organize a bidding among the clients who preferred little girls, and I would be given to the one who offered the highest amount to spend the night with me. In consideration of my first night, I'd only serve the man who would make me a woman, and that way my debut would be less hard. From the following nights, I'd admit only two or three clients at a higher price than the current rate for being still a novice, and after a few weeks I'd work with all the men who required me at the ordinary rate. The other women made cruel jokes. They said that they didn't know if they must be glad for my good fortune, because being the youngest I would be the center of attention and moreover the procurer at first only would allow that I were chosen by those who didn't give the impression of breaking me in two; or if they must be glad for their own good luck, because while the men were keeping their eyes on me, my mates would have a little rest. I only wanted to die."

The blond girl did a pause, remembering those terrible days with harsh eyes and tight lips.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
"You don't have to go on telling all these painful memories, dear. We all imagine what you've been through," pitied Jalima, caressing her hand.

"Thanks for your concern, but I have to tell it, Jalima. I know that the Mother's intention was that we had a happier afternoon, but it seems that today it's the day in which pulling out terrible memories to let them go and make us freer, you understand? If I don't cast this out, I won't be truly free. I haven't even talked with Pod about this."

"All right, sweetie. You can tell us whatever you want. All of us know about pain."

Daenerys nodded, encouraging her to continue.

"The night of my debut came. The other women styled my hair and dressed me, but they didn't make me up. Apparently the men who liked virgin little girls preferred them to have an innocent appearance. They took me to the hall and a crowd of men were awaiting anxiously. I was so terrified that I barely could walk, and the others compelled me to move forward shoving me without much consideration. When I saw that sea of faces I felt sick and I was about to vomit right there, but I told myself that if I stained the dress and spoiled my debut, I would be lashed and punished, so I made a great effort to recover. I didn't look directly at any of those men, and I stared at a spot beyond all of them and I focused on the memory of my cliffs, which was the only thing that helped me to keep control of my nerves. I had used that trick before, when my father forced me to do things to him, and it had worked. If I didn't look at their faces, they wouldn't seem real to me, and perhaps that way I might endure better what was waiting for me. The procurer shouted that only those who had a small male member could bid for me, because he didn't want to lose me in the first night, and everyone burst into laughter, but I was half absent, as if all that didn't have anything to do with me. The bidding seemed to be far from me, it was as if my spirit had gone out of my body and it witnessed the show dreamily from afar, from a kind of thick fog. That made me escape from reality and that prevented me from jumping down the table on which I was forced to stand and start to run. The bidding ended and the procurer grabbed my arm and made me go down. I don't even know what was the definitive price for my virginity, because I didn't get to listen to it. I only knew that someone who smelled of sweat and bear was taking me by the hand with iron claw to the special bedroom, and I walked as if I were floating, though I felt my legs heavy like stones. Luckily, the fog was still in my head and everything seemed distant, even the stranger who was pulling me. He made me walk into the room and he instructed me to do things to him, the same things my father forced me to do to him. I focused on the cliffs, I counted the waves crashing against the shore. I remembered the only time I had eaten a sweet. A little child must have dropped it on the beach, surely a rich merchant's child, and it had been left there, covered in stuck sand. I cleaned it and tasted it as if it were the very same food of the gods. It lasted for hours, because I didn't want it to finish too soon. Remembering the sweet helped me not to notice too much what I was doing to the man."

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 329

Meereen: Day 30

"After a while, he took my dress off and my mind traveled to the moment when my youngest brother was born. I felt that the man was applying me an ointment or oil. In order no to shriek out of revulsion and shame, I recalled the baby's red little face. My mother let me carry him in my arms for some moments. And then pain pierced me. Not even my brother's face could remove that torture. The man was hurting me so much that I surely screamed from the top of my lungs, but I don't remember my own voice. I tried to grasp another memory, but pain filled everything and I finally fainted. When I regained consciousness, some of the other girls where tending to me in our collective bedroom, and they had a look of worry on their faces. They had stopped mocking me and they felt pity instead. For some strange reason, that consoled me. They no more saw me as the newcomer, but as another mate of hardships. I had bleed a lot and felt as if something were burning me between my legs. I had been put some bandages to stop the bleeding, and the procurer consented me not to work again until I had recovered, because he obviously didn't want to lose me in the second night or stop earning the substantial income that I'd bring him due to being the youngest." Leena looked at her wine cup for some moments. "Seemingly the client had caused a tear in my entrance, but according to the girls it wasn't very serious and it would heal by itself in a couple of weeks at most. The procurer snorted with frustration, but he had no other choice but letting me rest. The girl who later would become one of my few friends in the brothel dared to reproach him that I had been given to that brute able to rip apart a girl of eight years, and in exchange she earned a slap, but since then the procurer chose more carefully the clients for very young girls with little or no experience. It wasn't convenient that there were more losses of money because any other girl had to stay in bed for a fortnight. I understood why in the houses of higher category the girls didn't work with the clients so soon and, exhausted, I spent many hours sleeping. When I awoke, my new friend used to be by my side when she wasn't required for work and, if she wasn't there, she was replaced by any of the others. I feared the moments when I had to go to the toilet, but day after day it hurt me less, and I stopped bleeding. When I recovered, the procurer chose my clients carefully, and many of the ones who were waiting for the other girls looked at me with embarrassment, as they knew what had happened to me and that made those who had a little conscience feel a bit guilty, and probably some of them had daughters my age. After a while I started to work with as much as the others. My body got stronger and I learnt to silence my spirit, to keep it asleep. Some of the girls drank a lot to forget, but I knew what alcohol did to people who drink very much and I resisted to it, because in a secret corner I harboured the hope to escape from that life and if I wanted to do it, I mustn't destroy myself more than the brothel would. My friends Kyra and Mylena arrived there and my life improved, because they were like family for me and the three of us comforted and breathed strength to one another. After a while, we were sold to a brothel in Volantis, we were won in a bet and got on the ship in which we met Sansa, Tyrion, Pod and captain Letho. And my hopes were fulfilled."

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

Until that moment Sansa had not noticed that she was grasping her friend's hand and that her own cheeks were wet. She felt a great admiration for the girl, because in spite of having passed through such hell her spirit had not been broken, it had kept complete. She squeezed her hand, full of emotion, and Leena returned the squeeze with her sad smile.

Cloe also had tears in her eyelashes, ans she was staring at Leena as if she thought it was a miracle that such a pretty and charming lass had experienced all that and had survived it, becoming a free and happy woman. Leena noticed her stare and smiled at her.

"I know that barely anyone has the chance to escape from all that, Cloe. But I had the hope that it would be that way. And it happened. Perhaps it's due to the ancient magic, as the Mother says. Perhaps it's simply that I was very lucky. You were a slave too and now you're no more. A thing is clear, and it's that we have much to celebrate, don't you think? Even with this wine," joked Leena, and everybody burst in laughter.

"Maybe this wine is a subtle punishment that the gods have sent to the Ghiscari noble people for having used slaves to produce it," suggested Sansa, and the others laughed even more.

Daenerys intervened.

"You've been very brave opening your hearts, my dear friends," she daid, addressing Jalima, Missandei and Leena. "It's not easy to rise to the surface the worst moments, but you've done it and that will help you to be at peace," declared Daenerys, who like Sansa and Cloe had to clean off some tears discreetly when the other women had told their sad past experiences. "Well, I think that now we really have earned to talk about hopeful things," she said, in a lighter tone.

Sansa sighed in relief. She was not sure of being able to recall her father's execution without breaking down, and she also considered that it was the proper moment to let rest again the terrible memories and think about other things.

"How many children have been born among the freedfolk since you settled in Meereen, Your Grace? Have you been counting?" Sansa thought that the birth of children in the camps and in the city was a hopeful topic. The arrival of babies made life happier.

"Around one hundred, more or less," said the queen.

"They're freeborn children. Do you realize what that means? For the first time in many centuries, the chain has been broken in Slaver's Bay. Until now, slaves' children were sentenced to be slaves," pointed out Sansa.

"I have to go on fighting a lot for that, Lady Sansa, so that many more children are born free and no one enslaves them."

"But from now on nothing will be the same in these lands, Your Grace. You've sown the seeds of change. Perhaps in a while this mustn't be called Slaver's Bay any more."

"That would be my dream, Lady Sansa, but I suppose that it's still a long way to that. What would you name it, if you could choose?" Daenerys was smiling at the optimism of the young Stark girl.
"Liberty Bay. It's not very original, is it?"

"Not much," confirmed the queen, amused. All the women laughed. "But no other name would sound better. I hope it could become a reality."

"For many it's a reality already, with or without a name," said Sansa.

"Do you think that the majority of my people would want to come to Westeros with me? And, what kind of life can I offer them there? I wonder it many times."

"I'm more than sure that an overwhelming majority will want to follow you to Westeros. You're their Mother, Your Grace. They trust you."

"That's one of the things I fear. I don't want to fail them. But Westeros is huge, it's not limited to a city surrounded by ramparts. I know how it's to rule Meereen, which I can see with my eyes from up here, but... An entire kingdom I can't even start to discern?"

"Then you also will have to take it in little by little if you want to know it well, Your Grace," suggested Sansa.

(Part 9 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 331

Meereen: Day 30

"If I learnt how to ride my dragons, I could do it. I wouldn't limit myself to stay ensconced on the Iron Throne. I'd go anywhere I were needed. But I still see far the day when I'm able to ride one of them."

"Your instinct will dictate what you must do. Until now you've done well following it. And moreover you have around you people who will help you to find the path."

The other women were watching the exchange between the queen and Sansa, absorbed. Missandei took advantage of the pause in the conversation to speak.

"Your ancestors used the dragons as a symbol of threat and conquest. But you might give them a different meaning, Your Grace. They might help you to build, no to destroy."

"That will be the most original thing a Targaryen will have done in centuries, dear Missandei," said the queen, smiling. "I'm going to need all the help I can get to build the realm I want for all of us."

"Count on me," assured Missandei without the slightest hesitation.

"And on me," said all the others with one voice. They toasted to the pact, but they burst out laughing again when the bland taste of the wine spoiled the solemnity of the moment.

The rest of the afternoon passed in distended conversations, jokes, laughter and funny anecdotes. Lania returned to clear the table and, when the sun was beginning to set, the change in the background murmur which came from the amphitheatres indicated that the shows had finished for that day and that the spectators were dissolving. Daenerys sighed, relieved because all had passed without any incidents. She bade farewell to her friends and Tyrion and Pod, who had been sent word a while ago, were waiting for their women at the door of the queen's private rooms. Jalima would be escorted back to the camps, as Kerro, too busy, could not go to fetch her.

The girls kissed their men as a greeting and the four of them walked along the corridors, back to their rooms.

"Did you have a good time in your afternoon of women's chats?," asked Tyrion to Sansa with his amused tone.

"It's been a while of liberation with friends. We've talked about many things, and we've cried and laughed. But I have bad news for you," she warned, with her mocking voice. "Until captain Gilean returns, the only wine will be the Ghiscari."

Tyrion made a face of disgust.

"Puaj! Who can drink that? Its sale should be forbidden. That way it would extinguish definitely and it would be a favour to the human race," he protested. And he lowered his voice. "I suppose we'll have to seek compensation for drinking that rat pee during meals. If I taste you afterwards, maybe I forget that terrible flavour. Ah, and you can taste me too." He caressed her hand in a sensual way and she automatically felt the overturn that his touch always caused in her belly. That made Sansa suppose that he also would be feeling that overturn in a certain part of his anatomy, and she smiled naughtily.
"Thanks for the generous offer. But now I think I remember a certain request I asked you several hours ago."

"Oh, and I'm an obedient husband. I'll please you gladly, but you'll have to be patient, very patient. You know that good things sometimes play hard to get, and that makes them twice as pleasurable."

They were speaking in whispers and Tyrion was barely controlling himself not to push her against the wall and introducing his hand beneath her skirt.

"I'll be very patient," she asseverated. "But in the end I want what's mine."

"You'll have it, gorgeous. You'll have it." Tyrion was using a mysterious tone which promised much more. Sansa was very wet imagining what things he had done in the solitude of the bedroom and what he would do to her as soon as they arrived at their chambers. Having to pretend in front of Pod and Leena aroused her more, and she sensed the same heat in him.

They said goodbye to their friends at their door and Tyrion sped up his pace, pulling Sansa's hand to urge her.

At the door, he said to her:

"I want you to close your eyes and not to open them until I ask you to, all right?"

Her heart started to beat faster in her chest.

"All right."
Chapter 332

Meereen: Day 30

He took her by the hand to the adjacent hall and made her sit down.

"Remember, don't open your eyes. You have to wait, my love. Will you do it for me?"

"Of course I'll do, Tyrion," answered Sansa, breathing fast.

He let loose her hand and headed for another part of the room. When he went back to her side, he positioned himself behind her and put over her eyes one of the pieces of cloth they used in their erotic games, which he tied behind her head so she could not see anything.

"I know you'll be obedient and won't cheat, but anyway it arouses me very much to blindfold you. That way I delude myself imagining that you're at my mercy for a while, that I can do anything to you, and you don't know what my next movement will be and so you have to imagine everything. Though I know you're very naughty and surely it'll be me who will end up at your mercy. You drive me crazy in every possible way, Sansa. When you're sweet and shy and when you're naughty and sassy, when you take the initiative and when you allow me to take it myself. You turn me very horny when you set the pace, and also when you surrender to me completely. I always recall that fantasy you told me in which I bought you in the slave market. Do you want me to tell it to you now?" Tyrion was behind her, caressing her hair and massaging her scalp.

"Yes, please, my lord," requested her, feeling the delightful and relaxing tingle of his fingers on her head.

"I had no intention to possess slaves, but my father was the head of the family and I could do nothing but looking every time he took me to an auction. He knew I hated all that and for that reason he forced me to go when he made new acquisitions, to make me suffer. And so you learn once and for all that life is shit, in case it's not clear enough for you yet, so drop those silly scruples, ridiculed him. Since I was a child and I accompanied my father by force to the slave auctions, I felt pity for those people who were sold like animals. I saw mothers brutally separated from their children, terrified kids who wept and didn't understand why suddenly they were beaten and dragged with chains, men who wouldn't last much to succumb in the fighting arenas or worn out in the hardest jobs. I saw women who would end up being whores who their owners would force to bed twenty men a day without receiving a single copper for themselves, I saw virgin little and young girls who would be bed slaves of depraved masters. One day I saw you. You had just been brought in a ship and it was evident that you had been sick and vomiting during all the journey. You looked skinny and very pale, with dark rings around your lovely blue eyes. You felt shame of your nakedness and you were trying to cover yourself, but it was useless and the lustful witnesses mocked your shyness. I knew that the slaver pirates hadn't touched you because the masters paid a lot of money for virgin girls, and much more if they were beautiful. You were one of the most beautiful creatures I'd seen and something very intense stirred within me. I didn't want to see you in the revolting hands of a master who immediately would rape you and would destroy your sweet innocence. I felt guilty for all that, I was ashamed of my father and of that whole world. And I had an impulse. Father, I want that girl. I want her for me, I said, to his surprise and to my own surprise too. Well, I see that you've become a man at last. He offered the highest price and you were given to me. You looked as if you were about to collapse and I covered you with my cloak, while my father made fun of my gesture, but I ignored him, as I always did. I tried to make you understand that I wouldn't hurt you, that I would take care of you. I wanted to assure you that you'd
be safe, but that lie stuck in my throat. *Safe from what? From me?*

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

Tyrion, who was behind Sansa, moved her hair aside and started to massage her shoulders, while he went on talking next to her ear, caressing her with his deep voice.

"I had bought you so no one else could disgrace or mistreat you, but I had no idea what to do with you. I was responsible for you. I decided that I externally would maintain the facade that you were my bed slave, but I wouldn't touch you. I had the intention to instruct you, teach you to read and write. Perhaps I might turn you into a scrivener. And that was how our life together began. You lived in my chambers, because it was assumed that a bed slave had to satisfy all the wishes of her master and she always must be near him. I had you in sight all the time to protect you. Such a beautiful girl wouldn't last to be harassed by other inhabitants of the house with much less scruples than me. I always took you with me, because I didn't want to leave you alone, and every day I taught you lessons and talked with you. I wished to know you, I longed for your trust. You were a reserved girl, but little by little I encouraged you to open your soul to me. By then I was madly in love with you, but I respected your wishes. You were lovely and I was a dwarf. I had learnt that princesses don't fall in love with monsters, and my father had always told me that I was a little monster. That no woman would love me. But I started to see an expression in your eyes that I had never seen in any girl before. It can't be. She can't love me, I kept telling myself. It's only compassion and gratitude. She has a kind heart and feels pity for this silly dwarf. One night, while I was lying awake as usual, as sleep lasted hours to come, I heard your steps in the dark. I knew perfectly the way you moved, the light sound of your steps, your slender figure. I thought I had fallen asleep without noticing and that I was dreaming that you came to my bed. I had dreamed of it so many times that at the beginning I wasn't surprised when you undressed and slipped yourself under the sheets beside me. You embraced me and I felt your soft body directly above mine, as I had a habit of sleeping naked. I know you love me, master, whispered you by my ear timidly, but with your voice full of passion. I love you too. I want to be totally yours."

Sansa was listening to the tale as if hypnotized, while Tyrion opened slowly the bodice of her gown and uncovered her shoulders. He kissed them while he continued to speak.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
"No, little girl, I opposed, shaking my head in astonishment and realizing that it was not another of
my dreams. I don't want you to do it out of gratitude. You don't desire me. How can you desire a
monster like me? But you made me hush with a kiss, the first true kiss a woman had given me in
all my life. You're not a monster. And I don't do it out of gratitude, my master. I do it because I
want to. You have told me since the beginning that you wanted me to express myself freely with
you. And that's what I'm doing. You kissed me again and placed yourself on top of me. I couldn't
resist any longer and gave in to your warm body. And from then on, the chambers we shared
turned into our paradise." Tyrion was lowering the dress slowly and kissed the silk of her back.
Sansa moaned slightly.

"That story is not so different from reality, Tyrion. I was a slave in King's Landing and you
protected me. At last, when we fled, I wished to give myself to you. I read in your eyes your hunger
for me. I read your love. And I finally knew that I loved you too."

"That you love me will always be like a miracle to me, Sansa." He stood in front of her and took
her face between his hands, staring at her with reverence. Sansa imagined his hungry gaze, which
made her shiver although she could not see it.

"To me it's also a miracle that you love me," she said, smiling under the blindfold which covered
her eyes. "I wouldn't mind being your bed slave for all my life," she whispered with wickedness,
sliding her hands over his chest and abdomen, and he trembled under her touch. "Do you want me
to be your bed slave?" She brushed his lips with her breath and lowered her hands until she touched
the hard bulge between his legs. She closed her hands around her man's centre of pleasure above
his pants and he let loose a deep and plaintive moan.

"Yes, I want you to be it," he said, panting. "Though I think I am your slave too," he added, smiling
with pure lust.

"I like that you are," Sansa opened his trousers and pulled out the stiff and wet member. She
claimed it between her hands, possessive, and he was sure he would die in ecstasy when he felt on
him those fingers which drove him mad. "And now I want you to describe how you touched
yourself before, when you were alone. Your sweet story has excited me very much, and now I
need another one much more hot." She squeezed him with her hand maliciously, but she did not
move it around his cock, to offer him an advance of what was waiting for him, though avoiding to
make him lose his train of thought.

Doing everything blindfolded increased the eroticism of the situation. Sansa imagined the
expression of his face.

Tyrion breathed deeply to control himself and started to speak.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

"I wanted to take my time. You already know that I like masturbating slowly, because that way I manage to endure better the hours I spend without you, when during those hours I haven't other tasks or duties which keep me distracted. Remember that I am a lustful beast and I need sex with my wife all the time and, when I cannot have her for a while, I feel the urge to seek my relief." He smiled at her with mischievousness. "Do you know that the period of my life in which I've masturbated most frequently, apart from when I was a randy adolescent, was when I had just married you and I started to desire you in earnest?"

"Really?," she asked, with her cheeks flushed due to the evident flattery.

"Really, Sansa. I think that by then my cock was raw with so many wanks. I had only to think of your red hair, your lips, the curves of your breasts which you tried to conceal demurely, your glorious butt moving beneath the dress, your hipswinging, your scent... And I was driven mad, like a dog in heat. That had never happened to me before with any girl or woman, I hadn't felt that burning fever consuming me. I didn't understand why you turned me so horny. In that time I was convinced that it wasn't possible that a love relationship could exist between us. That should have cooled me, it should have made me indifferent. But I couldn't be indifferent. I didn't know if it was because of your great beauty, your innocence, the rich inner world I was sure you were hiding, the passion you still ignored that you possessed, or simply that I had dreamt of having a wife like you. My heart leaned spontaneously to you, it knew intuitively by its own that, if it managed to reach yours, our union might be magical. I burnt for sharing pleasures with you, for easing the pain of your wounds with my caresses. Something told me that in bed you might be pure fire if I found the spark which lit you. I felt like I was thirsty, on the edge of a deep well with clear water that I couldn't see, but I could heard its murmur far low, and the water which was there, out of my reach, shot up my thirst... I was consuming myself with desire for you, Sansa. And I hid many times to seek lone relief to the torment of my unsatisfied body." Sansa was sliding her fingertips very slowly over his length, barely grazing it. He was staring at those fingers. "Today I've recalled all that again and I've got very, very hot while my hand moved up and down with no hurry. I've thought of the moments when I saw you smile truly with any of my silly jokes, and how beautiful you are when you smile. Moreover, I sometimes observed you without you noticing, when you sat down on the window sill to stare at the landscape of Blackwater Bay and you seemed to be so far away, and I'd have given anything to reach you. Occasionally I couldn't help casting quick and guilty glances while Shae helped you to change your clothes on the other side of the room divider, before turning to look to other place or getting out of our bedroom in order not to invade your privacy too much. All that came to my mind this afternoon and I got very hard."

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Day 30

She was moving her own hand around him with agonizing slowness and she figured that Tyrion did not look away from that hand.

"Like this, Tyrion? So this is how you did it to yourself this afternoon?," Sansa asked with her suggestive voice.

"What I did to myself can't be compared to what you do to me, honey. The feeling of your hand upon me is unbelievable. I think that with you I'll finish sooner, unless you stop touching me. And I don't want you to stop touching me," he pleaded, smiling in ecstasy.

"Did you imagine me naked? What part of me excites you most, apart from the most evident one?" The hand continued implacably, very slow but inexorable.

"I always imagine you naked. And after the heaven between your legs, what excites me most is your nipples. They're like cute rosy buttons, perfect for being sucked until making you delirious. I'll envy our children a bit because I'll have to share your gorgeous nipples with them," he joked.

"Oh, you fool. They will not steal them from you," she needled. "They'll only borrow them to eat for some months."

"Mmm, I'm afraid I'll also have to borrow them to eat. Oh, Sansa, I'm going to burst any minute now in your skillful hand," he warned, with bated breath.

"All right, if you want I'll give you a gift by how well have you behaved. Do you prefer my hand or my mouth?," she asked, mischievous.

"Above all I prefer your slit, as always, but..." Sansa did not let him finish his sentence. She yanked her underwear off her, pushed him down on the bed and in an instant she straddled him, introducing his member into herself quickly when she fell down.

"Sansa!," Tyrion exclaimed, shaken by his surprise.

She moved while she stimulated her clit.

"I'm your bed slave, remember? I realize all your sexual desires and, if you want my slit, here you have it, my lord," she said, panting. She tugged at her dress and then she was naked.

He was struggling to hold back. He was determined to wait for her to finish first.

"Remove the blindfold. Now I want to look at your eyes, my beautiful and hot slave. I want to see pleasure in them," he ordered, fondling her breasts eagerly with both hands.

She obeyed and got rid of the strip of cloth. She lasted several seconds to focus her gaze on his rapturous one.

"You are glorious. I'm more and more crazy for you each passing day. I want to feel you. Finish for me," Tyrion asked, making a great effort no to be carried away until he felt her completion.

Sansa was on the edge as well and she exploded.
"Oh, Tyrion!"

He followed her immediately, unable to bear it for any longer, and he flew.

"Yes, darling! That's it, you've performed greatly. It's been perfect. A perfect screw," he exclaimed, breathing laboriously.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 337

Chapter Notes

In the next chapters I'll skip some days to speed up the story a little. :-)

Meereen: Day 30

Sansa laid down by his side and embraced him. He encircled her back with his arm.

"The day of the bet will be memorable, don't you think?," she asked by his neck.

"With the high amount of times we are practicing, it's poised to be," Tyrion affirmed, smiling drowsily. "And I've reserved some surprises for the day of the bet," he added, playing hard-to-get.

"Oh, evil man. Now I'll wait for that day much more impatiently," she scolded, stroking the hair of his chest.

"That's what I intend, gorgeous. That you cannot stop thinking about that day."

"But if I anyway cannot stop thinking about that day. At this rate we'll have to bring it forward, if I feel in the mood of attacking you and not letting you going out of this bedroom," Sansa threatened, pressing herself against him.

"Gods, Sansa. You're a very red-blooded girl. Are you sure you come from a northern house?," he jested, very aroused again when he felt her breasts against his side.

"Snow doesn't make us frigid women, did you know, Southern?," she needled.

"Of course I knew, Northerner. And I'm not a Southern. I'm from the Westerlands, smartass."

"Everyone who is from down the North is a Southern."

Tyrion placed himself between her legs in a swift motion.

"So it says the Free Folk about those who live down the Wall." He penetrated her without preamble. "And now, ardent Northerner, let's fuck once more before Mhyraz brings dinner and Ray. You think you'll be able to finish before he comes here? I don't suppose that the boy will last more than ten or fifteen minutes." He began to thrust rhythmically, sinking into her.

"Of course I'll be able. And you?," Sansa challenged, enclosing him with her legs.

"You want me to prove it to you?" He lunged into her more strongly, overexcited by the challenge.

"Carry on," she invited, laughing and panting.

They had time to finish and get dressed quickly, just before Mhyraz knocked on the door and they heard the sound of Ray's legs scratching against the wood.
Meereen: Month 2. Day 9

Nine days later, Sansa had the razor blade in her hand, ready to shave Tyrion's beard. He had decided that, though it suited him well, he felt like having his face clear again. Moreover, the beard made him look older. And he might let it grow once more when he wanted.

"The worst is that you won't tug it now when you're angry with me. And I'll neither tickle you with it," he had told Sansa a while ago with his naughty air, when he asked her to shave him.

She had made a face of disappointment and pulled his thick facial hair for the last time. "Oh. Why are you so evil? How will I punish you from now on?," she complained, moving his lips close to his cheeks and kissing him in the most sensual way she could manage upon his blond beard. "You're so appealing and desirable this way..."

Tyrion had got hard in a single moment under the effect of her caresses on her face. "Look on the bright side, darling. Thus the other women won't be so eager to pounce on me," he joked. "And I'll look again like a man of thirty years. Don't you think that the beard makes me look older?"

Sansa moved aside and gazed at him with her sarcastic expression. "Oh, yes, it makes you look like an oldie. And... What were you saying in regard to that the other women are eager to pounce on you?" The touch of jealousy in her voice amused him a lot and excited him to the utmost. He used his cocky tone to provoke her.

"You see, sweetheart, I'm a very irresistible man. Even you, the most beautiful girl in the world, are jealous because of me. But if you shave me, perhaps the others will not have their eyes on me any more and you won't have to fight with them for my favours."

"Ah, such a relieve I won't have to fight for your favours. And, with whom I'm supposed to fight for you? Am I going to find a line of rivals in front of the door?" Sansa had pushed him onto the carpet and was straddling him.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 339

Meereen: Month 2. Day 9

"It's possible," he boasted, laughing. "Oh, Sansa!" A deep moan arose from his throat when she lowered his pants in a yank and rode him all of a sudden. But she remained still and said: "You're mine. Only mine. No other women can compete with me, you understand?"

"I'm yours, Sansa. Only yours. The others have nothing to do, gorgeous. Let them fight each other." He had grasped her breasts, smiling lustfully, and he was tracing the outline of her erect nipples which stood out beneath the wool of the dress.

"No, they have nothing to do. Because none of them would fuck you as well as I do," she stated, moving upon him.

"Oh, of course they wouldn't. You're my goddess." Tyrion, very aroused by the game of provocation and jealousy, was being carried away to paradise.

Soon afterwards, the two of them were crying out of pleasure and laughing, panting on the carpet. Later Tyrion went out to request some hot water. Sansa searched for the bar of soap and the razor blade, and when Mhyraz came with the water and left again, Tyrion sat down with the towel on his shoulders. She lathered with the soap and the hot water and covered his beard with the soapy mixture.

"You know, don't move. You want to keep all the parts of your face, don't you?"

"Yes, if possible. If that doesn't bother you very much." He was looking at her with his eyes flashing with amusement, mockery and desire.

"Oh, it costs me the same effort, whether if I slice something or not." Sansa was already gliding the sharp blade along his skin with extreme care and precision, and she was grinning.

"You enjoy yourself a lot with that thing in your delicate hands, eh?" Tyrion was relaxing with the soft touch of her fingers and the hiss of the blade. But his crotch had returned to restlessness due to her closeness.

"The truth is that I do. It gives me a feeling of power," Sansa admitted.

"Dear me. Finally you're going to take a liking to train with weapons." Leena and she had started to receive lessons in self-defense and handling daggers with Pod, and Sansa had discovered that she did not dislike it as much as she had believed. In truth, she liked to stop feeling so helpless as a baby. To everyone's surprise, and herself too, she proved that she was not so inept and her hands barely shook. Even Leena had more trouble than her.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Sansa always had condemned weapons and she was very afraid of them. But something had changed within her since her stay in King's Landing. She had loathed feeling so weak and being unable to defend herself. When chaos unleashed in the streets of the capital and those three men chased and harassed her, the situation would have been different if she had known how to defend herself and if she had possessed a weapon. At least she could have stood up to them.

"I've told you some time. I don't want to be a victim ever again. I don't want to feel anymore like a puppet in anyone's hands. The trainings with Pod help me to gain confidence in myself. And our daughters won't feel defenseless as I felt since my father was arrested and sentenced. They'll learn how to fight since very soon. They won't grow up inside a bubble of over-protection like me. The world changes constantly and life takes many turns, and we have to be ready to cope with those changes. I was educated as if Winterfell were untouchable and peace were endless. But all that is a lie. Peace doesn't last forever." There was a hint of harshness in her soft voice and Tyrion did not know if feeling proud of the she-wolf that nested in her and that each passing day was revealed with growing confidence, or if feeling sad for all the innocence she had lost along the way. He decided that he liked much more Sansa's development into a woman much stronger, determined and sharper.

As I'm alive and stay beside her, this rebellious cock won't ever stop getting stiff like a mast.

"You're completely right, darling. Peace doesn't last forever. We only can be lucky enough to enjoy peacetime while we are in this world. And that's why I'm fighting by Daenerys' side. Only for that, plain and simple," he said, looking her in the eye.

"I know. Me too." Sansa smiled at him with all her love and her admiration reflected on her pale irises. His cock leapt again.

"How do you think Jon is managing as the new Lord Commander? We haven't received any more news of him since we were reported that he was elected," she commented.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 341

Meereen: Month 2. Day 9

Several days ago, in a private meeting with the queen, Tyrion among other things had found out that the young bastard boy had been the candidate most voted. Daenerys had considered telling him immediately, out of deference to Sansa too, for being a half sister of Jon Snow. In that meeting Tyrion had been reported other things of great relevance, and soon another Council meeting would be celebrated to discuss carefully those matters, when the official mourning for the deceased from measles ended and the usual tasks were resumed. The funerals had been officiated solemnly in the Temple of Graces and the massive procession had accompanied the late-lamented babies and old people to their place of last rest in the consecrated fields. Daenerys had decreed the three regulatory days so people could mourn their dead ones, and because of that the market remained closed and the usual bustle of the streets had been reduced considerably.

"I'm sure he'll be a good Commander, but not for anything in the world would I like to be in his skin. He has some avowed enemies among the crows, and he's not going to contribute to win much sympathy with his open defense of the Free Folk. Jon is doing something which doesn't have precedents in the history of the Night's Watch, I mean, to regard the people beyond the Wall as equals to those who live south of the Wall. He's trying to help them to cross so they can escape from the threat of the White Walkers. And that's not well seen in Castle Black. He's going to meet fierce opposition. It's very difficult to change an ideology which had been stuffed into the minds of the black brothers for thousands of years."

Sansa stopped for a moment the movement of the blade, engrossed in her thoughts and biting her lip. Tyrion felt his erection pressing more urgently against his trousers and he held back with an effort, in order not to grab his young woman by her hips, push her onto the carpet and stab his cock between her thighs offhandedly.

"I understand Jon perfectly. The Free Folk are so human as the Westerosi and everybody else. He has lived together with them and has learnt to respect them, though the truth is that my brother has never been prone to despise people from the start. He knows what it means to be prejudged and so he doesn't judge lightly. He'll fight for the survival of everyone who can be saved, no matter what side of the Wall they come from. The worst is that the Watch only takes into account the survival of the Westerosi. When it was stipulated that the rest of the people was left out of its protection?," Sansa asked, frowning.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 2. Day 9

"It was not so simple, Sansa. At first the institution was founded to protect the continent from the attacks of the White Walkers, and your ancestor Bran the Builder constructed the Wall to prevent new invasions. The intention probably wasn't to abandon to their fate the people who were left isolated in the Lands of Always Winter, but that was what happened, and the Free Folk took it the wrong way. The attempts to climb the Wall began, as well as the clashes between the Watch and the people who wanted to cross and finally it was declared the war that has lasted for thousands of years. The White Walkers have been asleep during such a long time that the Watch had forgotten their existence, and their main goal did not consist any more in defending the kingdoms against those monsters, but in repelling the Free Folk. I even doubt that the majority of the black brothers see the wildlings as human beings," Tyrion reasoned, while Sansa resumed her task with the blade.

"Then Jon isn't breaking any law of the Watch. Its function consists simply in protecting people," she said.

"Well, let's see how he manages to make his enemies of Castle Black see it. Precisely, Sansa, we're talking about one of the main reasons of wars: the bad blood which lasts for generations and generations, which festers so deeply within that they're very difficult to remove. Our families are an example of it. When have the Lannisters and the Starks ever got along? Contempt and hatred are seeds which germinate very fast and grow like weeds. Rarely members of your house and mine have been next to each other without a conflict in the way. It's a question of prejudices, as you yourself said before. It's something irrational which persists for decades and centuries. That you and I respect and love at each other is something exceptional in the history of our houses, but we've seen that it's not impossible. Jon can make a difference in the Watch. He could achieve that they remember little by little that their goal is to defend human lives and not to destroy them, wherever they come from."

"I sincerely hope that he accomplishes that. He also has very good friends who will help him," Sansa pointed.

"Yes, he has. Let's hope that they support him when it comes to the crunch. Is it done? Have you finished?" Tyrion touched his cheek, already free of facial hair.

"It's done," she nodded, removing the towel from his shoulders and cleaning the razor blade. "You were right, you look younger. But I'll miss the possibilities your beard offered me."

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 343

Meereen: Month 2. Day 9

He made her sit onto his lap and encircled her waist with his arms.

"I can let it grow any other moment, when I fancy you tugging at it and when I want to tickle you with it. I think that it has pleasured you quite a lot, hasn't it?"

Sansa felt her sex throbbing and wet upon the hard bump on his crotch.

"Yes. And now I want you to make me enjoy again, with or without a beard," she blurted, straddling him and enclosing him with her legs.

"It will be a pleasure, my hot wife," he said, without losing a single second.

"What about carrying out the bet tomorrow?," she asked when they had just culminated, lying beside him on the carpet and panting.

"Great. Tomorrow will be the last day of the official mourning and we don't have to go anywhere. It'll be the ideal moment to spend the day fucking. Actually, there won't be a great difference with a normal day, don't you believe?" Tyrion was smiling and tickling slightly her back.

"Yes, I do, in truth. Anyway we already spend more than half a day fucking," she admitted, completely relaxed between his arms.

"You're right. We've been training a lot. The deal of tomorrow is going to be easy peasy."

Suddenly, Tyrion made a grimace of displeasure. "Oh, but there will be a drawback. We don't have Dornish wine. How will we carry out the bet with that disgusting Ghiscari horror?"

"In fact that won't influence anything, because it won't be necessary to drink the wine until the bet is over and we check who has won. We can delay it until Gilean comes back with the supplies. And maybe by then I might be pregnant, and therefore it wouldn't be advisable that I drink alcohol," she added, looking at him with her cheeks reddened by her emotion.

"Yes, you might be pregnant. You stopped drinking the moon tea twelve days ago. It's very possible. Only for that I'll exempt you from drinking the jug of wine. For now." He tickled her side and smiled at her wickedly.

Sansa squirmed to get rid of his fingers and burst in laughter.

"Why do you think it's me who will drink the jug?," she protested.

He tickled her more and she struggled to stand up, cackling.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 2. Day 9

"Because I have the intention to leave your skin raw and make you beg me to stop. My cock isn't going to surrender so easily. It knows very well what it loses if it surrenders." Tyrion sat on the carpet, staring at her in her glorious nakedness with lecherous eyes.

"Maybe it will be you who begs," she challenged, turning her back provocatively. The sight of her shining red mane down her back, the dimples on her lower back, her buttocks and her long legs were a wonder that he would never get tired of looking at. He also stood up, still grinning, and picked up his clothes from the floor.

At night, in bed, relaxed after having made love once more, they brought up the topic of the revolt of the Yunkai's slaves. They at last had received reports telling that there was a massive uprising throughout the city and the great majority of the Wise Masters, as well as many other rich people who possessed slaves, had been slaughtered. The members of the noble and rich families who had not been murdered, were thrown out and abandoned to their fate in the barrens of the wild. Lots of them would die prey to starvation, thirst and tiredness, and others would be captured by bandits and slavers in the best case. They only had a choice if they wanted to survive: to debase themselves to beg for asylum in Meereen or Astapor, and in both cities slavery had been abolished, so, even though they were admitted, the exiles would be social outcasts who could not have a dignified place anywhere. The freedfolk would mistrust them and they would not be allowed to live together with them in the camps or in other freedfolk's settlements, and the Good Masters and the Great Masters already had enough trouble having lost their position of power and privilege. Besides, Daenerys would no permit new collusions or alliances between noble slavers. The newcomers would have to prove that they embraced openly the new order if they wanted to find a respectable place. And if they refused to do that, the only thing remaining for them was to wander in the wilderness.

"It must have been terrible, Tyrion. Yunkai surely is a wreck again. How many innocent people are dead or have lost everyone and everything?" Sansa said, saddened.

"A high number of them. We knew that it would happen. The slaves knew it too when they decided to fight. They have chosen to pay that price. A very high price, that's true. But they have preferred it instead of going on chained. It's the first time they've been able to choose, and they have done it." Tyrion caressed her cheek, with a melancholic expression. "It's terribly harsh, I'm aware, Sansa. Many of them haven't even enjoyed the freedom they have fought for. Lots of children must have fallen, victims of a war for which they weren't to blame in the least. I'm not proud of it, because nobody wins wars. Everyone always loses in one way or another. Sometimes I wonder if it would've been better to leave things as they were and..." Tyrion left the rest of the sentence unfinished. "Well, it's done."

"To leave things as they were wouldn't have been the solution either, Tyrion. We couldn't close our eyes and pretend that nothing was happening. The queen couldn't have done that. What for they would call her Breaker of Chains?" Sansa also put her hand on his cheek, soft and perfectly shaved. They were looking at each other's eyes, and in their gazes floated the same sadness.

"In a matter of a few days the groups of surviving freedfolk will start to arrive in here. Probably many have stayed in Yunkai to rebuild it, but others surely have felt attracted to the aura of the Mother of Dragons and they'll come to live here. Very soon we'll celebrate a Council meeting to
discuss the issue and decide if we have to reinforce the lines of action we adopted in past meetings. We ignore how many freedfolk will come during the next weeks, but we should be ready for thousands of them."

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)

"Yes. But we'll cope with them. The fighting arenas are providing the city with plenty of profits and they're making up for the losses of the market. When it at last was recovering from the fire disaster, it has been closed again for three days due to the victims of measles. But little by little we'll get by."

"I'm sure we will, my love. With you here to help the queen, I feel safe and have full confidence that we'll get by," she said.

"With a girl like you by my side... How can a husband who is at least half a man fail?," he inquired grinning, referring to one of his nicknames, Halfman.

"Then imagine the possibilities of a whole man," she joked.

"Oh, many possibilities." He kissed her and he began to feel hot and hard once more against her warm and soft body. "Do you believe that your ancestors approve everything which happens in this bedroom, gorgeous?," he asked, teasing, pointing with his head to the large tapestry of House Stark that was hanging above the headboard.

"Of course they approve. Why wouldn't they want to see one of their descendants happy? Especially after the horrors which have devastated the family recently."

"They'd better. Because anyway they'll have to put up with it, whether they like it or not. Their descendant is mine," he asserted, possessive and with his naughty grin. He placed himself between her legs and they had sex once again.

Before sleep, they agreed on the terms of the bet.

"Will there be breaks between one session and another? Will we have short times of chats while we recover? And for the record, I'm not asking that because I think I'm going to give up. It's simply that maybe you'll need a little mercy," he suggested, provocative.

"You're the one who'll need it, boastful man. But well, we'll let the day be developed such as it presents itself. I suppose that some short whiles of chats won't hurt us. And by the way you'll have time to recover for the following round. I don't want you to give in too soon. What would I do with you for the rest of the day?," provoked Sansa.

Tyrion put himself upon her and immobilized her against the mattress.

"As a punishment for your insolence I might grip you against the bed like I'm doing right now and don't let you move while I plunge myself into you during the entire day. How about it? And that would make me be the winner, I reckon."

Sansa laughed under his iron claw, very aroused.

"Oh, you might do it. But you wouldn't hold on for the whole day, oldie."

"I'm tempted to start right now, impertinent woman. With you it'll be difficult to wait until
Sansa laughed again, looking at his intensely green eyes, which were sparkling with wickedness.

"All right, all right, my impatient man. The bet will start when we wake up tomorrow morning and it'll last until dinnertime. You agree with that, my oldie?"

"And when Mhyraz appears with breakfast, I'll tell him not to come back to fetch the things of any meal he brings throughout the day, so we'll be interrupted as little as possible. He can leave here a bucket with water and we'll wash the dishes by ourselves when we can."

"And he can take Ray with him for the whole day. He misses him more since Menelan has stopped being confined to bed thanks to his improvement and he has moved to Missandei's rooms," she proposed. To everyone's surprise, the boy was resisting tenaciously and had astonished the maester who was tending to him, who could not believe that a child who a few days ago was practically near death had got better so spectacularly. Other children who had been healthier than him had died. Undoubtedly, Menelan had a will to live which surpassed any medical knowledge and medicine, even of the best maesters. Since Missandei and Grey Worm had adopted him as a son and he had gone to live with his new mother, he felt so happy that it probably gave him strength.

"Great. Then it's official. Tomorrow early it will be open season," he insinuated, licking her nipples and pressing with his cock between her thighs.

"Oh, of course it will be open," she moaned, giving in once more before the both of them fell asleep as lead.
Tyrion woke up just before dawn and his crotch immediately turned over when he remembered what the plans of that day were. Completely hardened and eager to start, he smiled widely and got out of bed carefully. He relieved himself, washed himself up and took some objects which he had put away, wrapped in pieces of cloth, into one of the drawers that were barely used. Sarik had got them for him and, true to his discretion, he had not made any comment, though he knew perfectly what for the small counselor wanted them. Sarik had ordered them to a carver good friend of him without telling him for whom they were. For sure the puzzled craftsman never had been told to make such an unusual order.

Tyrion knew that there were sex toys because he had used them sometimes in brothels that offered a wider and more imaginative range of varieties, which served him to experience new ways to give pleasure. They generally were made of ivory or polished bone and they used to have elongated and rounded shapes, imitating the shape of the penis. Some of them were so realistic that they fully looked like male members with all their details. There were also some toys that a few women used to stimulate themselves while they made their normal lives. They consisted of several balls joined by silk thread, which were introduced into the vagina and could be carried for hours. The constant movement of the balls in the most intimate and sensitive areas of women kept them in a state of arousal which predisposed them more for sex. Tyrion had known prostitutes who used them during their hours of rest so it was less disagreeable to bed a queue of strangers every night.

He had tried too a type of rings which were put around the basement of the penis and that increased the pleasant sensation because they stimulated the clitoris directly during penetration. Tyrion had ordered one fit for the thickness of his cock. It had been a little awkward to explain to Sarik the exact measurement of the ring, but it had to adapt perfectly to his member, so it was not loose or too tight.

The carver had made all those objects for him. They were flawlessly polished and smoothed, as they should not have any roughness in order not to hurt the intimate parts. The elongated toy did not have the exact shape of a penis, because Tyrion did not dare to ask for that, but its tip was rounded and its size was about his own cock, which was not exactly small. Dwarfism did not affect his crotch in the slightest, and he felt secretly proud of that part of his body. Well, not so secretly. Sansa knows very well my great fondness for my cock.

The balls were two perfect spheres the size of his own glans. Though Sansa could not use them that day, because he obviously would keep filled almost all the time the conduct into which they were introduced, they would be useful any other other day, and Tyrion's erection shot up in his breeches when he thought about the many possibilities those balls would provide them with onwards. Every time they were carrying out their daily tasks, she would feel excited by the extra stimulation in her insides, and he could not stop thinking of the balls within her... Gods. That's all I needed, he thought, smiling.

The ring was thick and, when he penetrated her, it would hit softly the external areas of her vulva and he hoped that it made her experience a higher pleasure. Perhaps he even would manage to make her finish without touching her with his fingers. He would have to try it and see if it worked.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 2. Day 10

He had kept all those objects in the pieces of cloth. He had washed them scrupulously and they awaited temptingly. Tyrion was sure that Sansa had never heard a single word of sex toys like those. *I bet that her septa would've fainted if any time she had found out about the existence of these sinful objects,* he thought sarcastically.

Anyway, they were not of common use or easy to get, as their aim was to make women enjoy, and most men did not even take into account that side of sexual intercourse: pleasing their bed partners. So... Why bother to get those pieces of junk?

For Tyrion they had been a revelation, not only because he had always felt the need to offer reciprocation in sex, but because for him a satisfied woman, or that at least pretended to be satisfied, was important to increase his own pleasure.

The place where he had been shown those objects for the first time had been the brothel of Lannisport where he met Ketty, a prostitute he was nearly sure to have fallen in love with, although he did not want to analyze his feelings. Some weeks after the trauma of his first marriage, he frequented the brothels practically every day, and he met Ketty, a clever and sweet girl, with curly and blond hair and very generous breasts. He soon took to visit her, as with her he not only found relief from his physical needs, but he felt comfortable by her side. They talked a lot, sometimes they limited themselves to chat for hours, and the deep bitterness which had nested in him diminished to endurable levels when he was in the bedroom with that unaffected girl who listened to him and understood him, or at least she faked it very convincingly, better than the other girls. One night she took something out of her nightstand and showed it to him. She very soon had realized that he liked pleasing her in bed though she did not ask him for it, and then she dared to propose that they added those whatsits to their relations. They were an oddity for the scarce clients who, like Tyrion, were fond of trying new and creative things. He immediately began to make the most of them and he wanted to believe that Ketty really enjoyed when he used them with her. His inner voice did not let him knock down totally the barrier of skepticism and he resisted to admit that she gave herself to him with total surrender. *Whores don't give themselves, they only offer the part of themselves which is available for rent. How could they bear that job otherwise?* Even so, he did not mind deceiving himself with the illusion that, during those encounters in which he applied with her those skills he was achieving, he truly made her enjoy. Until Ketty left the brothel to marry. Tyrion had missed her much more than he dared to concede.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 348

Meereen: Month 2. Day 10

He also had bought a small assortment for Shae. She had laughed incredulously when he showed it to her and he explained to her what the use of those things was. It was evident that the poor girl had never been with a man who felt concerned about her pleasure, as she did not have the slightest idea that those objects existed. She quickly stopped laughing as soon as they tried them. And since then, they always were near her.

The day Sansa and Tyrion started to joke and defy one another with the sex bet, he decided that she would have those toys and he would gift them to her by surprise. Just thinking of the possibilities which opened for them both in the torridity of their intense sexual attraction made him shiver with joy. He could hardly wait to surprise Sansa and observe her reactions. He would blindfold her and she would tremble when she felt the touch of ivory on her skin and she would ask him what that was. And Tyrion would keep her intrigued a little more, without stopping caressing her...

*For all the hells. I hope that she wakes up right now or I'll start the bet fucking her while she's still asleep.*

In order to distract himself, he prepared the bedroom for the occasion. He took the blindfolds and other long strips of cloth and put them on his nightstand, hid the toys in the drawer, besides he placed within reach the jugs of wine, water and honey, and he had the idea to spread on the bed a handful of flower petals from the scant gardens in Meereen, which Sansa sometimes liked to put in the rooms to decorate them a bit more and perfume them slightly with their fresh aroma. He also made sure that the washbasin stayed close to the brazier, so the water was not cold. Probably, after some consecutive rounds, they would have to wash themselves up before carrying on. *However I wouldn't mind fucking her without letting her just a moment to wash herself up. She always drives me very horny any way. Even thinking about the sweat on her skin and the wetness of her slit drives me crazy. But I suppose that she will want to tidy herself up, she likes to be neat. Though with this husband she has, so devoted to the exchange of body fluids with her, it's difficult that she can be spotlessly clean while she remains alone with me. We like too much sweating together on the sheets and I adore to spill my seed inside or upon her. Nothing of that is very clean.*

He prepared the rest of the scene, placing cushions on the carpet and dragging closer the low chair onto which they sometimes fucked. They still had some reserves of Dornish wine, which Tyrion had intended to keep for the occasion. It would be much funnier and exciting if Sansa got tipsy, because her lack of inhibition would increase. *And it's not as if at this stage she is precisely shy with me,* he thought, wickedly. He would make her drink some cups during the day, only two or three, in case Sansa was pregnant already, as not for all the world he would do something which harmed the baby. That would be enough to exhaust the scant wine they had left, and afterwards they would not have a single droplet to pay the bet, if it was Tyrion who lost, because if it was Sansa who lost, she anyway would have to wait to pay it until she was sure there was no pregnancy or, if there was, until after the baby was born. In any case, they would wait until Gilean returned with a new shipment of the prized liquor.

*(Part 3 of a longer chapter)*
Meereen: Month 2. Day 10

He checked that Ray was still sleeping in his basket and he got into bed again. The movement of the mattress awoke Sansa and she yawned and stretched toward him, encircling him with an arm and smiling at him with her eyes slightly swollen with sleep.

"You're always lovely when you're just awake. Good morning, gorgeous," he greeted, kissing her. "Start getting ready. You know what day it's today."

"I know it very well, my eager husband. This is the day you're going to lose," she said, challenging.

"So that's the game, is it? Very well, I was willing to have a little mercy on you, but I've just changed my mind." He placed himself upon her and immobilized her. "Tomorrow you'll hardly be able to move. You have no idea of what is going to fall on you." And with that said, he tied quickly a strip of cloth around one of her wrists and then he did the same with the other wrist. She tried to fidget around, laughing, but he managed to tie the strips to the bars of the headboard, leaving her at his mercy.

"Now you're totally mine. I'm going to blindfold you, to make you suffer a bit more, my impertinent wife." And in one swift movement he surrounded her head with the blindfold and knotted it behind.

"So foul play, eh? I'll take revenge later," she threatened, breathing faster.

"That's if you can take revenge. Right now you're not in a position of advantage, sweetie. I might keep you this way for as long as I please."

He lifted her nightgown and pulled it up above her head. As he could not take it off her because she was tied, he left it curled on the pillow, attached to her arms. Underneath it she was completely naked. Like him, she had acquired the habit of sleeping without underwear.

"You belong to me. When I have devoured you alive today, you'll be begging me, before the day is over." Tyrion took out of the drawer the elongated toy and put it on Sansa's mouth, who reacted with surprise. The hard, cool and soft touch of that object was new for her, but she hung tough and continued with her rebellious attitude, to fan the flame of their sexual game a little more.

"I won't, ever. What makes you think I'm going to beg?" There was a defiant smile on her lips and Tyrion felt tempted to bite them and dart his tongue into her until taking her breath away, but he held back. He had planned to begin with other type of caresses.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 350

Meereen: Month 2. Day 10

"That tonight you'll hardly be able to move," he declared, shifting the ivory object over her face, and sliding it insistently above her lips. Later he lowered it towards her breasts and groped for her nipples, which were erect like small squealers which gave away their owner's desire. "Oh, these nipples. Do you know they're betraying you? They're begging for a glorious fuck." He stimulated them with the toy and he felt a shiver through her, who was starting to forget her fake resistance. Sansa threw her head back and sighed.

"What's that thing, Tyrion? Are you cheating again?" she asked, gasping when he made the soft thing go down her belly to her pubis.

"Cheating is allowed. Or have you forgotten?" He did not answer to the question about the toy deliberately, to leave her intrigued. She jerked up a little when she felt the object on her clit.

"Your cheating will turn against you. Later it will be you who'll beg." She moaned audibly. The object was rubbing her folds and the dampness impregnated it instantly.

"Oh, sweetie. Your cunt betrays you too. You're so wet. How is it that a rebel wolf like you can be so drenched between the legs?" And he immediately introduced the toy carefully, partway. She moved her hips instinctively, inviting him to continue, and Tyrion pushed it to the end. He pulled it softly to take it out some inches, and he pushed it inside once more.

"You like it, don't you? You want more?" He sped up the movement, still avoiding to touch the clit.

"Oh," she moaned. "What's that, Tyrion?" Curiosity got the best of her.

"Something which will make you cry out in pleasure beneath my hands. Do you know that sex toys exist, Sansa?" He went on moving it within her, implacable.

"Sex toys?" She was panting and moving her hips.

"Yes, honey. They're a sort of devices designed for making sex a little more imaginative and they help to increase pleasure, especially women's pleasure. Today I intend to try them with you. They're a present for you," he explained, taking a little pity on her and rubbing the clit with his fingers while he carried on penetrating her with the toy.

"Oh. Who taught you to use them? Did you pleasure many girls with them?" The unmistakable tone of jealousy inflamed him.

"Ketty taught me, that girl in the brothel of Lannisport with whom I nearly fell in love and who married another. She showed them to me when she realized that my wish of pleasing her in bed was honest. She kept them for odd clients like me. And yes, I pleased a few girls with that sort of things, or I tried at least."

"Was she very beautiful? Do you dream of her still?" That question surprised him. The truth was that some years ago he had dreamed of her many times, but he did not remember to have done it since a long while.

He sometimes dreamed of Shae. In his dreams she was so defined as when he had her beside him.
He saw her lithe, strong and slim body, with her skin lightly tanned, her small breasts with dark nipples and her black hair between her legs. But when he took her to bed, he felt guilty and he told her to stop, and Shae got angry and stormed away banging the door. Or she somehow changed into Sansa between his arms and then he felt more than happy to fuck her.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 2. Day 10

"Yes, she was beautiful. With golden blond hair, like many people in the Westerlands. And she had the most striking tits I had seen until then. But I haven't dreamt of her for an eternity until now. Or so I think," he added, to needle Sansa a bit. The truth was that, since he was sleeping soundly, he often did not remember what he dreamed. Those nights he may have dreamt that he took part in an orgy in any brothel; in the mornings, after a deep and restful sleep alongside Sansa, there was no image remaining from those kind of dreams, if he had them. However, he used to remember the nightmares vividly, especially those in which Sansa went back to her times of sufferings in King’s Landing. Luckily, they assailed him rarely.

Tyrion had slowed down the movement of the toy inside of her and of his fingers on her clit, to extend her pleasure.

"Ah. So you think? Do you dream of your girls frequently? Do you miss them?" Her menacing voice amused and aroused him a lot at the same time. And it touched him too, as always.

"It's been an eternity since they're not my girls. And... Do I give you the impression of missing them, gorgeous?"

"I don't know, Tyrion. I haven't been with anyone else besides you. How can I know what it means to miss other lovers?" She pronounced that question with a tone of provocation which shot up the erection that was threatening with tearing his trousers.

"And you won't know, because you're mine, and you'll be until I die, and that will happen when I'm a wrinkled old guy, I'm determined to achieve it, as I'm not going to detach from you. No other man would love you the way I do. No other man would adore your body like me, he wouldn't know each curve, each inch of your divine skin. No other guy would know exactly everything you like, everything which makes you quiver and which drives you crazy. You don't have to miss anyone else, like I don't miss anyone else, you understand, Sansa? Absolutely anyone. I haven't loved anyone the way I love you. Not even Tysha. By then I was a naïve and inexperienced adolescent. Now I know perfectly who I have in my arms. I know perfectly how you are. You are the most amazing woman I've ever met. And I've come across hundreds of women perhaps. I've fucked all of them, and with you I've forgotten completely how it was to be with them. I don't even recall the majority of them." Tyrion was overexcited and his heart was beating fast, but he would not touch her with his cock yet, at least until the next round.

"Kiss me, Tyrion," she asked, with her voice husky. He did not have to be asked twice and sank his tongue into her mouth and devoured her lips. They moaned together and then Tyrion, without separating his mouth from hers, pulled the toy out and he made it swirl around her hypersensitive clit. Sansa reached her climax, crying out against his lips, arching and shivering. She tugged the cloths which tied her to the headboard, in an instinctive reflex. He held her firmly until the waves of completion stopped and Sansa dropped onto the mattress, relaxed and smiling. Tyrion immediately removed the blindfold from her eyes and untied her wrists, kissing her once more with devotion.

(To be continued)
Chapter 352

Meereen: Month 2. Day 10

"It's been amazing, Tyrion. I've really believed I was flying to the sky," Sansa said, gasping and recovering from her crushing climax. "Those toys truly work," she confirmed, grinning. "But that doesn't mean that you've won any round yet. Don't start to get boastful, I know you. It's still a long day ahead and there are many rounds left. And the bet isn't won or lost until someone accepts defeat, no matter how many times we fuck."

"Perfect. Let's begin with the second shag then." Tyrion undressed completely, as he had not taken out his night clothes yet, and he turned his back to Sansa so she did not see that he was taking the ivory ring out of the drawer.

"What have you taken out of the drawer? Another toy?," she asked, trying to see what it was, but he concealed it in his palm.

"Don't be impatient, my lady. All in due time. You like pleasant surprises, don't you?" He climbed onto bed once more and pushed her softly so she lied down again. He placed himself between her legs and surreptitiously slid the ring to the basement of his member, covering it with his hand.

"You know I love your surprises," said Sansa, curious.

Tyrion lied above her, resting his hands on the mattress. That way Sansa could not see his cock, which was rubbing her vulva to moisten it more.

"Then get ready for another surprise, gorgeous. Are you ready then?" He put his tip on her entrance.

"I always am," she affirmed, sensual and challenging.

He entered her and, as always, both of them sighed because of the sensation. It was wonderful to introduce oneself into those insides.

Then he started to thrust deeply, without touching her with his fingers, and Sansa immediately noticed something different.

"Oh! What's that you have put on you?" A hard object was pressing repeatedly against her clit every time he lunged into her.

"You like it, do you? Is it all right this way? What pace do you prefer?" He was moving over her and inside of her looking into her eyes.

"A bit faster. Yes, like this," moaned Sansa. He discovered that he could go on penetrating her barely unsticking the thick ring from her skin, so pleasure was sustained and progressive for them both.

"You think you'll be able to finish without me touching you with my fingers? Tell me exactly how you want me to move," he requested.

"Keep it up. You're doing great," she assented, smiling.

"Caress your tits, Sansa. Do it as I would. I want to see you." She obeyed and caressed herself. He
accelerated a bit more, rubbing the ring against her.

"Tyrion, I feel I'm near the end," announced Sansa, haltingly. "Carry on moving that way."

"Of course I'll do, my love. I want to feel you. Will you finish for me?" He was panting too. The tension and flush on her body were announcing her imminent explosion.

"Yes!," she shouted, erupting under him. She squeezed him with her legs and encircled him with her arms, convulsing and moving her hips frantically.

He gave free reign to his own burst and he shuddered against her, closing his eyes in pure delight.

After awaiting some seconds to catch his breath, Tyrion moved aside and removed the ring so Sansa could see it.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 353

Meereen: Month 2. Day 10

She took it to examine it and she suddenly blushed. "Where did you buy these things? You had to order them expressly to someone. I don't think they're sold in any stall of the market."

He offered her an apologetic smile.

"I asked Sarik to order them to one of the craftsmen, without telling him for whom they were or what they were for. I explained to him how they had to be exactly and what their accurate measurements had to be. Sarik is a discreet man and, although he guessed the purpose of the order, he didn't ask questions. I know him and therefore I entrusted it to him. I'd have never put anything concerning our sexual intimacy before the nose of someone gossipy or evil-minded, Sansa. Moreover, the person who made these things doesn't even know for whom he made them."

"Oh, I'm not reproaching you anything, my love. I know you'd have never been indiscreet or careless as regards our intimacy. Though I suppose that the whole city knows our activities in the bedroom. I imagine that only in the lowest of the underground levels of the pyramid our cries are not heard." She was stroking his chest, grinning.

"Yes, maybe they're not heard in those levels," he corroborated, mocking. "But I have the intention to make them be heard even over there." He gave her his lewd smile.

"Then you'll have to exert yourself more, my lord. There's still a long part of the day remaining ahead of us," she insinuated.

He was completely hardened once again.

"Mmm, that sounds great. An entire day to make you scream and beg." He placed himself once more between her thighs and grabbed her buttocks with both hands, moving his mouth close to her sex, damp with their fluids.

"I'm not going to beg," she blurted, gasping, as soon as she felt his tongue in her folds.

"You'll do." Tyrion tasted that hot, soaked and intoxicating flesh, and he spoke so the vibration of his voice tickled her. "You'll beg me to stop. You're going to come so many times today that you'll lose count." He introduced two fingers and licked the clit. "But you'll also beg me to go on." He stopped suddenly and looked her in the eye with a wicked flash.

"Oh!," she protested, disappointed by the halt. Just in that moment she was climbing to her supreme pleasure. "I'm not going to beg," she assured, stubborn.

"You'll do," he repeated, licking again and moving his fingers a little inside of her. "Tell me you want me to make you come." He stopped once more.

Sansa smiled defiantly. "I won't."

"It's all right." He counterattacked and stimulated her again, and he moved aside from her all of a sudden.

Sansa emitted a grunt.
"Very well, I don't need you. I'll take care of my own needs." And she started to touch herself in front of him.

Tyrion stared at her with a predatory gaze.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
"You want me between your legs, but you're too proud to admit it. Aren't you?" He leaned forward without touching her, running his eyes over her.

"Go and make some of the other women happy. Didn't you say that you had a queue of candidates in front of your door?"

"You know that you don't want to see me satisfying other women, Sansa. You die of jealousy when you think of it. You want all of this to belong only to you," he provoked.

"Yes, only to me." Sansa gave in, enclosing him and drawing him to her. "Your cock belongs to me, and your mouth, your tongue, your hands, your skin, all of you. Your seed, your pleasure. I want everything from you. You're exclusively mine." She turned him on with her passionate and possessive spontaneity. Tyrion adored when she gave herself that way, when she left behind completely her mask of northern lady to become an ardent she-wolf willing to devour him in the abyss of her insides.

"You belong to me as well entirely, Sansa. No other man has any chance. No one knows how much do you like to feel my tongue in your slit. No one knows how much do you like me to move my fingers like this over your clit." She had stopped touching herself and he had taken over with his fingers. "Actually, many men don't even know that women have a clitoris, or if they know, they don't care. Do you think those men would touch you like I do? Do you think they would care if you enjoy or not?" He had laid down in the same position as before, holding Sansa's bottom and with his mouth mere inches far from her sex.

"They wouldn't. They would only care about their own pleasure," she agreed.

Tyrion slid his hands to her breasts.

"Do you want me to devour you, Sansa? You only have to say it. No other man would be such a devoted lover as I am."

"Come on, devour me at once. We both are craving for it."

He did not have to be asked twice and applied to the task enthusiastically.

"Say you like it."

"I love it, Tyrion. You know it drives me crazy that you do it." Sansa was moving her hips and was grasping his hair, holding him against her ardent and throbbing core.

"I know, Sansa." He was looking her in the eye, with his mouth submerged in her.

"How could not love you any girl to whom you did this, Tyrion? It's wonderful. I'm sure that it disgusts to most men to perform it, or they're too proud to do it. Surely they think it's a sign of weakness and degradation, that if they perform it everybody will believe that they are weak and that they submit to women's will." She was panting while she spoke. He loved those moments in which she became so talkative, rapturous with pleasure.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 355

Meereen: Month 2. Day 10

"Exactly, Sansa. Nearly all men think that." He was speaking against the folds, while he went on licking very slowly, slowing down the pace to follow her game. "But I think that's stupid, and all those dudes lack a prodigious thing in sex: to make a woman enjoy."

"They're selfish. They only care about their own enjoyment. But you're not selfish, Tyrion. At least, not to me. I know how you are. I know you're generous in bed. Because of that I can't believe that not a single girl loved you before me. Excuse me for my stubbornesss, my love. You're the most intelligent man I've met, but I'm sure that you're wrong in that."

He suddenly thought of Tysha. He thought of Shae. And of Ketty, and of some others on whom he had had a crush. Perhaps Sansa was right and some of them had come to love him a little. But that did not matter any more. The only thing that mattered in the world was Sansa, and the fact that she loved him like no other had loved him.

He did not realize that he had tears on his cheeks when he made her cry out his name, with her legs surrounding his head and her soft hands gripping his hair, squeezing him tightly against the most intimate of her body and her soul, wishing to possess him totally, the same as he wished to possess her.

Shortly before lunch, they allowed a truce to each other in order to wash themselves up and get dressed quickly before Mhyraz came. Tyrion persuaded her to toast with a couple of cups of wine and she did not last to feel the effects.

"How do you feel, sweetheart? Very tired?," he provoked.

"No at all. And you?" He had to be pretending he was fine, that was for sure. Even she, after drinking wine and feeling lighter, was beginning to feel that her muscles protested with every movement, and she was half the age of her husband. But not for all in the world Sansa would reveal the slightest sign of tiredness.

"Well, I'm like new. A whole morning of glorious sex with you is the best thing in this world, gorgeous. There's no one as lucky as me." He smiled at her with tenderness, dropping for a moment the provocative mockery in his expression. But soon afterwards he stared at her with renewed mischief. "There is still another gift I haven't shown you."

"Another toy? Have you kept it for later?," she asked, very curious and getting aroused once more, to her own surprise. She was sure that her lower belly would last at least a long while to be ready again, after having fucked several times in a row, and moreover he had devoured her with his mouth and she had devoured him until receiving his seed in her throat.

"Unluckily, we cannot use it today. It's not designed to be used during intercourse," he clarified with a mysterious tone, heading for the drawer of the nightstand.

"Ah, isn't it? What do you use it for, then?," she inquired, puzzled and intrigued.

Tyrion took out the balls and showed them to her.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
"They are designed so you carry them within you while you do your daily tasks, and they stimulate your inner walls in order to make you feel excited and wet for the whole day. That way, when the moment to fuck comes, you're much more well disposed."

Sansa burst in laughter, very flushed and almost scandalized.

"But, Tyrion, I am always well disposed. If I use this, it will be a great effort to me not to pounce on you even in front of the queen. Do you think it's sensible that I carry these balls?"

"Mmm, you should carry them every day. It sounds very tempting that you would pounce on me even in front of Daenerys. You reckon that it would bother her very much? When she lived among the dothraki, she saw that couples used to fuck in public, especially when they celebrated feasts. I'm sure that even she and Drogo did it some time. It wouldn't be odd. Daenerys adapted well to some dothraki customs. She even ate the raw heart of a horse, a tradition that the khaleesis must respect if they want good omens and strength for their children, though it wasn't too useful to her."

Sansa knew about the horse's heart. She did not envision herself eating one without vomiting until throwing her stomach through her mouth.

"You really think that the queen had sex with the khal before other people?" Her cheeks were burning. "How is it that something so intimate can be performed in view of everyone?"

"It depends on the customs of every place, Sansa. Look at the Dornish people, for example. They are very open regarding sex matters. So are the people from The Reach. Why do you think Margaery uses to wear such light gowns? In those places people don't have so many prejudices or taboos. Honestly, I doubt that Margaery was a virgin before marrying Renly, or before marrying Joffrey at least. Or, if she was a maiden, she surely had experienced other forms of sex without penetration. You know those techniques very well, sweetie." Tyrion gazed at her suggestively after saying that. "All in all, for certain cultures sex is something very natural of which one mustn't feel ashamed."

Sansa suddenly asked a question which was going round her head.

"Is it true that in some places it's even normal that people have sex with more than one person at a time?"

Tyrion felt intensely amused with that curiosity of his young and innocent wife (although she was not so any more, thanks to him) towards those topics.

"Even in Westeros a lot of people have it by stealth. Over there it's frowned upon for people to have it openly, so brothels offer services of that kind. More than a few people, especially from important houses, or rich merchants, who are the sort of people who can afford it, request threesomes and orgies to have a good time."

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
"Threesomes and orgies? Is it... sex among several people?"

"Yes. Of both sexes or of one single sex, depending on how the sex groups prefer it."

Sansa looked at him bewildered, and she hesitated. He knew what she was going to ask him and thought that it was better to tell her the truth. After all, all that was water under the bridge and Sansa already knew enough about him so she would not be very surprised with what he might tell her, though the topic bothered her a bit. She was not really jealous of any woman in his past, only a little more of Tysha, but it was normal that she felt uncomfortable thinking about those women.

"Did you have that kind of sex, Tyrion? I know that it's not my business and you don't have to answer if you don't want to. But as I am an infatuated and curious wife, and I had barely a clue of those things until meeting you, I'd like to know a little more about the things people do behind closed doors." She had reddened a lot and he adored the blushing on her cheeks.

"Yes, I had it. Lots of times, in lots of brothels." He also felt a little awkward telling her that, but he owed her the truth. He had not been a faultless man, nor did he want her to believe that he had been one, although Sansa by then knew many things which confirmed that he never was a model guy.

"Were there men in your... orgies any time?," blurted the girl, unable to restrain herself.

"No, Sansa. I've never come to that. Men lack the attributes I like," he declared, teasing.

She took a deep breath before asking the last question, and he noticed that she felt insecure, as she stammered and lowered her eyes to the floor.

"Do you miss that sort of sex? Do you feel fully satisfied only with me?" There was dread in her voice, as if she were expressing a fear that she ignored she had been harbouring. The sweet girl was wondering if she would always be enough for him, Tyrion sensed her doubts. Is it possible that such a beautiful and amazing girl like this is wondering if she is enough for me, for a Lannister dwarf hated and despised by his own blood and by almost everybody in Westeros? That thought filled him with tenderness. He, deeply touched, took her face in his hands and made her look into his eyes.

"Sansa, I've told you many times. You're the most awesome thing that has happened to me in all my life and you fill me completely and even more, to my last corner. I don't miss other women, I don't wish to be with them. Only with you. I don't need anyone else. In those times I did all that because I felt terribly lonely, Sansa. My heart was empty and the only way to distract it a bit was through bedding all those women. But as soon as I had you, I knew I didn't want to be with any other woman. I'm not interested in bedding anybody but you. Who would want to go back to the ordinary when one has tasted the sublime? For me you're sublime."

Relief flooded her pupils and her sudden access of insecurity faded, giving way to joy.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 358

Meereen: Month 2. Day 10

"It's me who fears not being enough for you, darling. I'm going to do whatever necessary to try to deserve you always, Sansa, though I know I don't deserve you. I'll always do everything it takes to be for you more than a halfman."

"Oh, goofy man. For me you are more a whole man than any other would ever be. And now come here. Show me once again what a real man you are before Mhyraz comes."

He gave her a mischievous grin.

"It will be a pleasure, my wife."

And they had intercourse for a few minutes upon the cushions on the carpet. Just when they were peaking, Mhyraz knocked on the door and they had to suppress their cries, laughing like crazy and tidying up their clothes in a rush.

"For the moment it's me who is winning, isn't it?," asked Sansa, cocky, when they were relaxed in bed after another session. "Until now I've finished more times than you, I think. How many times have we finished, by the way? Are you keeping count?" Her sated and satisfied body was gleaming in spite of the sore muscles, but the latter was something she would never admit. She had mocked him too many times calling him oldie. "And don't cheat. I want the actual count."

He tickled her belly softly.

"Let's see. We've fucked five times, so that makes five orgasms for each of us. I've made you finish three more times with my mouth and hands, and you have made me finish in your mouth twice. Altogether, you've come eight times and I've come seven times. I think we have to balance the scales, because I don't want you to start calling me oldie and bragging about it's you who is going to win the bet. So you owe me one, gorgeous."

"Really? A Lannister always pays her debts?," she asked, mocking.

"Exactly. Remember that since you married me you're carrying my surname, so you also have to pay your debts," warned Tyrion, smiling at her with sarcasm.

"Ah. And you think that right now I'm going to kneel between your legs to pay the debt? Why would I have to?" Once again she was playing the game in which she feigned rebelliousness and that turned him on.

"Because it would be unfair that you abused your numerical advantage. And you are an honourable girl."

Sansa straddled him and began to rub herself against his protruding crotch.

"I've married a scoundrel. Now I know how to play foul as well," she whispered between his lips. "If I fuck you this very moment, that would make nine for me and eight for you, and you'd still be losing," she threatened.

"Evil girl. I'm sure you would. But afterwards your bad conscience would chase you." Tyrion
cradled her breasts and hollowed out his hands to adapt them to their size, enchanted by their beauty, as always.

"Yes, I certainly would feel very guilty. My poor husband losing a sex bet. A shame, definitely," she teased, resting herself on the mattress and moving her breasts close to his face.

"One night you'll wake up with a voice whispering by your ear: You owe one to your husband. He's doing his utmost, he pleases you all day long and, for once he asked you for a minor compensation, you denied it to him in order to win a bet." Tyrion could not resist licking a nipple. Perhaps that would instill into her a little guilt.

Sansa faked a gesture of exasperated surrender.

"All right, all right. But afterwards I don't want a single reproach." She moved down.

"I assure you that not a single complaint will escape my lips."

And Sansa paid her debt. Later they used once more the toys to finish together.

At the end of the day, they had tied and, after dinner, they were so tired that they fell asleep almost instantly.

Just before letting themselves be carried along by the sweet lullaby of sleep, Tyrion thought, with a smile on his lips, that later them both would have to share a big jug of Dornish wine.
Meereen: Month 2. Day 11

As it was often his habit, the first light of the incipient dawn found him awake. He liked the peace of that early moment when the day was beginning, promising new hours of love with Sansa and more chances to move his tokens in the game of thrones. He liked staring at her lovely face, submerged into the evasion of sleep, and he imagined that their children would have features resembling hers. Only for that he loved them in advance, thinking about how they would remind him of their beautiful mother, either by the blue of their eyes, or the shape of their noses, of their mouths or faces, the copper of their hair... Or by certain sides of their character. Thinking about a little boy or girl in whom he could see a reflection of the woman of his dreams was for him enough reason to love his son or daughter before he or she had started to grow in his or her mother's womb.

He wondered once more if Tywin had adored the same way even the air Joanna breathed, and if he had loved in advance the children he would have with her, simply for themselves, for being the fruit of tenderness, passion and desire. He wondered if by that time it had influenced him so much the duty to produce the future heir of Casterly Rock or if he only had thought about a child to love, and if he was not yet planning to charge each and every one of his descendants with the slab of each one's mandatory contribution to the tiresome grandeur of house Lannister. But Tyrion doubted that his father would have been less strict or less scheming in anything concerning the perpetuation of his dynasty's power, no matter how much in love he had been with his mother. Since very young Tywin had demonstrated that he was inflexible and ruthless. His youth did not prevent him from annihilating two entire liege houses and forcing his father Tyto's paramour to walk naked along the streets of Lannisport as a punishment for tarnishing the sacred image of the Lord of the Rock and Warden of the West. His hands did not even shake with many other atrocities. No, Joanna was the only one able to soften up the genuine lion of the family, and no one else. Not even his older children, Tyrion knew it. Jaime had told him details about how Tywin treated him and Cersei when their mother was still alive, and not even then he was a close, affectionate or warm father. The twins felt for him a reverential respect and a nearly paralyzing fear, an effect that their mother softened. But Jaime admitted that, since very little, he had felt suffocated by his father's thirst for seeing in him the perfect son, the flawless heir of Casterly Rock, and Jaime became extremely distressed with the perspective of inheriting all that and chaining himself up for life to the most powerful lordship in the Seven Kingdoms. Besides, though Jaime never had confessed it openly to him, Tyrion knew that his eldest brother had no wish to marry, because the only woman he was interested in was Cersei. And if he became the Lord of Casterly Rock, he would have to wed someone Tywin would lumber him with and stay there forever, whereas his sister and lover on her part would wed another man and would leave for other lordship, far from him. Jaime did not conceive life far from her. But it seemed that at present the situation had changed and he was beginning to untie from his fixation for her, at least for the moment. It seemed that his long absence during war had opened his eyes and had interposed something more than a physical distance between them both.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 2. Day 11

After Joanna's death, the process by which Tywin was turning into a stone man had accelerated, and only she had been successful to slow it down. Tyrion was convinced that his father had not loved truly anyone but her in his whole life. Not even his older children. Did he got jealous of them because Joanna loved them more than him? Tyrion had no evidence save for Jaime's rare revelations, Ser Barristan's comments and little more, to know for sure what kind of mother Joanna Lannister had been. Jaime had barely talked about her to him, for fear of the threat that his father had not deprived himself of spreading among all the inhabitants of the castle. Nobody must mention in front of his wife's killer absolutely anything related to her. What would not do a man who had eliminated without a single blink entire lineages if he found out that someone in his own house skipped his orders?

But in spite of the silence that had weighed over everything related to his mother during his childhood, Tyrion knew intuitively that she would have given her life for her children. In fact, she had literally given it for him. And he wanted to believe that she had not born any grudge against him for that.

In some aspects, Tyrion was like Tywin. But in others, he believed he was like Joanna. And besides, what he had wished most in his life was something that he had been short of: to have someone who truly loved him. He always had longed for giving the whole world to that person if she appeared. And she not only had appeared at last, but she offered him the possibility to bring in her belly more people to love him, and who he might love above all.

What was the good of being a cold and pitiless monster as Tywin had been? For making nearly everyone hating him and that nobody remembered him with fondness. Perhaps his brother Kevan had mourned him sincerely, but that was not so difficult considering that Tywin had not suffocated him until stealing all his dreams, nor had he imposed his brother a spouse he detested, or had he put pressure on him to be the lord of Casterly Rock, or had hated and punished him since his birth, like he had done in one way or another to his own children.

Cersei could be claiming for his head of supposed patricide and performing the role of mourner daughter, but she had not shed a single tear for their father. Tyrion was absolutely certain about that.

And with regard to Jaime, he neither imagined him throwing himself onto the patriarch's corpse, broken with pain.

Definitely, Tyrion did not want anything but being loved and remembered with affection, at least regarding the family he had founded with Sansa. The rest of the world mattered to him much less, but even so he liked that people did not look at him as the Demon Monkey.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 361

Meereen: Month 2. Day 11

He was more than eager to take his own children in his arms, pamper them, play with them, laugh with them, show them his fatherly love without restrictions. And to hell with Tywin and everything he had represented. If the dead could fidget in their graves, Tyrion had no qualms about going on giving his dead father enough reasons so he could not enjoy a single moment of rest.

Thinking of his former Lannister family made him remember the news he had received several days ago and the conversation he had maintained with Sansa.

“Cersei has survived the walk of punishment the sparrows sentenced her to, but as it was to be expected she had to endure insults and that people threw all kinds of filthiness to her, and her feet were bloodstained by cuts. It's said that she tried to stay haughty and firm, but in the end the tears were running down her dirty cheeks and she looked like a broken doll.” Tyrion almost had felt pity for her, but then it came to him an image of the poor prostitute Ros whipped and beaten because of Cersei's stupidity, he also recalled how she had looked at Shae during the breakfast on Joff’s wedding day and the venom in her words when she had whispered to their father that that was her brother's whore. It came to his mind as well a harassment of his childhood, among the many he had born. Tyrion might have forgiven Cersei for any other of the countless humiliations to which she had submitted him, but he could not forgive her for that one specifically. When his sixth nameday came, his uncle Gerion, his favourite uncle, had gifted him a beautiful book about dragons, with exquisite illustrations which represented varied specimen of those magestic animals. It was one of the few copies that maester Carlus had made of the book he himself had written and illustrated, thinking about the children of noble houses. It was especially designed for young readers, with an agile and entertaining narration and impressive full-colour, very detailed drawings. Tyrion worshipped his copy, not only because it fed his passion for dragons, but also because of the fact that his uncle was defying Tywin openly by giving gifts to the despicable dwarf in his nameday. The patriarch had forbidden the celebration of that event, because it coincided with the day when his wife had died, killed precisely by the small monster. So Tyrion's birthdays were not even mentioned in the presence of Tywin, but Jaime and Gerion offered him his little party by stealth, giving him presents that Tyrion was extremely careful to conceal from his father's sight. This one, of course, knew about that yearly defiance, but he was too busy in the family mausoleum, sitting for hours before Joanna's tomb, and as long as Tyrion did not dare to rub his presents right on his nose, he turned the blind eye for once, a rare indulgence among the very scant ones the patriarch allowed himself.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 2. Day 11

Tyrion kept that book like a treasure, he stroked it, he opened it with extreme care and spent hours and hours with it in the library, until he practically knew it from beginning to end. The dragons in the illustrations heightened his imagination and he saw himself flying on their backs to incredible places, and then he was not afraid, because it was everyone else who feared him. A single word from him and anybody might end up engulfed in the flames. Just then it came to him suddenly a sentence in the language of the dragons that he had memorized, and which maester Carlus had written below one of the drawings. It was the only sentence the erudite man knew in the ancient language. That language was a dialect which kept many remains of a very primitive tongue, one of the first ones which had appeared in the history of mankind and that had become extinct lots of thousands of years ago, to which had been incorporated some expressions of a language that subsequently resulted in High Valyrian. The former inhabitants of Valyria used that mix to communicate with the dragons when the alliance between these and humans began, and since then it was the only language to which the beasts listened. The tongue evolved in the current valyrian and its derivatives, but the Targaryens went on using the primitive language to control their dragons, as it seemed that there was a sort of magical bond between the old words and the minds of the intelligent beasts. The Targaryens with true dragon blood had the *dragon's tongue* integrated in their memory when they were born, but they had to stimulate it and remember it little by little with the help of their relatives and the maesters who were expert in conveying that knowledge. But with the decline of the Targaryen dynasty and the extinction of dragons, no maester dedicated himself any more to study that discipline, and Daenerys, after losing nearly all her family and fleeing to exile, had not had anyone to teach her. Tyrion knew that she was trying to search for a maester with knowledge on the language, with no result until then. She also hoped to find at least a copy of the book *The dragon's tongue* by maester Byloth, the only work written about the language which controlled the dragons magically.

Tyrion, doing a momentary pause in his conversation with Sansa, had noted down the sentence in the ancient language on a piece of paper in order not to forget it and show it to Daenerys later. It was possible that it helped her to spur her memory.

He had told Sansa about the book Gerion gifted him and what Cersei did to him.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 2. Day 11

He was reading it in the library, as usual. He had hidden its existence from his sister, because he feared what she was able to do. He endured her little daily tortures with self-possession, but that book was his treasure. And, of course, he was only six years old and she was several years older, and she did not last to discover what kept the small monster shut himself away for hours in the library. And it was not as if he were not there as normal, as the abomination had an unwholesome penchant for books, very precocious for such a tiny creature. But Cersei suspected that in that occasion it was a really special book and she barged triumphantly into the room. Tyrion jerked up, terrified, and tried to hide the copy to no avail.

"What do we have here?," she had asked with vindictive glee in her voice.

She leapt on him and snatched his treasure. Tyrion shrieked and jumped onto her, trying to scratch and bite, possessed by a wild rage, but Cersei gave a cruel laugh and threw him to the floor with a shove. Because of the fall he cut his eyebrow and blood ran down his face, but he, bewildered with fury, did not notice.

In that moment Cersei had the book in her hands like a trophy.

"You want it? Come and get it." And right then she threw it at the bottom of the fireplace. The flames engulfed it and licked the beautiful cover, which turned black immediately. In a few seconds his treasure was burning and coming apart into ashes. Tyrion was screaming and had sprung to save it from fire, but Cersei blocked him, laughing with a sinister laugh he would never forget.

Sansa had squeezed his hand when he told her what Cersei had done to him.

"Well, it seems that she at last has what she deserves," he said, back to the present. "She has been publicly humiliated and that will be a blow from which she's not going to recover easily. Moreover, she's already on her way to Casterly Rock to her forced confinement, by Tommen's command and with the enthusiastic support of the Tyrells. They finally have managed to neutralize her. Her harmful influence will be a problem no more."

"What do you think Jaime will do?," Sansa had inquired, still holding his hand.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
"I don't think he will dare to defy Tommen. He's his son after all, and his king, and Jaime is the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. He won't desert his post. Perhaps he doesn't have a great sense of honour and there aren't many things to which he feels attached, but in some things he's strangely stubborn, and his oath as kingsguard matters to him. Besides, the situation is not the same any more between my siblings. Their relationship has been much colder since he returned from war. I doubt he has stopped loving Cersei, but I've observed that he doesn't see her like he did before. With regards to what he'll do when he comes back from wherever he has gone (though I dare to venture that he has traveled to Dorne to try to persuade Myrcella to go with him to King's Landing), it's a mystery, but it's going to be hard for him. He'll feel torn between his obligations towards Tommen and his love for his absent lover, knowing that she's sentenced to confinement in Casterly Rock."

Tyrion sighed. He normally was able to guess the reactions of his impulsive brother, but in that occasion he had not the slightest idea of what he would do when he left Dorne with empty hands, as Myrcella was not willing to give up on her betrothal to Trystane, and he went back and did not find the woman he had always loved more than a sister, his only woman, although Cersei had not kept the same fidelity, and not by the fact of having been forced to marry Robert, because that was imposed by Tywin. Tyrion remembered the time when his father, who was King Aerys' Hand and therefore spent periods in the capital, offered the hand of his daughter to prince Rhaegar. Sure that she would wed the handsome and admired heir to the throne, Cersei became infatuated in the distance and walked as if she were floating on the clouds. During that while, Jaime was sulky, dying of jealousy, watching how his sister set him aside for a stranger. But when Aerys refused the marriage proposal, offending the extremely resentful Tywin beyond repair, Cersei got miserable and Jaime forgave her for her betrayal and consoled her.

He had always forgiven her and she had ended up returning to his arms, as when she also became disillusioned after marrying Robert and discovering that any love relationship between her and her husband was impossible.

Maybe at present Jaime was no more willing to forgive her. While he had been kept a prisoner, Cersei had bedded their cousin Lancel and probably several more men, and Jaime must have heard rumours. He surely did not feel very good suspecting that she had searched for replacements between her legs as soon as he had gone far to fight in war. And he neither must feel too well being treated coldly after the hell he had endured, dreaming of being by her side again. She even reproached him that he had lost his right hand, as if he had cut it by himself. Surely it was the hand with which he made the handjobs to Cersei, Jaime was right-handed. She must blame him for having left it on the way and would reprimand him that he was too clumsy with the other hand to make her enjoy the same as before, thought Tyrion, caustic. The question was that she had not received him the way he expected and treated him as if he were scum. And to that Jaime had to add the rumours which were spreading about her and her activities in bed.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 2. Day 11

In short, Jaime was tired, lost and disappointed. It was difficult to foresee what he would do regarding Cersei's sentence.

Sansa had set out another prickly subject.

"Your uncle Kevan is now the Hand of the King. The betrothal between Cersei and Loras at this stage has faded into history after everything which has happened with the sparrows; the Tyrells under any concept would accept your sister into their family with all she has caused, but your uncle might establish a marriage alliance with other house and send her away from Casterly Rock in the future. What's your opinion on that?"

Sansa's question caught him by surprise. Of course it was very plausible that Kevan proposed to marry Cersei again, but Tyrion had not stopped to reflect on that point. After all, Kevan was not Tywin and Cersei was a very hard nut to crack. After her experience with Robert, she refused flatly to get married for the second time, and even if Kevan was Hand and had the prerogative to wed her to anyone he regarded as convenient, Cersei was not afraid of him like she had feared Tywin and she would not submit.

Moreover, there was Jaime. Tyrion ignored to what extent Kevan believed it was true that his twin nephew and niece kept incestuous relations, but if he believed at least a little in the veracity of the rumours, he would not take Jaime lightly. The Lord Commander of the Kingsguard would not remain idle watching how his sister-lover was given to other man. Probably Kevan would let the matter go and would resign himself to send Cersei far from Tommen and not to impose another husband on her. On the other hand, his uncle was not a man as weak as he seemed. Although he had lived on the sidelines, behind his brother's back, he was not faint-hearted and he was able to make wise decisions by himself. It was likely as well that he might decide to impose himself and continue with Tywin's task of strengthening the Lannisters' power through strong marriage alliances and, by the way, silencing the rumours about his nephew's and niece's incest. But the issue of Jaime emerged once more. These one had feared his father like everyone else and had not dared to oppose him except for the matter of the inheritance of Casterly Rock and the titles of the lord of the Westerlands. However, he was not afraid of Kevan.

Tyrion had expounded it to Sansa and she admitted that she felt so disoriented as him with all that muddle.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 366

Meereen: Month 2. Day 11

While he, lying in bed at the edge of dawn, was reflecting on his siblings and the uncertain immediate future of the Seven Kingdoms, Sansa stirred beside him and opened her eyes.

"Mmm, good morning, my early-rising husband." That sleepy voice was his perdition.

"Good morning, my sleepyhead wife. I see that yesterday's bet has knocked the stuffing out of you," he needled, encircling her with his arms and giving her a kiss.

"No way. It must be you who has been knocked the stuffing out, but you disguise it well," she rebutted. "Yes, you disguise it very well." He was already hard against her belly and Sansa felt it, smiling and with naughty sparkles in her eyes.

"Do you want to see how good I am at disguising it, sassy girl?" he threatened, placing himself upon her. He had rested so well that the thrashing of sex of the previous day scarcely had left sequels in him, and he was more than eager to show it to Sansa.

And he did, as soon as he noticed that she was so willing as him.

Afterwads, they washed up and got dressed for their daily duties. That morning the school would be started finally and Sansa was a little nervous and excited, because she was going to meet her new mate teachers and hundreds of children would take lessons in the pyramid.

While they were having breakfast and Mhyraz took the opportunity to carry out some of his other morning tasks such as changing the bed sheets, cleaning the chamber pots, replenishing the fuel of the brazier and refilling the straw in Ray's basket, Sansa raised something to Tyrion that was going round her head.

"I'd like to write a letter to Jon. It's been a long time since I haven't spoken to him and I wish to renew contact. Or more like, to begin to treat him like the true sister I never was for him. I've been thinking about it for some days and I think that I mustn't go on drifting apart from him. It's very possible that he's my only living sibling and I don't want to lose him permanently."

Tyrion looked at her with an expression of joyful approval.

"That's great, Sansa. He'll be glad that you write to him. He doesn't hold any grudges against you, I'm sure. During the time we kept mutual company when I traveled to the Wall, he looked like a lad with noble feelings, unable to harbour aversion against his family. He loves you, I don't doubt it," he assured, squeezing her hand.

"I'll be careful not to reveal him anything which might compromise any confidential information, I know that ravens can be easily intercepted, but he at least will know that I'm well. What do you reckon he thought when he found out that I had married you?"

"I suppose that, of all the members of your family, he would be one of those who would have taken the news better. Not because he considered me the ideal husband for his sister, but at least he knew me quite enough to guess that I wouldn't mistreat you." He did a pause and continued.

"You've given me an idea, Sansa. I also will take the chance to restart my contact with him. The truth is that he was a good friend for me and good friends aren't behind every corner."
"Oh, Tyrion, I think it's perfect. I'm thrilled, and that's so even though Jon is still thousands of miles far from here, but the fact of exchanging letters with him makes me believe that he's closer," she said.

"Then, if you want, today we'll write to him and send the letter as soon as possible. Do you agree?"

"Of course I do. In the evening, when we end our duties, we'll compose it."

They finished breakfast and each one got ready for their activities. Tyrion would carry out his tour through the city and Sansa would wait for Dara to style her hair and then she would go to her lessons. Moreover, that day she would have weapon training with Pod and Leena.
Meereen: Month 2. Day 11

Tyrion, accompanied by Ray, Pod, Green Beetle and White Fly, made his round through the places he had to inspect, and he visited the market, which had opened after the three days of the official mourning and little by little the activity and the bustle were restored throughout the morning. The soldiers swarmed around the city, as since the fighting competitions in the arenas were being celebrated, surveillance had been increased. Until currently it had not happened anything worth mentioning in the amphitheatres, as no spectator could access to the venues without being frisked, so there were no chances to hide weapons or any dangerous objects. The attendance of public was massive and the grandstands were filled up, what indicated people's eagerness to attend that type of shows. Or any show which provided them with some hours of entertainment. They not only watched the combats, but also comical acts starred by traveling comedians, which were performed in the intervals between competitions. Some of those performances were carried out by dwarves and, though Tyrion loathed the mere existence of those shows, he understood that almost all the dwarves were much less lucky than him and that was the only means they had to earn a living, so he had no choice but to tolerate it. Hizdhar always presided in the box seat of one of the arenas, while Daario did it in the other, and the sellsword captain seemed quite happy with that task. There was no doubt that he really liked the atmosphere of those places. It must bring him many memories of his times as a fighter of the arenas, which he recalled without rancour, because it had given him the opportunity to excel as a warrior and gain his freedom. Although he only was present as the captain of the guard and not as a contender, that place was like his home, and he did not mind being there.

Captain Gilean had sent a raven from Tolos some days earlier to inform that he had finished successfully the commercial transactions, having managed to sell all the cargo and fill the holds of the merchant fleet to the brim with the acquired products. He was preparing to go back along with the Dornish ships, whose captains he had the chance to start dealings with, and especially with Byron, prince Doran's right-hand man. The truth was that in Meereen many people were awaiting eagerly the arrival of the new supplies, indispensable for survival during winter.

When Tyrion completed his visits and returned to the pyramid, a large group of children and teachers were gathering at the entrance, getting ready to walk back to the camps after the lessons. Tyrion had already crossed paths with them early in the morning, when they went in for their first day of school and he was going out for his morning duties. In that moment, near lunchtime, he broke through from the street to the main doors, and the children's racket enveloped him. Lots of kids were still looking at him with curiosity, though they had seen him before and knew him since that very morning or since some time ago, when he paid some of his visits to the camps, or when they went to the market with their families and he was there. He greeted them and a choir of voices returned the greeting. Everyone moved aside respectfully to allow him passage. Ray was walking right before his owner protectively, and the children smiled and let out exclamations of admiration when they saw the small beautiful snow dog.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 368

Meereen: Month 2. Day 11

Once inside, Pod and Tyrion headed for their floor, where the squire stopped for some instants in his rooms to fetch Leena, and then the three of them went to Tyrion and Sansa's chambers. She welcomed her husband with a kiss and a smile. She was wearing more comfortable clothes for the training, like Leena, and Pod took both girls and the dog to the parade ground. Tyrion had insisted that Ray must accompany her every time she went outside or went to any place of the pyramid and he himself could not go with her. He felt tempted to follow them and observe how Sansa managed in the training field, but he thought better about it. That was part of her private space, of the activities which were exclusively hers, and he reminded himself once more that he must not invade that space. There were not many places through which the girl could move her own way, she lived nearly shut away in the Great Pyramid with her infatuated and jealous husband stuck to her skirts, and it was fair that she had her own moments at her disposal. Tyrion, in a hidden corner of his spirit, feared that she grew tired of him, that she realized that it was not enough for her to be the wife of a dwarf with an ugly scar of war on his face who for the moment could only offer her a pair of modest borrowed rooms in a pyramid that had belonged to a Ghiscari dynasty, through which she could not even stroll freely. Her situation there was not better than in the Red Keep, in the sense that she neither could come and go or move around at will. In King's Landing she ran the risk of crossing paths with Joffrey and his arse-lickers and girl-beaters, and with other undesirables who made fun of her, some of which probably would not hesitate to rape her in any corner and kill her so she could not denounce her attacker or attackers, and with other ones who plotted to kidnap her and take her to other prison, taking advantage of her claim on Winterfell. In Meereen, Tyrion barely trusted anyone who was not one of his intimates or the Unsullied, who would never hurt anybody unless they were commanded to.

So, afraid that Sansa (who after all was a teenager, with the passions of her age and who, like every girl, admired young, handsome, charming and skilled lads, and Tyrion was fifteen years older than her and not precisely a comely gallant) got bored of seeing him every day and almost every hour, he took any opportunity in which she could do something by herself. Sansa, for example, was in the process of founding the guild of seamstresses with Leena's and Cloe's help. Daenerys had assigned them a large hall for their meetings and they were carrying out the survey to calculate how many women would be interested in taking part in the guild. Sansa had committed herself with great enthusiasm and she was organizing and getting everything ready. She was determined to help the freedfolk and the humble people of Meereen so they could have decent and warm clothes for winter. For a very affordable price, depending of each one's means, everybody might afford it. And if besides the Meereenese nobility and the merchants were interested in ordering more luxurious clothes, their demands could be satisfied too, but Sansa doubted the seamstresses to receive orders from the arrogant noble people and merchants who hated the Breaker of Chains and her supporters.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 369

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So Sansa was busier than ever with her classes, the guild and the trainings with the dagger. Except for the quiet days of the mourning, the rest of the days she and Tyrion only saw one another in the mornings until they left for their activities, during lunch and at nightfall, when they came back to wash up, have dinner and get ready for bed. Then they made love and chatted about the things they had done that day, and they exchanged opinions, ideas and impressions, and soon afterwards they fell in bed, worn out. Sometimes they hardly had time to speak before falling asleep, but for them both it was very important to keep a constant verbal communication, aside from the fantastic connection between their bodies.

Everyday Sansa showed him in a thousand different ways how much she loved him and how much she yearned for his company, but he never stopped striving to the utmost for deserving her, for making her laugh, for satisfying all the wishes of her soft, wet and burning flesh, for maintaining with her a deep emotional and spiritual bond and foreseeing her needs. Sometimes he gave her little gifts, he ordered in the kitchens her favourite dishes and surprised her with new ideas, both in bed and in other moments of their coexistence. As he could not be for her the tall and attractive knight of her girlhood's dreams, he did his best to compensate her in many other ways. And every time Sansa looked at him with those big blue eyes full of warmth he felt rewarded and fulfilled, and all the ghosts which chased him since he could remember went off, behind the bars where they dozed whenever she was next to him.

_Did your ghosts go off behind the bars when my mother looked at you with her green eyes, father? Was that why they swallowed you when she was gone because of me?_ When he thought about that, Tyrion could get the picture of what Tywin had felt when he lost her.

With their new routine they saw each other much less, but Tyrion thought that it had its bright side, because when they met at night Sansa told him how much she had missed him and it was usually her who pushed him to the bed and drove him to amazing sex sessions in which both flew higher and higher, and they moaned and shouted no matter how late it was or that the whole pyramid was aware of their vigorous sex life.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 370

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But that night they had other pending task, so, in spite of going directly to bed after dinner, they sat down to write the letter Sansa wanted to send to her brother Jon. Tyrion picked up the book he was reading those days, while he was waiting for her to compose her part of the letter, but he could not focus on reading because every so often he lifted his eyes to her and observed her surreptitiously as the girl reflected, biting her lip unconsciously, and then she dipped the quill in the inkwell and wrote with her exquisite handwriting of diligent student. Tyrion listened to the relaxing sound of the quill scratching on the sheet of paper, and he imagined the little model pupil that she undoubtedly had been, being taught her reading and writing lessons by the patient and prudent maester of Winterfell. Tyrion had crossed paths with him during his visit to the northern castle and he had liked the man. His vocation was true and he was the sort of wise man which every honourable house should have so it could benefit from his knowledge, his experience and his judicious guide. Tyrion had heard that, when little Bran had remained in command of Winterfell when war burst and not any Stark adult had stayed in the castle, only him and his brother Rickon, maester Luwin had remained at his side at all times and had advised him rightly, though the boy was quite sensible himself despite his young age. The poor old man had protected his little lords when the castle was attacked by the ironborn and he must suffer terribly when Theon supposedly killed and burnt the two kids and hung their corpses in view of everyone. Sansa was reluctant to believe that the former ward and hostage of house Stark had committed that atrocity against two innocent children who he knew since their birth and who had loved him and treated him with respect, but there was not anything either which proved that he had not done it. If he had murdered two peasant boys to pose as the Stark kids, it meant that, or either he himself had freed Bran and Rickon in secret (what Tyrion doubted), or they had escaped taking advantage of a moment of inattention of the arrogant iron sons. What did not exonerate Theon from having killed two boys, no matter who they were. And moreover, in the case that the two little lords had fled... How would they survive the northern winter, lost in the woods? Unless they were being helped, in which case the most likely was that they were heading for the Wall or for a northern house which was still loyal to the Starks. But there was not any news of them. No information about their whereabouts had come to Meereen, so that could mean that they were dead (the most probable option), or that they were traveling in disguise or they remained hidden in some place. And if Varys knew something, he was keeping it to himself. Tyrion continued to be unable to guess what was concealed behind the tortuous mind of the Master of Whispers, save his unswerving loyalty to the kingdom.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 2. Day 11

It took her a long while to fill the sheet of paper, because she had to stop often to reflect carefully on what she was going to write next, in order not to make mistakes. Paper could not be wasted, as they had not plenty of it. When she finished, she traced her signature at the foot of the text.

"It's done. You can read what I've written. There's nothing compromising," she said, handing the letter to Tyrion.

"Darling, I want you to know that you don't have to feel compelled to show me the contents of your letters. Mail is something private, at least to the extent any message sent by raven can be, of course," pointed him out with light irony. Probably a high percentage of the missives which overflew the whole world were intercepted before they arrived at their destinations by spies and others interested in knowing about people's secrets. The contents of a man's letter are much worthier than the contents of his purse, Varys had said to him, and he was right, as usual. Because of that one must be extremely careful and, if the contents included any delicate matter, it was much safer to encrypt it. Daenerys exchanged coded messages with several of her recipients, Varys the Spider among them, and she sent them in duplicate, with a few hours difference between sending a message and the other, both to mislead the possible spies and to make sure that at least one of the missives would arrive. His father also was an expert in encoded letters with codes that he agreed with his henchmen. In fact, that was how he won war. As he himself said, there were wars which were won with swords and spears, and others which were won with paper and quills. No matter how much Tyrion hated Tywin, he had to admit that no one could outwit him.

"I know, my love, but I want to show it to you. I have nothing to hide in this letter, and even less from you. You're probably one of the scarce men who respect their women's privacy, and that makes me wish to share everything with you," Sansa said, with her sweet tone, which made him melt. And be driven very, very horny.

"Thank you, gorgeous. You're a real privilege for this dwarf." He caressed her cheek, feeling an intense heat on his fingertips when he touched her. The burning sensation spread throughout his body and centred in his restless cock. He took the letter, trying to ignore the bulge on his trousers, and he read what she had written.

"Dear Jon:

I am your sister Sansa. I know I never treated you well, and I regret it. By then I was a silly and half blind little girl who had her head filled with songs and tales, and I was convinced that my mother was right treating you the way she did, so I followed her example. But I really never hated you, Jon. At bottom I didn't even despise you. You always were a good boy, much better than most of the people I've met. You were kind and solicitous to me, although I didn't deserve it. I feel ashamed of having shown myself distant and cold to you, but now I'd like to change things, if you are willing to forgive me. I outstretch my hand to you as a real sister, with the hope that you'll take it and we forget what distanced us in the past.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
"I suppose that in due course you found out that I married Tyrion Lannister. I'm ignorant of what you thought about our forced match, but Tyrion has told me that he and you became good friends during your shared trip to the Wall. No wonder that it was that way, because he's a good man, like you, and in many aspects you are compatible. I wish you didn't think badly of him when you knew that we had to marry. His father forced us, and Tyrion wanted this marriage as little as me. Instead of taking advantage of me and thinking only of my claim on Winterfell, he respected me, took care of me and protected me. Though he had to live together with a girl wife who he barely knew and who despised the Lannister surname, a hurt girl trapped in that golden cage the Red Keep was, he never lost his patience, never treated me otherwise than kindly. He cared about my well-being and did all he could to protect me from his family." When he read that sentence, Tyrion smiled bitterly. He wished he were so sure as her of having done all he could to protect her from his family. He went on reading. "He did not have to take so much trouble because of me, as I only was the disgraced daughter of traitor Ned Stark, a puppet at the mercy of the whims of bad people. I did not have any power, or influence, or any true friend. All of you were very far, some of you scattered and others missing, and I did not have in King's Landing anyone who really could help me. No one except for Tyrion. Little by little I realized how he was. I stopped seeing him with my eyes clouded over with hatred, like I saw other Lannisters. And then king Joffrey died suddenly and Tyrion and I escaped. Tyrion took me out of there because he feared that we would be charged with his nephew's death. We had nothing to do with that, but it was no secret that my husband and Joffrey detested one another. You met him when he was a prince and he visited Winterfell. You saw for yourself how he was. In brief, anybody might have reasons to want to murder him, and neither Tyrion nor I had less reasons than others, but we are not murderers." Well, at least Sansa was not. With regard to him, his hands were not completely clean. And he would not hesitate a single instant if the time came to kill for Sansa. If he had been ready to kill for Shae, then... What would not he do for the love of his life? "As Tyrion knew that others would not be of the same opinion, he decided that our best course of action was to escape from there if we wanted to survive. His sister Cersei and his father Tywin would condemn us, no matter how much innocent we were."

Tyrion did a pause to rub his tired eyes. "Without losing a second we took a ship which carried us to Pentos and from there we sailed from one port to another until arriving at Meereen, because Tyrion was determined to ask queen Daenerys Targaryen for asylum. And here we are, we don't lack anything and we are very happy. You surely have heard that Tyrion is one of the royal counselors and that he helps the queen to take many crucial decisions for the governing of the city." Tyrion smiled, looking up from the letter to glance at Sansa tenderly. She was hanging on his reactions.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
"The only thing he and I truly miss is the other people we love and that we had to leave behind, but apart from that I can't ask for a greater blessing than having next to me someone like him, who loves me like not a single knight of my songs and my tales would have ever loved me. Tyrion is much more of a man than any of those knights who in real life haven't moved a finger for me." He smiled again. Those words touched him. They summarized perfectly the dream of all his life. "I hope to see you again someday, dear brother. I miss our childhood in Winterfell, those happy years when we had a true home. I know that for you it was hard to assume the injustice of being different, and that your boyhood wasn't as happy as mine, but I want you to know that you are in my memories, because you always were there, and you were part of my life. And you are still.

I wish you a lot of courage and luck in your task as Lord Commander of the Night's Watch. I feel very proud of you. Take care of yourself and write to me. I look forward to receiving news from you, from your own handwriting.

"Your sister who loves you," Tyrion was surprised when he looked at the signature. "Sansa Stark Lannister." She had added her married name. That detail touched him even more, because it implied in a single word the path she had went across with him.

"After reading this letter I feel like the most lavished husband in the world, sweetheart," he joked, trying to swallow the knot in his throat, and he leaned toward her to give her a kiss. "I'm afraid that later you'll have to take me down a peg or two," he murmured, with his voice hoarse and provocative.

"Oh, I'm an expert on that." She bit his lip. "But before that you have to add your part to the letter."

"If you bite me again like that, we won't finish the letter today, gorgeous."

She moved aside laughing and he, with a sigh, took the quill.

"Dear Jon:

I'm Tyrion, your brother-in-law. I am not clear if I must congratulate you on your appointment or if I must feel sorry for you, but in any case, I wish you loads of luck too. You're going to need it, but you know that much better than me.

I hope you don't bear a grudge against me for marrying your sister and, if it makes you feel better, there's nothing more important to me than making her happy and taking care of her with my own life. She's the most beautiful gift a dwarf like me might receive.

I remember you as one of the few true friends I've had and I, like Sansa, wish that we could meet again, in better times if possible. Be cautious and very careful up there. Your sister would be glad if you keep safe and sound, and we both want her to be happy, so you would do well to take good care of your skin of headstrong Northerner. That's a feature you share with Sansa and she has taught me to appreciate it in you Northerners.

Someone told me that I am a lucky dwarf, and it's true. No one can be luckier than me. I wish I could send to you a bit of my good fortune to accompany you on your hard task. Cheer up and remember that when everything goes wrong, the best is to think of the girl you'd like to have in
your arms. It won't help you make the right decision, but at least, if that's the moment when you have to go away from this world, you'll go with a smile on your lips.

Write soon if you can and you'd better making a great effort to stay alive, because I'll be willing to haunt you in other life if you make Sansa cry.

Your brother-in-law who esteems you, Tyrion Lannister."

He dropped the quill and left the letter on the table. Sansa was reading over his shoulder.

"Oh, Tyrion, you're terrible," she said, smiling, moved and amused. She grabbed his hair and drew him to her to kiss him.

"Of course I am. And if you don't mind, I'm going to show you right now. You still have to take me down one peg or two." He stood up and took her hand to guide her to the bed, and she followed him laughing.
Chapter 374

Meereen: Month 2. Day 12

The next morning, before going to the public audience, Tyrion asked Mhyraz to convey to the queen that he was going to send a letter to Jon Snow, on behalf of himself and Sansa, which did not contain anything that could compromise the confidential government affairs. It was simply his wife's wish to restore her contact with the only sibling with whom she could do that. As soon as Daenerys transmitted her acquiescence to him, Tyrion searched for maester Maero, who was in charge of the ravens of the pyramid. Since his hardworking intervention during the last tragedies which had ravaged Meereen, like the fire in the market and the measles epidemic, the man had proved his worth and the queen had appointed him as Grand Maester, offering him in addition a seat in the Council, and due to that they had a new member in the meetings. Tyrion liked him. He was the healer who tended to little Menelan personally, among many other tasks. He had done everything possible to keep the boy alive, and he continued to take care of his health, though Maero, who was a person with a humble character, said that the boy himself had almost all the merit, because he had found new strength to fight for his life.

Maero was of Braavosi origin, the son of a moneylender who belonged to the commercial elite of the free city. Since a very early age he had been interested in books and knowledge, and had an insatiable curiosity towards the functioning of the human body and the treatment of the illnesses and diseases which pestered it. His most loved sister had died due to a fulminant fever and Maero had wished so strongly to be able to heal her that, after crying disconsolately over her pale cheeks and kissing her for the last time, he decided that when he grew up he would go to the Citadel and would become a maester. It was rare that the archmaesters of the Citadel admitted foreign acolytes, but sometimes they made exceptions if the student's family had social prestige and offered a generous donation to the institution. Meanwhile, and as his father did not oppose to his aspirations, the boy studied and made researches by his own, he read all the books on medicine he could find, he dissected in his small study corpses of beggars who died alone in the streets and that some homeless boys carried to him in exchange of a handful of coins, and he ventured going through the poorest boroughs to tend for free to the wounded and ill people who could not afford to pay for the services of a curer.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 2. Day 12

When he was old enough, his father, after persuading the archmaesters to admit Maero, sent him to Oldtown, to the most prestigious school of maesters in the world, where the young man earned one by one the links of his chain. When he completed his training, he was allocated to a Westerosi minor house in the Reach, but Maero never arrived at his destination. Skipping the orders, he went back to Essos and traveled from one city to another, looking for a place where establishing himself, until he reached Meereen, short before the period when Daenerys Stormborn conquered it. Maero was a detractor of slavery and he often looked after slaves, trying to make their sufferings more bearable. When the queen started the uprising in Meereen, slaughtered lots of Great Masters and settled along with her freed subjects, the maester multitasked throughout the city, overworked, and later he usually visited the camps of freedfolk and he began to be known among Daenerys' followers. The braavosi man's reputation reached the ears of the new queen and she finally decided to offer him the post of Grand Maester and royal counselor, to which Maero agreed, on condition that he could go on devoting himself fully to his vocation.

The maester dedicated the first hours of the morning to write the queen's missives and he was in charge of the care of the ravens and the delivery of the messages. Tyrion found him in his plain chamber. He might have asked Mhyraz to bring the letter to Maero, but Tyrion fancied seeing him in person.

"Good morning, maester Maero. How comes the day?" Tyrion said.

"It seems that it comes not too bad, my lord," the healer answered, smiling. He was around thirty-five years old and, though he did not look older than that age, he was not physically attractive. Premature baldness had left his head almost devoid of hair, his big and hooked nose reminded the beak of an exotic bird and he was thin as a stick. No doubt his frugal eating habits had made its mark on his body. Tyrion observed once more the chain that was hanging around his neck, which contained nearly all the links, except for the one made of Valyrian steel (which was attached to the study of magic and occultism).

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 376

Meereen: Month 2. Day 12

"Can I ask you a question, my lord?," Tyrion said.

"Of course. Go on. But I prefer you to call me by my name," Maero answered.

"All right. But I'd like you to do the same. I also prefer some people to call me by my name." Tyrion smiled. "Don't you mind that the Citadel expelled you from the order? They had to do it, as you didn't obey their orders and instead of shutting yourself away in a stronghold, devoting your life to house Orme, you decided to depart to Essos and offer your services to the common folk and slaves above all."

Maero looked at him with his keen light eyes.

"From the Citadel I obtained what I wanted, which was knowledge on the discipline I really was interested in, medicine, and on other areas which could help me to improve my understanding of the world. The acknowledgment as maester was something that didn't draw my attention. They were happy forging the links I gained step by step, but in truth the chain didn't matter to me, only the learning process to obtain it. But if they found out about my true intentions, they'd expel me, so I covered them up and let the instructors believe I would be a model maester. I didn't care about what happened after my appointment. They can remove my chain if they want, but they can't take away the years I spent training there." The man gave a hint of an ironic smile. "Probably what I did has damaged the aspirations of other foreign applicants. The archmaesters must be much more reluctant to admit acolytes who might betray them like I did, but I don't regret my actions. My idea of being a healer wasn't reduced to spend my life shut away in a Westerosi castle, teaching spoiled and haughty children and advising stupid lords."

Tyrion agreed. He liked that rebellious young man who had refused to submit himself to a conclave of stuffy old men.

"It never crossed my mind the idea that the Mother of Dragons would offer me the post of Grand Maester," the healer continued. "When she made the proposal, I was so stunned that I couldn't even answer, but I knew I had to be honest with her, so I told her the truth: that the Citadel forbids me to practice my profession for refusing to follow the path it wanted to set me. But the queen didn't mind. She told me that my dedication is all the accreditation she needs. I warned her that I've devoted my life to healing, and she assured me that I could carry on with my task for all the days I needed, if I didn't mind to alternate it with the care of the ravens, the writing of letters, the delivery and the receipt of messages and occupying from time to time the Council seat, activities which wouldn't steal too much time from me and, moreover, I can excuse myself from attending some meetings if I'm tending to a specially serious case. They were good conditions and I accepted, because I saw it as an opportunity to help those who most need it. She gave me the impression of being a more trustworthy queen than any other king I've heard of."

"You have a good eye for judging people, Maero. And soon you and the other maesters in Meereen will have company," Tyrion pointed out.

"Yes. Ten more maestes will mean a little relief. The gods know that we're never enough in a large city like this. Prince Doran has intervened directly in the conclave of elders of the Citadel to intercede for our cause of wandering healers, and that way he has prevented the maesters sent here to be expelled from the order as well. I imagine that it must have cost the geezers a lot to agree to
the request, but for them Dorne is much closer than King's Landing, and the Martells are more powerful than the Lannisters themselves since your father died. The men in the Citadel are not fools."

Tyrion looked at him with amused respect. That man was still able to keep his sense of humour, despite he must spend many hours awake, mitigating people's miseries at any time of day or night.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 2. Day 12

"Well, I request you to send this letter to Castle Black, to the Lord Commander of the Night's Watch," Tyrion asked, giving him the rolled up sheet of paper. It was not sealed with sealing wax, as neither him nor Sansa had signet rings with the sigils of their houses. Tyrion had made a mental note to order one to Sarik in which the blazons of the Lannisters and the Starks appeared together, like in the banner he had gifted Sansa. "I will wait for his answer as well."

The maester nodded and took the letter.

"The raven that is going to carry it will fly promptly."

"Thank you. Have a good day, maester Maero."

"Same here, Lord Tyrion."

They bent respectfully and Tyrion left the chamber, heading toward the audience hall.

That morning, in addition to the usual property disputes, accusations of theft, squabblings of ill-assorted neighbours and a complaint for a horse which supposedly had been devoured by one of the dragons, Daenerys had to cope with a case of rape. The victim of the assault was a twelve-year-old freed girl and her mother accused a neighbour of the camp who seemed to have been looking at the girl in a way that gave a bad feeling about him. The accused man was flanked by two Unsullied and was protesting and whining, saying that he had not been the one to do it, that the little bitch was making everything up because she did not want to admit that she had laid half the lads in the camp and she was handing him the bum rap.

The mother, on her part, was shouting, claiming that the girl was a maiden before the assault, which had happened that morning, just when she had gone out to meet the rest of the group attending the school, and she had come back to their tent crying and bleeding, and the blood between her legs was still there to prove that she had been raped by that monster. The woman asked Daenerys if she wanted to examine the girl to verify it herself.

"This is an issue which requires a trial. The suspect will be carried to the cells of the pyramid and will remain imprisoned until the hearing takes place. Your daughter will be examined by the maester, who will pronounce judgment on the veracity of your words. If it's true that the girl has been deflowered violently and you have witnesses that can report to declare, we'll bring them. The accused can bring witnesses too. Besides, my Unsullied will carry out a research in the camps to gather information on the case. The trial will take place in three days. Meanwhile, the girl will stay in the pyramid, in the custody of the Crown." Daenerys did a pause. "If the suspect is found guilty of the crime, he'll remain in his cell and will be punished with castration by knife. If he survives the mutilation, after a month he'll be executed in the same square and in the same way that the one hundred and sixty-three Great Masters who killed innocent children." The queen's expression was stony and her voice was cold as ice. Her eyes, devoid of any trace of feeling while she was gazing at the weeping man on the queue, pierced him and he fell on his knees, terrorized. The girl's mother was yelling all sorts of insults at him, full of hatred and more than willing to tear him to pieces right there if she were permitted to.

"I also might let her execute the sentence, if you are found guilty. If you are innocent, you would have nothing to fear. It will be a fair trial." Daenerys' tone was acid, deathly loaded with venom.
The man urinated on himself. "Take him away," she commanded, with a grimace of disgust. The Unsullied who escorted him grasped his arms and compelled him to walk. His wail faded as the small group stepped away. "Take the girl to one of the empty chambers, where she will stay with her mother. The Grand Maester will visit her in short. You'll be well cared."

"Thank you very much, Mother," the woman said with a trembling voice, bowing. Two other Unsullied accompanied her and the quiet child to their chamber.

Daenerys had established that trials would be held once a week, if were arose serious matters which required a more exhaustive process. Rapes and murders were among those matters, and the case of the poor freed girl was the first for which a formal trial would be carried out.

Moreover, she had forbidden people to take justice into their own hands. All violent crimes must be tried, and those who did not comply with the royal decree and exerted justice on their own, would be sentenced to death.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 378

Meereen: Month 2. Day 12

After that case of presumed rape, which left the whole hall profoundly shaken, the rest of the matters were nothing in comparison. And on the queue there were not slaves escaped from Yunkai yet. The tiring walk they had to go through was long, but in a few days the horde would start to arrive at the gates of Meereen and Daenerys wanted to set the details for the reception of the new refugees in the next Council meeting, which was scheduled for that week.

When the audience ended, Daenerys asked Tyrion to accompany her to her private hall, as usual.

"Earlier today you sent the letter to your brother-in-law Jon, didn't you?," Daenerys asked as soon as they took a seat.

"Yes, Your Grace. Sansa is excited by the perspective of resuming and fixing her relationship with her brother."

"That's very good. One has to cling to the few people truly worthy of having beside oneself. Death itself is already in charge of snatching them from us. My uncle Aemon is dying, Lord Tyrion. Samwell Tarly has informed me about it. He's taking care of him, together with a girl of the Free Folk who he rescued and has followed him to the Wall." Daenerys' voice was loaded with sadness. "He's the only relative I have left, and he also is extinguishing. He has lived over a hundred years and has seen so many things... He went blind twenty years ago, but that hasn't prevented him from seeing more than most people. The penultimate page of my family's book has turned. A book that has had thousands of pages, and many of them have left a deep trace in history. Where is all that gone? Where are the days of glory? It's hard to be the last, Lord Tyrion. It's very hard that everything falls on oneself's shoulders."

Tyrion stared at her with sympathy.

"Of course it is. But you can cope with it. And remember that you're not so alone as you think. Your uncle soon will be gone, but others are still with you."

Daenerys smiled with melancholy.

"I know, and I'm thankful for that. Some mornings I'd wish to cover myself to the head with my bedclothes and not to get up in the whole day. Or to fly on the back of one of my dragons, soaring above everything and escaping... But afterwards I tell myself: Escaping where? You can't escape. Your life is this. Your heart is this. You are a Targaryen, the last one remaining. You have the blood of the dragon. Do you think I'm weak for wavering, Lord Tyrion?"

He smiled tenderly, as if what she had just confessed were a little child's mischief.

"Of course not, Your Grace. I'd be worried if I wouldn't see you wavering. That wouldn't be human. And blood of the dragon or not, you are human."

She smiled as well and sighed, releasing a bit of the stress which was oppressing her.

"And continuing with the subject of the Wall, I found out that the night of Mance Rayder's execution Jon did something that defied Stannis and the beliefings of the Night's Watch. When they lit the pyre where the King-Beyond-The-Wall must perish and the flames began to lick his skin, Jon shot an arrow to his heart to put an end to his sufferings and to prevent the dignity of the
leader he had respected from burning together with his body. A king who screams of agony at the moment of his death doesn't offer a proper image, and your brother-in-law spared him that. He helped him to die with dignity. But I'm afraid that that act of mercy hasn't earned him more likeability among his own black brothers. And regarding Stannis, he mustn't take very well that subversive act, but he had to accept it. He doesn't have authority over the Watch and feels admiration for Jon, and saying that about someone so curt and so scarcely inclined to sentimentalism as Stannis is too much. But now he has more pressing matters to attend to. He's getting ready for the attack against the Boltons and is preparing to guide his sellsword armies to Winterfell."

"Stannis doesn't know the territory, or the true northern winter," Tyrion pointed out, skeptical. "The Boltons do. And very thick walls protect them. And furthermore, they're not stupid."

"Stannis' red witch whispers in his ear, and people tell things about her that would give anyone the willies. How far can reach the influence of a bunch of fanatics with red robes who preach about the Lord of Light? We've already seen what has happened with the sparrows who preach the Faith of the Seven."

"A lot of tales circulate, Your Grace. But someone who you know told me about a saying that stuck with me forever. Power lies where men believe it lies. It's an illusion, a shadow on the wall. And someone very small can cast a very large shadow."

"Lord Varys? It's his way of expressing. He likes double entendres, full of double meanings."
Daenerys was grinning, nearly amused. "We'll have to make people see our shadows on the wall, larger than any other's. How far can reach the shadows cast by dragon fire?"

"I'm sure they reach very far, Your Grace."

"They'll do. They'll reach so far that everyone in the Seven Kingdoms will see them," Daenerys stated.
Meereen: Month 2. Day 12

Tyrion remembered the note he had in his pocket, and he took it out to show it to Daenerys.

"I've just recalled that I had noted this down for you, Your Grace. It's a sentence in the ancient language, the only one that appears in the book *Dragon's dreams* by maester Carlus. My uncle Gerion gave it to me when I reached my sixth nameday and it was the most special book I had, until Cersei threw it into the fireplace to punish me once more for the crime of being born." He held out the sheet of paper to the queen and she took it with curiosity.

After reading it, a light lit in her eyes.

"I understand what it means! It means: *If you awake the dragon, you won't be able to escape from its fire.*" She stared at Tyrion with a glint of euphoria in her pupils. "It looks like an old saying typical of my dynasty." She repeated it in the strange sounds which had nearly got lost in oblivion, and she pronounced it again, with more confidence.

"Very well, Your Grace. I see that your ancestral memory works perfectly. Can you remember something else?"

"Yes! I recall another word. Until moments ago, the only I could say was *fire*. But now I think I know how to ask a dragon to fly. Though I'm afraid that's all for now." Daenerys contained her enthusiasm and sighed.

"Well, that's a start." Tyrion remembered an anecdote he had been told. "Among the many stories that go round, I heard the one about the time you received the captains of the Second Sons at the gates of Yunkai, and Daario Naharis was one of them. What did you say then?" Tyrion was smiling, imagining the conversation in which, seemingly, one of the captains, a Braavosi quite boastful and alarmingly lacking in manners, had not been too much polite. Daario, on his part, must begin to conceive his plans just in those moments, when he got enchanted with the khaleesi's beauty and bravery.

Daenerys caught what he meant.

"That a fortnight earlier I had no army and a year earlier I had no dragons."

"That's it. Five minutes ago you only knew the word *fire* in the ancient language," Tyrion encouraged.

Both of them grinned.

"Well, it's better than nothing. I appreciate a lot that you have helped me to refresh my memory a bit, Lord Tyrion."

"You're welcome. Step by step, Your Grace. When the moment comes, you'll be ready."

"I hope so. And I'll tell you a thing that will interest Lady Sansa especially. The strings have been pulled so the mountain clans of the Vale of Arryn start the siege. Littlefinger will stop settling down on the seat of the Eyrie," Daenerys announced with irony.

Tyrion remained thoughtful.
"We should act with utmost care. And Baelish mustn't be underestimated. It would be the worst mistake. That man knows very well how to sneak out and turn the situations in his favour."

"I know. But Lord Varys is not less astute and he knows what he's doing," she pointed out. "We'll take advantage of the strategic location of the mountains and of the mistrust of the lords of the Vale towards Baelish. Moreover, no one will be in a position to send immediate aid to him. He can't count on the Boltons, and the Lannister armies would last weeks to arrive there, if it happens that your uncle Kevan considers necessary to mobilize his troops for a bunch of lords who refused to participate in war. I think we can regard the Freys as ruled out. They are too much incompetent. They're only useful for slaughtering guests in a low way, violating the law of hospitality."

Tyrion felt a tingle in the pit of his stomach with the perspective of catching the main responsible for war. The more he analyzed what was hidden behind the conflict, the more he convinced himself that Littlefinger was the hand that had lit the fuse. Besides, that dude had tried to remove him from the board, Tyrion was more than sure of that. Especially since he had married Sansa, snatching from Littlefinger his chance to get his claws on the daughter of his obsession, Catelyn Tully. Tyrion felt a fit of hatred when he thought of what that degenerate would have done to poor Sansa, manipulating and using her for his crafty plans, and turning her into the target of his depraved frustration because he had not ever been able to get her mother. Tyrion could not even imagine those greedy and poisonous hands over Sansa's soft skin without feeling an unspeakable disgust.

Littlefinger would have sentenced her to a prison even worse than the Red Keep.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 380

Meereen: Month 2. Day 12

When Tyrion had been in the Vale under arrest for his alleged attack on Bran, Lysa had accused him also of murdering her husband, Jon Arryn. *What a cynical bitch.* She herself had poisoned him, that was another thing which Tyrion did not doubt. And, being Littlefinger's lover, he must encourage her to do it, and thus to start all that series of misfortunes that came afterwards. If that was added to the fact that her lover surely was also putting in her head paranoid ideas against the Lannisters, it was not necessary much more for her troubled mind to forge all kinds of persecutory manias and desires to eliminate some Lannisters. Preferably, the despicable dwarf, both for being an abomination, and for being much cleverer than it suited Baelish.

And it was not that it bothered Tyrion specially that his lineage was hated, as that was perfectly normal, having Tywin and Cersei, and also Jaime whose reputation was not precisely good, not to mention Joff, although he officially was a Baratheon. Or himself, who many considered a monster because of his physical condition. No, for varied reasons the Lannisters had not earned people's affection. Tyrion never had felt proud of being a Lannister, though he had exerted himself uselessly to contribute to the questionable honour of his family and he had sought the impossible approval of his father.

What truly bothered him was that others indicted him for crimes he had not committed and that they wanted to involve him in them to make him carry the can, and that way some people, the true culprits, took the blame off themselves, and others took advantage of those circumstances to punish him even more for having been born a dwarf.

No, Tyrion would not give any of them the satisfaction of letting himself be caught in their claws. Neither Cersei, nor Petyr Baelish.

A sudden thought worried him. What did Jaime think about Joffrey's death? Had he come to suspect him, his little brother who he had always loved and respected? Tyrion knew that Jaime never felt a great affection for his firstborn son, nor had he developed fatherly instincts towards any of the children he had with Cersei. Surely he had suffered more for her grief than for his own. Simply, Jaime did not have a vocation for being a father, and anyway he could have never shown it if he had developed it, because his children were the result of incest, and there was no choice but to make them pass as Robert's children.

But, even though Jaime never loved Joffrey... Would he blame Tyrion for his murder? Did he have a grudge against him? Did he think that his escape was a proof of his guilt? He could not be sure, but he hoped that Jaime was able to see beyond their sister's nose and slit and sense that Tyrion, no matter how much he hated his disgusting nephew, he would not have killed him unless it had been a case of self-defence, if the sadistic bastard had tried to attack him openly and with his own hands, what would have never happened, as Joff was too much weak and coward when he was not surrounded by his thugs. Perhaps the idea of strangling the snot had tempted Tyrion not infrequently, but he was not a murderer of his own blood. If he did not count his mother, of course.

In any case, he wished Jaime had not turned on him as well.

Daenerys caught the glint that passed through his eyes during those moments.

"I'm gathering all the information I can obtain about the Lord Regent of the Vale, Lord Tyrion, but he is a very elusive guy. He doesn't leave traces or evidences of his actions, he knows how to erase
and cover up his trails. I've tried to find out how he organized the conspiracy with Lady Olenna, when he recruited the knight made into a fool, Ser Dontos... But none of Lord Varys' little birds knows anything. What I've received confirmation about a few days ago is that Littlefinger and Lady Lysa effectively were lovers, though I suppose that anyone who had observed them a little more carefully would have noticed. You yourself realized it, and that even taking into account that you didn't pay much attention to them. That fact undoubtedly makes Baelish the main suspect of conspiring to murder the Hand of the King, and from that moment can be assumed his direct or indirect involvement in many other incidents which have contributed to devastate the kingdoms."

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
"Lysa was never intelligent or very discreet. She was blind with love for that nasty dude since she was a little girl. Only a foolish and trusting poor sod like Jon Arryn wouldn't notice," Tyrion said, ironic. "Lord Hoster Tully wedded his youngest daughter to the mature lord of the Vale, and I'd bet a barrel of Dornish wine that he did it not only to establish an alliance by marriage between the Riverlands and the Vale and that way he joined forces, along with the North, during Robert's Rebellion in order to defeat your father. He also did it because Arryn would be probably the only important lord who would agree to marry a deflowered lady. Lord Hoster would've had to give Lysa to a minor lord or to a knight if Arryn wouldn't have accepted. In most of Westeros, except for the South, the ladies who lie with men without being married get tarnished. Lysa's father was not a fool, and his daughter was very indiscreet, and he probably found out about the affair between her and Baelish. The only one who surely wasn't aware of anything was the husband," Tyrion related. "Baelish more than once has boasted asserting that he had intimacy with Lady Catelyn, but I'd swear that it was the lie of a jilted and spiteful man. He had to resign himself to the leftovers, Lysa, and he took advantage of her while she was useful for him. As soon as he got the regent lordship of the Vale, he got rid of her. He's really dangerous, because he always acts in the shadows, underhand." He hushed for some moments, thoughtful. "My sister herself is enough threat for the stability of the realm. If besides we add someone like Littlefinger, who is, apart from Varys, the true mastermind there, the devastation will not stop, Your Grace. My uncle Kevan is competent and a good Hand of the King, but he can't compete against Littlefinger's wickedness and astuteness."

"Well, we'll do everything possible to counteract him. When we have sown the seed of rebellion in the clans, we'll see what he does to try to get out of the quagmire, especially when the lords of the Vale turn against him, what I expect them to do. Surely the proud lords, who have lived there for many generations, will refuse to give the mountains to the clans, and Baelish, who is not from there, surely will try to deceive both sides with some sort of fake deal, but my contacts will try to make sure that the clans won't give in. They'll be in a strategic advantage, and that's the best weapon they have. If the lords persist in their refusal, the clans might attack their lands and harass them. And meanwhile, Littlefinger will be between a rock and a hard place, as we commented in a previous meeting."

"It's a good plan, Your Grace. We'll see what happens. From here we can't do much more. But we have to get used to the idea that it's going to be very difficult to catch him." Tyrion preferred to remain skeptical and on the lookout, waiting for the events to come.

"Yes, it's going to be. But in one way or another, one day he'll pay for his crimes, take that for granted as far as I live, Lord Tyrion," Daenerys affirmed.

"And also as far as I live, Your Grace," he added.

They shared another knowing grin and then she changed the subject.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 382

Meereen: Month 2. Day 12

"Within three days the finals of the fighting championships will be celebrated in the Daznak's amphitheater. The great test is coming. I'd wish to be anywhere but there." She made a face of annoyance.

"You're not the only one. Neither I share the popular fervour for blood and bowels. At least Sansa will be spared it. I begged her not to attend the shows. She was determined to accompany me. As a true Northerner, her strict training dictates that the proper thing in the acts of protocol is that the wives of the royal counselors attend. But I managed to persuade her against it. I'd be too much worried for her and couldn't focus fully on my duty by your side, Your Grace. Moreover, though she has seen enough horror, she's a sensitive lass and I know that the sight of death affects her deeply, so I'd like to spare her all that," Tyrion explained, with a tone devoutly respectful but resolute.

She nodded.

"I understand your concern, Lord Tyrion. I'd do the same. It's not necessary for your wife to be present, you can tell her so she doesn't think I feel offended by her absence."

"I'll tell her. I assure you that her mother and her septa did a good work with her education, Your Grace, and she won't stay really calm until I confirm to her that you yourself have said that her presence in the amphitheater is not necessary." Tyrion was smiling.

"I was educated partly by my brother, and by the preceptors that our protectors put at our disposal. We had to change constantly, because we couldn't settle down anywhere. Whenever I started to be fond of a place and of some of the people who lived there, suddenly I was forced to leave everything behind, I was hidden and moved to another temporary residence. It was madness. I was always scared and missed a true home. My brother was obsessed with the Iron Throne and was stupid, but he sometimes was good to me too, and when he was in a good mood he taught me all he knew. It wasn't very much, but I liked listening to him and imagining all the stories he told me. With the preceptors I learnt to read and write, they also explained to me many details about the history of Westeros and of varied nations and civilizations of Essos, and I was instructed in the protocol standards which are displayed in the Seven Kingdoms. But I didn't have a strict or continuous education, because none of my teachers remained with me enough time. My life was made of leaps and constant changes. I miss what Lady Sansa had. But things had to happen this way so I've been able to reach where I've reached."

Tyrion observed her melancholic expression.

"If it's not an indiscretion to ask it, Your Grace, and you don't have to answer if you don't fancy it... Is there something you would have preferred more than anything, more than having reached this far?"

She watched him with a look of sorrow.

"Lots of things, my friend. I'd have preferred to have a mother who kissed me goodnight. I'd have preferred to live in a nice house with a red front door. I'd have preferred my sun and stars to be still with me, and my son Rhaego. I saw them in a vision, in the House of the Undying in Qarth, do you know? My boy had black hair like his father, but his eyes were light like mine, and he was
stretching his small arms to me. I wished to stay in that warm dothraki tent. But that was only an illusion, a mirage. The wizards were tempting me with what I had loved most. And I said goodbye once more to the loves of my life, because I had to carry on. And that's what I'm doing. Carrying on. This is not what I'd have preferred, but it's what I must do, and I will do it, because I owe that to my people. I'll do it because I know what it means to be deprived of oneself's dreams, and I want others to have the opportunity to live theirs. I want them to know the kind of life I won't have.”

Tyrion listened, really touched, to the confession of the voluntary sacrifice of that beautiful and young eighteen-year-old woman, and he knelt in front of her.

"And I will help you to achieve it, Your Grace."
Meereen: Month 2. Day 15

Three days later, after having breakfast, Tyrion said goodbye to Sansa regretfully until the evening, when with a little luck he at last might come back to have dinner with her at a reasonable hour. It was going to be a long and tiresome day, because first it would be carried out the trial for the rape of the freed girl, and later he would attend with the queen directly to Daznak’s amphitheater to witness the final of the fighting championships, which would start as soon as Daenerys took her seat in the box and clapped her hands to announce the beginning of the combats. Tyrion summoned up all his patience and cheered himself up recalling the sex sessions he had shared with Sansa the previous night and during that dawn. She was using the erotic balls every day for some periods of time, and for them both it was an extremely arousing game. Tyrion barely could take his mind off those toys inside of his wife's body, stimulating her most intimate area. It was their shared secret and, when they were together but without pouncing on one another for not being the proper moment to do that, they looked at each other with burning eyes and knowing smiles. Sansa had felt very embarrassed the first time she used the balls, because she thought that the others would notice that something strange was happening to her, but she started to gain confidence and she realized that she was perfectly capable of pretending in front of people. It cost her an effort not to give away the heat which ran through her insides and not to stop what she was doing to go in search of her husband and ride him on the floor of any room, but her training of northern lady was proving its great usefulness, and all that added more excitement and erotism to the game. The only times she did not use the toy was when she had to go to school, because she did not consider it appropriate or decorous before the children, but as soon as she went back to her rooms when the lessons ended she put them into herself, while she was waiting for Tyrion and sewing. In the afternoons, during her meetings with the women of the guild of seamstresses, the objects provoked in her very pleasant sensations and sometimes she was on the verge of moaning, especially when she remembered the things Tyrion did to her in the privacy of their bedroom. In those moments she almost forgot where she was, and in some occasions Leena had observed her with a puzzled expression, undoubtedly catching in her a suspicious gesture or funny face, but Sansa immediately regained her composure and she kept on with the needlework as if nothing was happening. She spent the whole afternoon in a sweet anticipation which caused a tingle in her stomach and in her lower belly and, when she returned to her chambers, the first thing she did was pull out the balls, wash them and wrap them in the clean pieces of cloth, and then she was ready for the sexual encounters she had missed so much with her husband. More than ready. She practically assaulted him and devoured him alive, and he let her do, delighted and happy to follow her to the endless boundaries of pleasure.

Sighing with resignation, Tyrion walked along the corridors towards the audience hall. Daenerys was also arriving in that moment with Missandei and Ser Barristan, and the freed girl and her mother were walking forward from further away, escorted by two Unsullied. Everyone greeted each other and took their places in the hall.

The last one to enter was the accused, who looked even worse than three days earlier. By then he had given the impression of being a man little inclined to personal care and hygiene, but after three days in a cell he offered an almost pitiful image. Though it was not because he had not been offered the means to keep a decent appearance. Daenerys had commanded that the suspects who remained awaiting trial and who had not been sentenced yet, must be treated fairly. While their guilt was not demonstrated yet, they had the right to be treated with respect.

But with no doubt that guy was not very inclined to the advantages of water and soap. Tyrion imagined his grimy skin over the girl's and his stomach nearly turned in disgust.
Meereen: Month 2. Day 15

Missandei stepped forward at the top of the stairs and she proclaimed:

"All kneel before Daenerys Stormborn, The Unburnt, Queen of Meereen, the Andals, the Rhoynar and the First Men, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Chains and Mother of Dragons!"

Everyone obeyed and knelt until Daenerys indicated with a motion of her hand that they could stand up. Each one sat down or stayed standing in the place where they had to be.

The queen took the floor.

"Today we will hold the trial for the rape of the girl named Keyla, twelve years old and a native of Meereen, committed allegedly by the man named Likhan, between thirty-five and forty years old and a native of Yunkai. The incident happened supposedly yesterday, more or less half an hour after sunrise, in the tent of the accused, who, according to the girl's testimony, abducted her while she was walking past there and he forced her to keep quiet putting a knife on her neck. He dragged her quickly to the inside so nobody saw them and he perpetrated the crime. Later she managed to escape in an unguarded moment of the accused. He maintains that Keyla is lying in order to hide certain secret activities that the accused affirms to have discovered and that she desires to silence him by accusing him falsely. To prove the veracity or the falseness of the facts, we will count on the presence of several witnesses who will testify to what they have observed. After the testimonies, my two judges here present, Missandei of Naath and Lord Tyrion Lannister will dictate sentence, and I will be one more judge." Daenerys was following the Westerosi custom of appointing three judges, including herself. "The final verdict will be the one which most judges will decide." Daenerys remained silent, looked at the soldiers positioned at the door and nodded in their direction. "Let Grand Maester Maero come in."

The soldiers stationed on either side of the door opened it and another soldier escorted the maester to the inside. This one knelt and went to position himself in the witnesses' place.

"Grand Maester, three days ago you examined the presumed victim to confirm or discard the commission of the crime. What do you have to declare?", the queen asked, with her resounding and steady voice.

"That the girl indeed was deflowered in a violent way, Your Grace."

The accused emitted a plaintive wail. "No, no, I didn't do it, I didn't do it, she's a liar bitch...;" he repeated in a string.

"Silence!," Daenerys thundered. "If you have something to allege, you will do it when it is your turn. If you interrupt again, you will be taken back to your cell, where you will await the verdict of this court."

The man stopped whining, but he was still moving his lips quietly. Tyrion confirmed for himself that the dude was not in his right mind, what Tyrion had noticed the first time he saw him. Probably he was one of those lonely deranged wretches with strange manias and depravities that sooner or later ended up surfacing and that those people could not control. That miserable fellow must have got obsessed with the girl until he finally could not resist his impulses. Although surely Keyla was not the first. Normally that type of sexual criminals were repeat offenders. If he had not
been caught before, it was probably because he had been lucky enough that no one had accused him, either because he had killed the victim to prevent her from talking to someone about it, or because the victim did not tell anything. Generally the rapes among slaves were not reported to the masters, because these ones usually did nothing to punish the culprits. The slaves were possessions of too little value to take such pains for them. The most that the slaves could get with a complaint of rape was that the master punished all his slaves for bothering him and making him waste his time.

"Do you affirm then, Gran Maester, that Keyla has been ravished?"

"I affirm it, Your Grace," he stated, unblinking.

"Thank you, maester. Let the next witness enter," Daenerys commanded.

Maero left and his place was occupied by a freed woman of around twenty-five years old.

"My name is Marra. My tent is two rows to the left of Likhan's, and since we settled here I've observed him. He's a troublesome neighbour, he doesn't practice any job and he hasn't applied for membership in any brotherhood with the excuse that he's sick, but I can assure that he's in better health than myself. I sometimes have caught a strange expression on his face when there are girls around, he stares at them in an unnatural way. The morning of the incident I was in my tent, collecting the breakfast utensils, and suddenly I heard a slight muffled scream. When I went out there wasn't anyone and I thought that I had imagined it, the previous night I had barely slept and was worn out because my little child had a colic, but now I'm sure of what I heard. Someone shouted, but was silenced quickly."

"Thank you, Marra. Let the following one enter."

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 2. Day 15

The next one was an Unsullied from the camps.

"My name is Wheat Weevil and I'm in charge of patrolling that area of the camps, Mother. When I was walking between the rows, I saw the girl running, with blood between her legs. I asked her what was happening and she told me and led me to the man who had damaged her. He seemed to be getting ready to flee and denied having forced himself upon the girl. We arrested him and brought him here."

"Did you observe if the accused was tidying himself or his clothes up, Wheat Weevil?," Daenerys asked.

"His tent was dirty and messy and the man had no better appearance than his dwelling, Mother. He was tying his trousers with clumsiness. Since I am out on patrol throughout the camp, Likhan has never been clean."

Poor girl. She'll be very lucky if that degenerate hasn't got her pregnant or has transmitted some infection to her, Tyrion thought, nauseated.

"Thank you, Wheat Weevil. You can go back to your occupations." The soldier bent and went out. Daenerys turned to Likhan, and the expression of her eyes was merciless. "We haven't found any witnesses who would testify in your favour. It seems that you don't have many friends in the camp," she said, and the sarcasm of her words was full of threat. She addressed the rest of the hall. "Is there anyone here who hasn't spoken until now and who has something to provide this court with?" Only silence answered. Daenerys looked at Likhan again. "Do you have anything to say in your defence?"

Likhan broke out.

"She's a bitch whore, she bewitched me from the beginning, she's a liar, she has fucked half the camp!"

"It's enough!," Daenerys yelled. "The evidences point vastly at the accused." She turned to look at Missandei. "How do you find Likhan of Yunkai, Missandei of Naath?" Missandei cleared her throat and her voice did not falter. "Guilty." The queen continued, addressing Tyrion. "How do you find Likhan of Yunkai, Tyrion Lannister?" Tyrion did not like at all to act as judge. Although it was obvious that the man had committed a deplorable crime against an innocent girl, it was a bitter pill to condemn someone to be castrated and executed. "Guilty," he said. Though, truth be told, when he observed the poor girl and the man who had assaulted her without many scruples, he himself did not feel too much guilty for having pronounced that word against the rapist. At last, it was the queen's turn. "I also find Likhan guilty of Keyla's rape. I sentence him to be castrated by knife, and I sentence him to death by crucifixion. The mutilation will be carried out today and the execution will be effected within a month."

The convict was shrieking and started to kick when the Unsullied grabbed him to take him back to his cell. The screaming faded progressively when the group moved away.

Keyla and her mother payed their respects to the queen. They knelt at the foot of the stairs. "Mother, thank you for having done justice," the woman said.
"That degenerate will not touch more girls. I cannot repair the damage he has done to Keyla, but I can help you in whatever you need. The maester can go on examining her regularly to make sure that she recovers without trouble, and he can provide her with moon tea if she believes it convenient. For anything, don't hesitate to come to me," Daenerys offered. "Go back to your normal life and I hope that you overcome soon the hard time."

"So we'll do, Mother. Again, thank you very much for everything." Them both made a bow and left, accompanied by the Unsullied who had brought them.

"Obviously that man has some mental disorder," Tyrion commented while everyone was rising from their seats. "Some people like to spend the day crushing bugs with stones. Others, unfortunately, like to assault children. And others even have crowns on their heads and are called kings. My nephew Joffrey was an example of that."

"And my father too," Daenerys added. She stared at the door of the hall, absorbed. "If any time I go as mad as him, don't allow me to keep a crown upon my head." When she turned, there was fear in her gaze. "Swear to me."

Tyrion, Missandei and Ser Barristan looked at each other with their eyes wide out of perplexity.

"We swear, Your Grace," they uttered in unison.

Daenerys recovered quickly and started to walk down the stairs.

"And now, let's go to Daznak's amphitheater. My people is awaiting me to give the signal to authorize a bunch of men to kill each other." In her sarcastic tone there was not the slightest trace of humour. "Ser Barristan, you stay in charge of the security of the pyramid and you'll be in command while I remain absent, as always that my duties call me outside."

"I'll do my duty with all devotion, Your Grace," the knight promised, leaning forward in a bow.

The rest of the group went out to the bright light of Meereen with their escorts and, while they were getting into the palanquins which would carry them, Tyrion mustered his patience to cope with an endless afternoon. You have endured days more boring than this, he told himself to cheer up. But then you didn't have Sansa yet waiting for your return. He smiled, not very sure if that thought would help him to make the afternoon pass faster or if it would make it slower knowing what he was missing without her at his side.
Chapter 386

Meereen: Month 2. Day 15

Tyrion took his place in the box seat, to Daenerys' right, while Missandei did it to her left and Daario Naharis was standing just behind the queen. The winter sun warmed pleasantly and a slight cold breeze was blowing, raising the dust of the sand in the amphitheater, which had been recently irrigated and smoothed for the occasion. The fifty thousand seats of the grandstands were full to overflowing with Meereenese citizens and freedfolk eager for the shows to start. They must have been waiting for quite a long while, and while waiting they had spent their time laughing with several comical acts. When the small royal retinue had made their appearance in the venue, escorted by a tight circle of soldiers, the public has begun to give the queen an ovation and to whistle out of enthusiasm, especially, Tyrion thought, those who were loyal followers of the Mother of Dragons. Daenerys had nodded slightly in greeting when she came out to the arena, what people had applauded, and she had walked with an impassible face until she got settled in her place of honour. She wanted to make clear her displeasure toward that form of popular entertainment, conveying the message that she only compromised because of the collective petition, but she would never be in favour of death as a form of entertainment.

Tyrion ran his eyes over the rows of soldiers scattered throughout the oval perimeter of the arena until he found Jorah. The box seat was placed in one of the two ends of the oval, just opposite the main entrance, and Jorah was on the left, more or less at the midpoint between both ends of the arena. Their eyes met for an instant and the knight nodded. Tyrion returned the gesture, and then Jorah turned his longing stare to the khaleesi. She seemed to be searching for her devoted soldier too, as she turned to look at him, greeting him from afar with a slight gesture and a grin.

In that moment Hizdhar zo Loraq stepped up the box seat and took the seat reserved for him next to Daenerys, between her and Tyrion. Obviously the nobleman had arrived a little late and the queen was irritated. He supposedly would have had to join the royal retinue when the Mother arrived, as protocol required that the personalities who presided over the show in the box seat must enter together in a line behind the queen.

"Where have you been?," she asked, with an unfriendly tone.

"Just making sure that everything is in order, Your Grace," he answered, with his most deferential voice.

Obviously Daenerys decided to let him be and breathed in deeply. She had long hours ahead of her and she'd better keeping as serene as she could.

And after all, we have to thank Hizdhar for so much. He has worked a great lot to organize these games she detests so, and the truth is that I can't blame her for it, Tyrion thought sarcastically. He was determined to make the most of that tedious afternoon and the only way to do that was through his sense of humour. He would laugh as much as he could, but of course not at the dwarves' shows he would have to endure, or even less at the slaughters which would be displayed a few metres in front of him.

The herald walked out to the arena. He belonged to the Meereenese nobility and he was wearing the Ghiscari tunic. He went to the center of the oval, lifted his arms and the murmuring of the grandstands faded.

"Free citizens of Meereen! With the blessings of the Graces and Your Majesty the queen, welcome
to the Grand Final of the Games!" The audience roared and applauded. The herald lowered his arms and two fighters made their entrance. One of them was tall and hefty, and the other was shorter and thin. "My queen, our first combat. These brave men have defeated their former rivals and now they have been brought face to face. Who will triumph, the strong or the quick?"

The short fighter walked forward. "I fight and die for your glory, oh glorious queen!"

Afterwards it was the turn of the tall one, and he repeated the sentence a little clumsily, as if his excess of muscle lessened his ability to speak correctly.

The herald retired and the two men stood still in front of the queen. The crowd kept silent, expectant. Only some cough could be heard and the royal banner with the Targaryen's three-headed dragon was waving in the wind above them.

"Clap your hands, Your Grace. Your public is awaiting," Hizdhar hurried her along.

She, slowly, showing clearly her rejection toward what was about to happen, joined her palms and the reluctant sound was heard loudly in the silence. *More loudly than she would like.*

The audience roared again and the combat started.

*(Part 1 of a longer chapter)*
Chapter 387

Meereen: Month 2. Day 15

Unluckily, Tyrion could not disengage as he usually did when he had to put up with endless meetings and receptions in the Red Keep. The abundant wine helped him to achieve that purpose, but those times were history. Now his mission was to observe carefully his surroundings, listen to the sounds and the conversations. He knew that there were hundreds of soldiers safeguarding them, but he only really trusted his own eyes and ears, and that was perhaps one of the reasons why he had survived to that day. And he had the intention to go on doing so. To his left, Daenerys was talking with Hizdhar and, by her tone, it was clear that she did not have too much patience with the string of pomposities he was saying. He was defending and justifying insistently the existence of the arena games, relying on tradition, and she was not very diplomatic snapping at him that the moment she wanted she might end with a single stroke that tradition and other Ghiscari traditions, the same way she had ended slavery. Moreover, Hizdhar proposed her to bet, and she replied that she was not going to waste Crown money in any bet. Daario took part in the conversation cheekily, telling how he, during his time as an arena fighter, was thin and quick like the lad who was fighting before them (without anyone in the box seat paying a great attention to him, except for the Unsullied who were guarding the box), and Daario was strutting around with his dagger, handling it with such skill that it could barely be seen and putting it very close to Hizdhar's nose, in a provoking attitude which the nobleman did not like in the least. Meanwhile, Tyrion also interspersed some ironic comments, fed up on his part with the stuffy Meereenese man. He quickly sided with the short fighter, both because he always tended to stand up for small people and for those who were at disadvantage, and because he liked being contrary to his annoying seatmate. But right when Daario was making the khaleesi smile with his past triumphs, the tall combatant beheaded the other with a brutal twist of his sword. Blood sprang squirting and the head flew several metres, while the rest of the body fell. The cleaners went quickly to cover with a layer of sand the large bloody spot and to clear the space, and Daenerys was staring at the pathetic scene with patent disgust. Hizdhar was displaying a discreet triumphant smile and Daario must be considering seriously if slitting his neck to gift him a very different smile.

The herald went back to the center of the arena and announced the next combatant, who was a woman. Her name was Barsena and she was quite famous among the population. Tyrion had heard of her. Her specialty was beasts, and in the minor pits she had beaten a bear, a horde of wild dogs and a lion. That time, her opponent was a wild boar. The woman fell on her knees in front of Daenerys and recited the speech prior to the fight. As soon as the clap sounded, a latticed door was opened and the huge beast trotted to the light. Its appearance was really threatening, and besides it was obvious that the animal was not used to the presence of so many human beings. It was very nervous, and that was what the audience wanted. A fight with a bored, docile or indifferent beast would not be very thrilling.

Barsena kept lurking with her spear, moving in circle cautiously, studying her adversary. The boar focused its attention on her, as soon as it acknowledged her as its true enemy. It lowered the colossal head and attacked with a grunt. The woman dodged it with an agile somersault and the public released an exclamation and applauded. She knew how to offer show and for a while she toyed with the animal, provoking it and tiring it out. But in the last run the beast changed its course suddenly and, lifting his head brusquely, hit Barsena squarely in her belly with one of its enormous horns. A cry spread throughout the venue and the fighter woman fell in a gush of blood. With a grimace of agony, she held her belly, out of which her intestines were pouring, and tried to move aside, but the smell of blood drove the animal crazy, and it attacked again, sinking its horns once more into the body beneath it, hoisting it, letting it drop and charging and trampling. By then
Barsena was only a bloody mass. The cleaners took down the boar from afar throwing a few spears at it, and hurried to remove the female ex-champion's unrecongnizable corpse. The people in the grandstands, disappointed, were grumbling or kept quiet. *What many of them regret most is the money they've lost in the bets, how not.*

*(Part 2 of a longer chapter)*
Meereen: Month 2. Day 15

The ones in the box seat were planning to have lunch right there. Daenerys took advantage of the break and ordered their midday meal to be brought, but anyway Tyrion had lost almost all his appetite. The sickly and nauseating smell of Barsena's blood and entrails had turned his stomach. He was glad for the umpteenth time that Sansa was not there. According to Daenerys' expression, it was evident that she was neither eager to eat after the carnage.

In order to liven up the atmosphere after Barsena's fiasco, a company of traveling dwarves made their performance and Tyrion exerted himself to conceal his upset as much as he could. The food arrived at the box seat and was put in several bowls, and the wine was poured. Tyrion refused it, because he wanted to keep totally sober and alert. Neither the queen nor Missandei tasted it, but Hizdhar commanded to be served a generous amount in his cup, obviously happy and relaxed. Look at him, he's in his element. Not even a pig wallowing in shit would be happier than him.

Daenerys and Missandei nibbled with lack of appetite from some bowls. Once the remains of the unfortunate fighter woman and of the boar had been removed, the wind carried away the stench, and Tyrion started to recover his healthy appetite. He decided that after all it would not hurt him to fill his stomach with some of the succulent morsels they had been brought directly from the kitchens of the Great Pyramid. It would be a shame to waste such a good lunch. He asked to be poured fresh water in his cup, and Daenerys and Missandei imitated him. Hizdhar on his part had his plate full to the brim and he was eating and drinking with relish. Meanwhile, in the grandstands many people felt like buying appetizers and drinks to the peddlers, who were some of the merchants of the city and of the market with a special authorization to sell their products in the amphitheaters at a very cheap price. Other attendants, more savers, carried their own food supply, especially bread, cheese and fruit, but it was not permitted to enter with bottles or other type of rigid objects which might be thrown. And all that had been meticulously inspected in the entrance queue. The soldiers had carried out a monumental work making sure that no one was introducing any suspicious object.

The dwarves made the spectators laugh while they were eating, and when they finished their performance they scampered around the grandstands pirouetting and doing acrobatics, collecting the coins many people was offering them. At last, all of them placed in row in front of the box seat and bowed to the queen, and the sound of applause reverberated throughout the venue. Tyrion clapped as well by mere courtesy. He observed that some of the members of the company were looking at him brazenly, and also were smiling at him and gesturing to him, as if indicating to him that if he wanted to join the group he would be welcomed, but he rejected the offer suggesting his ironic smile.

After the break for the comical interlude and lunch, the herald announced the highlight of the afternoon: a series of four multiple bouts, each one with ten opponents who had won in every previous contest of the games. All would fight against all in four rounds until only one winner remained in each round. Those four victors would be brought face to face in the final fight, and the final winner would be the champion of the games, and he would gain two hundred gold coins as prize, enough to retire if he fancied it and lead a modest life, with no frills or wastages, but he might maintain himself and his family with no need to work hard.

Tyrion thought that fortune had a very black sense of humour. The temptation of the prize was not negligible at all, of course. It offered a comfortable life, if one did not throw the money away with
women, wine, bets and revelries. All those who had been candidates in the games were willing to kill and die for those two hundred coins, aware that only one of them would obtain the prize. And all in all, it's sure that the one who gains them will have disposed of everyone else to spend the gold within a couple of days.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 389

Meereen: Month 2. Day 15

Yes, fortune was that sodding. He knew human stupidity very well; it assessed the price of living in two hundred coins. And here the price is high. Many other lives are taken for much less. Or, what is even worse, for free. Would I take part in any games for two hundred coins? The truth is that I've never put a price on my own skin. Others have been already in charge of putting it in my place. Tyrion was entertaining himself with those caustic thoughts, as he did not have other way to have a little fun in that damn place, apart from the times when Daenerys argued with Hizdhar and both Tyrion and Daario dropped comments that made the khaleesi smile and got up the Meereenese nobleman's nose.

There's no doubt that he really desires to warm up with his ass that seat next to the queen, as none of us are making things easy for him. Tyrion nearly felt pity for him. The man seemed to take himself very seriously. Too much seriously, that's his problem.

The final clashes started and the stench of death spread quickly, even more intensely than in the previous fights, because that was a fully-fledged massacre. The spectators were stirred and they asked loudly for rivers of blood. Daenerys' face was showing more revulsion than ever and Tyrion was already regretting to have eaten so heartily.

In the middle of the clamour, a distant roar could be heard.

The whole amphitheater came to a halt all of a sudden, staring at the sky.

More bellows.

And then they appeared. Three monstrous shadows darkened the sky.

Many spectators began to scream. The fighters who were still standing started to run, as the shadows were hovering over them.

Daenerys jumped up, and the others in the box seat imitated her in an instant.

The dragons landed on the sand and began to throw fire over the corpses of the fighters which were scattered throughout the oval, roasting them to feast with them.

Lots of people in the grandstands were shrieking and chaos was unleashed. Everyone was running haphazardly, searching for the exits.

Some of them were throwing at the dragons stones that they must have found on the ground.

"No!," Daenerys shouted. "Don't throw stones at them! They won't hurt you if you don't attack them!" It was useless. Nobody was listening to her.

The beasts released angry roars and turned to the grandstands, enraged, with their jaws bloodstained due to the banquet they were enjoying with the dead combatants. Rocks were still raining onto them.

The soldiers were doing as much as they could to restore order and tried to keep the formation, but people were also throwing rocks at them and mowing them down and Tyrion saw some of them disappear underneath the human mass. Moreover, lots of spectators were falling under the feet of
those who were running behind them and were crushed brutally.

Just then the first flames reached the grandstands. Daenerys had jumped down onto the sand and was running in a way Tyrion hardly had seen anyone run.

All happened very fast, and at the same time it looked like an eternity was passing. Daenerys stopped dead in her tracks at a prudent distance and got closer to her sons cautiously. For a moment it seemed that they were going to attack her as well, but they recognized her immediately and hesitated, though Tyrion observed the fury which was sparkling in their wild pupils. She raised a conciliatory hand and moved her lips, undoubtedly speaking to them to calm them down. But a maddened mob was still throwing rocks and other things they had seized amid the confusion. Someone had taken a spear from a dead soldier and threw it at Drogon, hitting his side, although the projectile barely buried in the hard flesh.

Daenerys must be desperate, and Tyrion saw her do the only thing she could do right then to save herself and save her dragons. She climbed onto Drogon's back and shouted the word *fly* in the ancient language.

The three beasts started to run along the arena to gain momentum, nearly knocking down a group of soldiers that were rushing to aid their queen, and they rose up in the air until they gained height, left the amphitheater behind and vanished in the distance, heading for the north.

Tyrion had observed everything as if petrified. The box seat had not been attacked, because the crowd's instinct had been to escape to the outside, but Missandei had grasped his arm in an unconscious gesture. Daario could not be seen anywhere. He had jumped to the arena behind Daenerys and he probably had joined the soldiers who were trying to contain the mass hysteria.

A sound drew Tyrion's attention at his feet. He lowered his eyes and saw Hizdhar lying on the floorboards. He was convulsing and a pink froth was spilling out of his mouth. He was popeyed and his eyes were turned backwards, so only the white of his eyeballs could be seen.

"He has been poisoned!," Tyrion shouted, realizing what was happening. He and Missandei knelt on both sides of the dying man, but nothing could be done. Hizdhar stopped writhing and passed away.

Tyrion's mind, as always in times of emergency, was working at full speed.

"It's the wine! The wine was poisoned. He has been the only one to drink it." Missandei was staring at the scene in shock. There were too many things to assimilate them so suddenly. Daenerys had to flee riding Drogon to save her own life, her dragons' lives and prevent them from burning more people. She was setting out towards an unknown location and she did not possess enough control on her beasts yet. The amphitheater was a mess and loads of people had died crushed and burnt. And, besides, it had been planned a plot to murder Daenerys with poison.

*And, what is worse, Tyrion thought, overwhelmed, now almost everything has fallen onto my shoulders.*
Chapter 390

Meereen: Month 2. Day 15

The soldiers at last managed to restore a fragile order. Tyrion, Missandei and Daario arranged on the fly that the dead were lined up on the sand, and the injured were taken to the temple of Graces, like it had been done after the catastrophe of the market. Jorah also got to work to help with whatever necessary.

The mood in the city was very agitated after the attack of the dragons, and it was going to cost a great effort to appease those affected. No one, not even Daenerys herself, had foreseen that the beasts would appear suddenly in the amphitheater, with no doubt fearing that their mother might be in danger amongst the huge crowd gathered together in that venue which at any moment might turn into a trap, as it had happened indeed, though the tragedy had been triggered by themselves with their presence. Or rather by a series of unfortunate errors. Many spectators had felt terrorized when they saw the three monsters hovering over them, and fear was the worst enemy of good sense. Probably if people had not thrown stones at them, they would not have felt provoked and would not have attacked anyone. They would have verified that their mother was all right and they would have taken flight once more, remaining around just in case, watching the panorama from above, although it was impossible to foresee the reactions of the unpredictable animals. Despite all, Tyrion believed that nothing would have happened. But no one, except for a few people in the world, was used to seeing dragons so closely, and it was logical that they got scared and reacted in such an impulsive way.

The damage was already done and there was no way back. As far as Tyrion had been able to hear, many people were accusing Daenerys of the disaster and her brittle popularity had plummeted in the city, and even in the camps, where she was practically worshipped, many were resentful.

How would they manage to soothe that pain and that rage?

On the other hand, there was too the matter of Hizdhar's poisoning, which could not be overlooked. A research had to be carried out to try to find out how that wine ended up in the box seat. Without any doubt it was intended for Daenerys. Now the Loraq family had one more member to mourn and that fact neither was going to incline one of the most ancient dynasties in Meereen toward the queen. Their feeble alliance with the Crown was sustained thanks to their young patriarch, who had just been brutally killed. Tyrion at least had one thing clear: that Hizdhar had not belonged to the Sons of the Harpy. If he had been one of their members, he would be aware that the wine had a lethal dose of poison intended for Daenerys.

Tyrion, Missandei and Daario, after arranging the most urgent measures, had managed to break through to the pyramid. They had to meet and discuss vitally important matters. First, they must organize both the search for the queen and how Meereen would be ruled in her absence. The city could not be abandoned to chaos, with the great effort carried out to straighten it out after its conquest. The citizens, native and freed, could not be left to their fate; they needed a guiding hand. But, who would be that hand?

Tyrion liked to have power of command and, when he served as Hand of the King, he discovered that he was good at it. But from that to having to act as a king, or rather to stand in for one... There was a great difference. He never had desired, or would desire, to be a king. Being at the forefront of everything overwhelmed him. But being an assistant, a hand in the shadow, that was his thing. He hoped that, whatever was decided, it did not fall to him almost everything, as he had feared.
when he saw Daenerys overflying the sky towards the horizon. After all, the close friendship that the queen and him maintained and the high confidence she placed in him had not gone unnoticed by anyone. But he wanted to make very clear to the members of the Council that he was more than willing to rely on everyone's collaboration, though he expected that the experience he had in government and politics would give him skill and decisiveness which were even more necessary in times of emergency.

Despite all the pressing problems they had, Tyrion was about to smile when he remembered that, even in those times of distress, he could not help but realizing that the image of a member of the Targaryen family riding a dragon was an unusual spectacle that had not been seen in centuries. A unique event in recent history. A meticulous observer like him, who besides had a developed aesthetic sensibility, could not disregard such an important detail. But it was not the proper moment to stop and think about that. There were many issues that required all his attention.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 2. Day 15

Of course, when he got into the pyramid, Sansa, Pod and Leena were aware of all that happened and were waiting in the main entrance together with Tyrion's escorts. His wife threw herself into his arms, flooded with relief when she saw him appearing in one piece, and he soothed her, though he himself did not feel calm at all. There was so much to do and to organize that it was very difficult to decide where to start, although he always applied a trick which usually worked: to start with the most urgent issues, with what could not be postponed, and from there continuing in order of importance. For the first time he understood truly how much Daenerys was bearing on her delicate shoulders and once more he admired her ability to carry it forward.

He explained to Sansa that he would have to meet with the other members of the Council to decide the lines of immediate action, and he asked that, as he did not believe he could go back to their rooms soon, she stayed in the meantime with Pod and Leena if she fancied company. She agreed. Evidently she did not relish in the least remaining alone with that restlessness eating her away, and Tyrion thanked his friends with all his heart for taking care of her in his place.

The fact that Sansa was in good hands steadied his spirit enough so his ideas started to get straight. His mind once more was doing what it did best, work at full capacity.

The first he did was to agree with Ser Barristan, Missandei, Daario and Grey Worm to go right away to Daenerys' private hall to debate. Kerro and Maero were exempted from assisting, the former one because he must have an awful lot of work trying to pacify his people and organize the camps with the help of the Unsullied and the Second Sons, and the latter for being fulfilling his tasks as healer in the new catastrophe. It was essential that all those who could assist to the meeting were present, as it was going to be decided the immediate future of the city, if something could be done to amend it.

Daario took the floor first, expounding a matter that, effectively, Tyrion wanted to tackle first of all.

"Our queen right now is flying at the whim of some dragons she doesn't control yet, and we don't even know where they are carrying her to. They went away northwards, what makes me fear that they might end up in the Great Grass Sea, and we all know what's there. Thousands of dothraki thirsty for conquests, sacking and rapes. What do you think can happen to our khaleesi if they find her? It's true that she has her dragons, but they are capricious and we can't be sure that they'll protect her at all times. And if it's not the dothraki, it'll be others equally thirsty for venting their lust with a beautiful silver-haired woman, a very rare feature in these lands. And they won't last much to identify her as the Mother of Dragons, even in the case that she didn't give herself away within a few minutes after bumping into the bad guys. She's used to exert her authority, and maybe she forgets that she alone, lost in the middle of nowhere, isn't anybody to a gang of savages, thieves and slavers. We have to find her as soon as possible."

"Of course. How do you suggest we do it? The city right now is on the verge of tumbling down and we can't manage without many soldiers," Tyrion set out, because though he did not fear for Daenerys less than Daario, he was not willing to leave the city untended, without enough soldiers, and the armies were devoted to their queen. In her absence, they only would listen to what Grey Worm, Daario or even Ser Barristan, who they respected deeply, commanded them. Because of that it was necessary to act with the utmost caution and not squandering their resources.
(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
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"I won't need many soldiers. I'll only need one to accompany me. In these circumstances stealth is the most effective tactic. We might infiltrate wherever they have her and rescue her in the darkness of the night without their captors noticing. And if when we find her no one has captured her and she's hidden somewhere, even better. More boring, but faster, doubtlessly. What we can't do is to go announcing our arrival as if we were a walking fanfare," Daario reasoned.

Tyrion nodded.

"It's true. Very well thought. Who are you going to choose to accompany you?"

"Someone who knows his khaleesi almost as much as I do," the sellsword said, with a grin, emphasizing the word almost. "Moreover, he's an old hand, he's used to ride many hours and to the harshness of the road, he's an expert following tracks and he's not too silly. And what is more important, he longs for our queen like an adolescent, and thereby he won't spare any efforts to find her."

Tyrion smiled too. Daario certainly was a clever man. A bit irksome sometimes, but clever.

"Jorah. Excellent choice. When will you depart?," Tyrion asked.

"Before sunrise if possible. I'll inform him right away. I think that he must be opening a groove out of impatience out there, walking like a caged beast at the gate of the pyramid, while we are debating what to do. If I don't let him know soon, he'll eat his own hands or something worse, and I need him in one piece. Or he might commit the folly of going alone in search for her, and thus he'd be committing disobedience and desertion and he'd put me in serious trouble."

"Well, then go tell him and get ready for the trip. We'll go on with the Council meeting. For now your task is decided, so it'll be best if you don't waste time," Tyrion suggested.

"Then let's say goodbye until soon. If we don't come back, don't cry for me a lot because you'll become old prematurely. Well, except for you, Ser Barristan," the sellsword captain joked and, without waiting for an answer, he left the hall.

Tyrion took the initiative. He did not want to give the wrong impression that he expected to walk off with the government of the city exclusively, but it was necessary to act quickly, and if he had a very useful quality in the precarious situation they were going through, it was a quick mind.

"They will move heavens and earth to find her. I think we can be sure that, if there's someone capable of bringing her back, it will be them both. Now we should focus on the difficult task of preventing Meereen from falling into war. I want you to know that I rely on your full collaboration. All our minds working together will be more efficient, and now all of us must give the best of ourselves. Moreover, without our highest power figure, our enemies might summon courage. The Sons of the Harpy and the rest of the slaver masters will take advantage of the confusion. Until order is restored, our position is extremely vulnerable. Besides, to complicate matters, we have to calm down those who have been affected by the attack of the dragons. Until now we've been able to cope with the slavers of the city, but if our own people turn against us we couldn't do much to contain them."
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Tyrion kept silent and gave up his turn to those who wanted to participate. Ser Barristan spoke.

"Let them have this night to prepare their dead and see them off, and tomorrow morning the funeral will be held. We all must attend and make them see that we join their sorrow. It's very important that they see us take part in their sufferings. We also should recommend the Green Grace to convey a message of peace in her speech for the deceased, touching enough to make an impression on the population. She possesses an excellent oratory and maybe they will listen to her. In the worst moments, people need to grasp any solace, and she knows how to console the crowds. Before all else, we must do whatever necessary to prevent a popular uprising. The spirits are very heated already, and though in this case the Sons of the Harpy haven't been the authors, except possibly for Hizdhar's poisoning, between the freedfolk and the Meereenese it won't be necessary much provocation to ignite any spark. They might look for any pretext to declare war mutually, taking advantage of the current instability."

"Yes, we agree that we must act quickly. It will be done as you say." Tyrion turned to Grey Worm. "You already know the instructions, captain. The deceased will be held a vigil tonight, and early tomorrow they'll be buried. By the way, we should arrange that Hizdhar's corpse is given to its family and we should explain the truth to them, that he's been poisoned, but without revealing our suspicions about the Sons of the Harpy. Surely they will come to that conclusion on their own. Could you organize all that?"

"Of course, master." The young officer left immediately.

"Let's hope that tomorrow people quieten down in the funerals. We'll have to trust the Green Grace's power of conviction." Tyrion ignored to what extent the grand priestess would be willing to collaborate. As a religious authority, no one could impose anything on her, and Tyrion did not know her enough to be certain about which side she was truly inclined towards, and if she was looking after peace and the souls of all citizens. Then an idea occurred to him. "Do you remember the red priestess from Yi Ti, the one who came to ask for permission to preach through the streets? Let's bring her here. I want to speak with her to request her collaboration. She has many followers and they'll listen to her."

"Good idea. I'll go right now to send word for her to be searched and brought here," Ser Barristan offered. And he left the hall as well.

Only Tyrion and Missandei were remaining.

"My lady, you are the queen's right-hand and you know all her plans. Has she started already the preparations for the welcome of the new freedfolk from Yunkai? They'll arrive at any moment. I'm aware that the present situation alters things, but we can't close the gates to the newcomers. Perhaps their recent sufferings will encourage the population's sense of solidarity and will make them listen to reason a bit more, because they'll be kept busy helping the new neighbours. If we can't trust that there's still a remnant of humanity amongst our freedfolk, then we are lost, because that's the only thing we can rely on to save the city."

"The queen had already foreseen that, my lord. She was going to expound it in the Council. She had the intention to offer them a welcome speech in the Square of Graces, as they'll be too many to receive them in the audience hall, and she would explain them that they'd be sited in the camps."
Tyrion sighed.

"It's all right, I'll do it. I'll offer the welcome speech. If by then the city still stands," he joked, with his ironic half-smile.

Missandei looked at him with solemn reproach, as if he were a naughty boy because he jested with such a serious matter. I sometimes forget that the Good Masters gave this poor girl scarce reasons to smile and appreciate japes.

"We'll have to make joint decisions about the matters that the queen usually handles. I'll need you, as you're more available than the others. We have to be informed about the news both from inside and outside. We'll read the messages that will arrive and we'll answer to them. There are many pending issues and we'll have to decide what to do in each case. Might you help me, my lady?," he asked, with his most respectful tone.

"Of course I'll help you, Lord Tyrion, as I've always helped the queen. She trusts you absolutely, so I do as well. Count on me in everything you need."

Tyrion felt that some of the weight he was carrying upon his shoulders became lighter. He would need her as a right-hand. Daenerys could not have endured so much burden without her by her side. Tyrion realized it.

But he had Sansa too, and though he did not want to oppress her with too many pressures, he needed her beside him. Daenerys already knew that she was practically a member of the Council in the shadow. Well, she would be no more, if she wanted. She would be an active member of the Council. He would suggest to the others that his wife might be present at the meetings. They were desperate times, and she had proved that she was very capable of contributing good ideas for the well being of the city. It would mean much less time for herself, but anyway Tyrion knew that she would not want to remain idle. He knew her very well, and she would not dare to ask him to include her in the emergency Council. In that occasion, her austere northern training would be an obstacle, so Tyrion would spare her that and would ask her straightaway.

"Well, my lady. Right now we can't do anything else. Go rest and tomorrow we'll attend the funerals and will cope with the difficulties. Have a good night." Tyrion bent in front of her. There were not many people who he respected so much as the young interpreter.

"I wish the same for you, my lord." Missandei smiled at him and he gave her way gallantly to the door. She passed him and waited for him at the door. With the prevailing chaos, there was not any sentinels stationed by the door.

"You shouldn't wander around alone through the corridors. I'll accompany you at least until we find a soldier who replaces me," he offered.

"Thank you, my lord."

They walked in silence. Agitation was floating in the air, and the corridors were more crowded than usual. The former calm had been replaced with tension. Tyrion wondered if any of the families who lived in the pyramid had been directly affected by the tragedy of the amphitheater. It's the third tragedy since Sansa and I came here.

"We all will miss her. Let's hope that she doesn't last to come back," he commented, giving voice to his feelings. He had to admit that he was frightened. He would be an idiot if he was not scared. He feared for Sansa. He had to protect her at all cost. And to achieve that they would have to manage that the city was not shattered. And plead for Daenerys to return soon.
"She'll come back. I know she will. She'd never abandon us," Missandei asseverated, with full confidence. And somehow, her improvised bodyguard was caught up in her confidence.

"No, she'd never abandon us," he repeated, sure that, if the gods did not listen to his pleading, as it was their custom, there was at least one person in the world stubborn enough to make it come true.

Don't leave us here in the lurch, khaleesi. You are one of the scant people I believe in along with Sansa, so you'd better planting your ass here as soon as you can.
Chapter 394

Gulltown

The tall woman was walking across the docks, asking for the first ship that set sail to Pentos. The sailors and the dockworkers who packed out the harbour were gazing at her insolently and murmuring among themselves, and some of them even addressed her bawdy comments. The woman disregarded their stares, which ranged all the cruellest degrees of mockery, though in some rarer cases, lewdness also shone. She was so used to make that impression wherever she walked by that it had been a long time since the unwanted attention she aroused had stopped hurting her in the deepest. The shield she had been building around herself since her childhood made all that malice bounce on her surface without even grazing her.

At last one of the sailors, with better manners than the average who swarmed around the huge and bustling port, led her to one of the captains and this one informed her that his ship would depart for Pentos the next day, but the fare was not cheap, as in winter the journeys were much more dangerous and the vessels were much more exposed to sinking. Due to that, sea crossings were scarcer than in summer and the fares became expensive.

The woman observed the ship with a critical eye. It was a medium-sized merchant vessel with a slovenly appearance, which had seen better days. She decided to haggle over the price just enough to make the captain believe that she did not have as much financial resources as to going around squandering, but she neither lowered the fare as much as to predispose the greedy captain against her. Money was not really a problem that worried her; she barely spent, as she provided herself with supplies whenever she could. She knew how to hunt and fish, did not need more clothes than the ones she already had and, since she had taken her latest decision, she avoided populated places and preferred to sleep rough in hiding places that she knew how to find. Along with the Valyrian steel sword, she had received a generous bag of gold which might last perfectly until the end of her travel, and Jaime also had gifted her a beautiful sorrel. He had been a good animal, noble and resilient. As she could not take him by sea, she had sold him in Gulltown regretfully, because she had grown fond of him.

Brienne of Tarth sealed the deal with the captain of The Eastern Siren and found out about a decent inn where spending the night. By the way, she studied surreptitiously the man's attitude, to resolve if she could trust that he would restrict himself to fulfil the agreement and take her to the destination without more complications, or if he was one of those who felt tempted to rape a lone passenger and cut her throat in the stillness of the night, while she was asleep in her cabin. If that was the case, Brienne would not make it easy for him. Anyway, either they had an affable appearance or a rough-looking appearance, she had learnt to trust no one, and she took precautions. She had been able to manage on her own for several years, since she had left Tarth.

She got into the populous city towards the place where the captain had indicated that she would find suitable accommodation. Gulltown was one of the largest and most thriving cities in Westeros, thanks to its situation as a strategic harbour which connected the capital with the North by sea, and which kept a regular shipping line with Braavos and Pentos especially, due to the geographical proximity. When the mountains of the Vale of Arryn became completely blocked with the great winter snowfalls, Gulltown was the only source of supplies for the lords and the peasants of the Vale.

Once settled in the inn, while she was waiting for her dinner to be brought, with the door firmly barred (she preferred not to be seen in the collective dining room, to draw as little attention to
herself as possible), she started the laborious task of removing her armour. She had a lot of practice and she did it in a reasonably short time. Sometimes she wondered if she should take a squire to help her with those tedious daily activities, but she had no time or patience to search for a suitable one and begin to train him, and moreover an inexperienced person under her charge probably would slow her down. She discarded the idea once more.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 395

Gulltown

After allowing herself to relax in the relative protection of the room, her mind went back to the incident that still burnt her insides and made her experience a shameful sense of failure. Once again.

And the worst was that in her guilty imagination she could feel Lady Catelyn's accusing look. Brienne had failed her resoundingly, like she had failed her loved Renly.

The image of the shadow with Stannis' face piercing the young king's chest would chase her until her last day.

On the other hand, she had let Arya Stark escape. After moving heavens and earth until finding at last Lady Catelyn's youngest daughter next to the Eyrie, she had not been able to persuade the girl to permit her to take care of her. The girl's eyes had made her shiver. They were the eyes of a girl who had seen and lived much more than any child should. There was a cold hatred in that gaze. But perhaps Brienne would have managed to sneak into some small crack on that armour of hatred and mistrust, if the Hound Clegane had not stood in the way. She had to fight fiercely against him until leaving him nearly dead, and meanwhile Arya had fled or had hidden, refusing to give her even the slightest chance. What, on the other hand, had been very sensible on her part. In her circumstances, Brienne would have done the same.

But at last, she had failed Lady Catelyn as well. Twice. She had not been there when her throat was cut at The Twins, and had let one of her daughters go, alone and helpless, after having her right before her. The gods would know what would become of the poor orphan girl.

Fate was laughing at her face. But wallowing in her own pain and failures would not help her to carry on, so she focused on the latest mission she had imposed on herself.

The other daughter of Lady Catelyn, Sansa Stark, was still alive. At least, that was the most recent news she had heard about her. She had run away with her husband Lord Tyrion Lannister and the lastest information she had received revealed that the girl was living currently at the city state of Meereen, under the protection of the queen in exile, Daenerys Targaryen. Sansa and her husband the Lannister dwarf were among the many fugitives who the Dragon Queen took in. That had made Brienne recover her hopes.

She had decided to go to Meereen, pay her respects to the queen and offer her services to Lady Sansa. She wanted to swear her sword to the Stark girl and devote her whole life to protect her, as she had dreamt with Renly. That time, she would do everything possible to persuade Lady Catelyn's eldest daughter to accept her. She did not want to think of failing once more. No, she had to focus on her goal. To start with, the long and harsh travel she had ahead of her would help her not to fall into despair, because she had to concentrate all her senses and her ability to keep safe and sound. On the other hand, the rigid discipline she subjected herself to did not let her fall apart. Her strenuous hours of training not only exercised her skills, but they also kept her mind busy, and that was a very welcomed relief.

She wondered if the Stark girl was happy with her husband, or if she simply had been forced to stay with him to survive. She had not come to treat Tyrion Lannister sufficiently to get an accurate idea of him. Jaime had spoken to her about his youngest brother with affection and, soon after arriving at King's Landing, they had been introduced briefly. She was as tall as Jaime and she had
to look far down in order to see his face properly. Tywin Lannister's youngest son had deep green eyes that seemed to pierce and which could make one feel uncomfortable, because they gave the impression that they were analyzing and measuring with precision the person in front of them, but she also had detected in them for an instant a spark of humour, the same as the one which shone in Jaime's eyes. Brienne had had to endure more than a few doses of her traveling companion's dry sense of humour, and she was familiar with the tendency towards laughter for which the two Lannister brothers felt so much predilection. But the mischievous flash had extinguished quickly in the Imp's pupils, and Brienne had the impression that his worries were not making him go through his best moments. When she greeted him, she tried to deduce if he was taking good care of Lady Sansa. Jaime, sensing her thoughts, had told her soon later that he was sure that his brother treated the girl well. Tyrion had always had a soft spot and empathy for the people who did not have an easy life, and certainly the young Stark girl had not had an easy life since her father had been declared a traitor and executed. And to top it all, shortly after Jaime's and Brienne's arrival at the capital, news circulated about the slaughter at The Twins. Brienne would have wanted to throw on her knees and cry and tear her hair with rage and sorrow. Once more someone to who she had sworn her sword was dead. She had failed Lady Catelyn too. She had to make a great effort to overcome her grief and not to consign her sword, her armour and all her stupid dreams to hell. What was left for her if she renounced to her sword? Only the isle where she was born and where most people mocked her. Her father Lord Selwyn Tarth loved her, that was true, but if she gave in and returned as a failure he would marry her to a minor lord who would accept her for her status and her titles but who would despise her because of her great stature and for having unladylike aspirations, and she would have to move to a place that would never really be her home, to cut herself off from the world behaving as the lady she would never be.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 396

Gulltown

Brienne had maintained a few arguments with Jaime about the promise they both had made to Lady Catelyn. The fact that she was dead did not free them from their oaths. He on his part had brought the matter to a close and not simply because he alleged that hardly anything could be given back to a dead person. Besides, there was the fact that Arya had disappeared and Sansa was under Tyrion's protection because of their marriage. Brienne on her part was not so sure that they had been freed from their mission, and she continued to insist with her usual stubbornness. Finally, after the death of king Joffrey and the escape of Lord Tyrion and Lady Sansa, who were charged with the regicide, Jaime had gifted her the beautiful Valyrian steel sword which came from the Starks' ancient large sword, and he had entrusted the continuation of the mission to her, with surprising seriousness, since it was him. Jaime did not believe that his brother was guilty of the king's assassination. With regards to Sansa, he was not so sure that she was innocent, but he equally said to Brienne that, if she was still willing to devote her life to seek and protect the Stark girls, she would need a good sword, and besides one that was symbolically linked to Lady Catelyn's daughters. *Oathkeeper* would be that symbol, and by the way Brienne could not have a better weapon.

During the farewell, Jaime had said to her, with his usual twisted humour, that since he had met her for the first time she had been like a pain in the ass, that he had not ever known anyone so pig-headed and he would feel relieved to lose sight of her, but his green eyes were telling otherwise. There was grief in them and Brienne knew that he would miss her much more than he would ever admit. At some moment in their strange journey together, they had become true friends.

She did no want to think about certain imprecise feeling that floated quietly between them. No, it could not be love. Jaime loved his sister, no matter how much disgusting Brienne considered it, but she was not stupid and she recognized when a man belonged to a woman. Jaime probably would belong to Cersei until the day of his death. And Brienne had left behind a lot of time ago the childish and stupid love dreams she once had, when she was a girl in Tarth and started to become disillusioned. She was too tall, she liked fighting, she even learnt to fight better than most men. They despised her. No, Brienne stopped getting her hopes up. Until she met Renly, who treated her with respect and kindness when no one else did, and he became her impossible love, but he gave a purpose to her life. She then knew what she wanted to devote herself to in body and soul.

Jaime had awakened again in her those feelings that had been asleep and chained within her. She surprised herself looking at him longingly, wishing for what could not be. She shook her head vehemently, insisting on discarding that weakness that she could not allow herself. But when she had seen in his eyes those things she had dreamed of seeing in the eyes of a man she truly admired... She had been about to waver. She had wanted to embrace him and know how a kiss was. No one had ever kissed her as a lover and she neither had missed that someone put his lips on hers. Only thinking about that made her nauseous. But with Jaime... It would have been very different.

She quickly rejected all that nonsense and recovered, before he noticed that she was in the verge of behaving like a thoughtless young lass. They had not even touched one another when they bid farewell. They limited to stare at each other for some moments, without masks or armours, like two people bound together by the ties of honour and something deeper than affection. Both owed each other their lives, they had passed through the most absurd and treacherous journey possible, and
had arrived at King's Landing as two people different from what they had been.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 397

Gulltown

While she was finishing to remove her armour, Brienne gave herself some more minutes to let her mind fly towards Jaime. What would he be doing? A sensation like a burn bothered her when she imagined him with Cersei. She remembered perfectly how the Lannister lioness, during the celebration of her son's wedding, had looked at her when she reproached her, with her voice soft like silk and lethal like poison, her supposed easiness to change her cloak (Brienne's guts had burnt when she caught the tone with which she had dropped it), but especially the fact that she loved Jaime. If looks could kill, Brienne would have been stricken dead in that instant by the mortal flash in the eyes of the queen regent. Jaime's twin sister was jealous of her, of the time she had spent with him, no matter how scarcely romantic was everything that had happened between them both.

However, what had shocked her most was that Cersei was right. Were her feelings so evident? The truth was that she had never been good at feigning. Jaime must have noticed it, but he never commented anything, though Brienne ignored if he had kept silent out of respect for her feelings or if he did it because being the object of her love ashamed him.

Anyway, it did not matter. Anything between them was absolutely impossible. She called off at a stroke the brief moment to think about her feelings for Jaime and applied herself to order her little luggage, relieved herself and washed herself up in the basin. Someone knocked on the door and a servant announced dinner. She moved away the heavy bar with the dagger in her hand, ready to attack if necessary, but indeed it was only an employee of the inn who was bringing her evening collation. Brienne thanked the lad, barred the door again and sat by the table to eat. When she was done, she took the weapons to clean and grease them. The Valyrian steel did not need to be sharpened or greased, so Brienne polished the hilt. The relief of the lion with the embedded ruby was impressive, she had to admit it, doubtlessly made on the orders of the Lannister patriarch, who had died shortly after his grandson. Had they been victims of a plot? Joffrey had been poisoned with the strangler, whereas the old man had been found in his bed, with no apparent signs of violence. Whatever the case, the situation had changed radically in the Seven Kingdoms, but Brienne would not be there by then to see how the events would unfold without Tywin Lannister to lead the continent with his iron fist.

She honed the daggers and tested the bow and the arrows. She still had enough of them and for the moment she would not have to make more. She hoped not to have to use them, though it did not hurt to carry them. She was not an expert archer, but she was able to hit the target if she did not shoot from a long distance.

She estimated that, in the best case, she would take at least a couple of months to arrive at Meereen. She would sail from one port to another and the route would surround the ruins of Valyria, causing a considerable drift. But the real problem would turn up when she got into the Gulf of Grief. Those waters were infested with pirates and besides the war ships from the cities enemy of queen Daenerys were trying to intercept the maritime traffic to harass her. It was rumoured that Daenerys was trying to search for allies which helped her to keep the waters clear, but that was very difficult for her, as nearly all the cities that might send help were slavers.

Brienne still did not know what would she do when she arrived at Tolos, the last port city previous to Meereen. She hoped to catch a boat there. If not, she would have to risk traveling by land and, if the Seven Kingdoms were already extremely dangerous for any traveler, especially for a lone woman, the territories of the slaver lands and the areas bordering the dothraki Great Grass Sea
were practically a suicide. But if she had no other choice, she would have to take the risk. Anyhow, she would deal with the problem when she had it before her. Previously to that she would have to reach Tolos, what was not going to be small feat either.

Despite all the setbacks and difficulties, her new mission breathed strength and determination into her. Her spirit found a little peace at last and she got ready to sleep. *The Eastern Siren* would set sail at dawn and she wanted to be well rested.

She put on her plain nightgown, hid the sword with its scabbard beneath the pillow as she always did when she slept at inns and put the daggers under the mattress, within easy reach to grab them quickly if necessary. She laid down and felt strange over the bulges that the straw formed under her, as she used to sleep directly on the ground nearly all the nights. Even so, exhaustion swooped down on her and a few minutes later her mind and her body found escape from the hardships of the world.
Chapter 398

Meereen: Month 2. Day 25

Tyrion was tired. Ten days had passed since Daenerys had disappeared and he was sure that he would explode if he had to keep on presiding over for much more time all the audiences, trials, meetings, taking all kinds of decisions, attending to public events and lots of other responsibilities.

It had been a rough time when he received Hizdhar's mother. Grey Worm had chosen a group of soldiers to rescue the young nobleman's corpse and take it to the Loraq's pyramid with full care. They had told Tyrion that the destroyed mother had grasped her son's body and other members of the family had to intervene to separate her from the body and thus they could get it ready for the funeral. When the mother, after the funerals, appeared in the Great Pyramid, Tyrion assured her that he would do as much as he could to find out how her son had been poisoned, but he avoided to mention the Sons of the Harpy. She was not a fool and told him that she knew that a tragedy like that would end up happening. That she had warned Hizdhar that he had got himself onto a very dangerous ground and the Sons of the Harpy would make him pay for it, but he did not want to listen to her. He was too much blinded by pride and the high position he had reached in the city, higher than anyone else had reached in centuries. He even had the hope that the queen one day would choose him as a husband... And her dear son was there no more. The woman fixed her dark withered eyes on Tyrion and said that, as she did not have anything else to lose, she too would make the Sons of the Harpy pay.

"I'll spy for you and will help you to catch those motherfuckers," she declared, surprising those who were present at the hall. "He was my only son. I don't care any more about whatever happens to myself, but I won't leave this damned world without engulfing those who have snatched everything from me. You're not the only ones who hate them or the only ones who can fight against them. A mother's sorrow never must be undervalued. You can let me spy on them for you or I can act on my own account if you don't admit me in your network of spies. One way or another, I'll take revenge. What do you decide?," she blurted out.

Ser Barristan intervened.

"How do we know that all this is not a ruse to betray us?"

The woman looked at the knight with a hard smile.

"If that were the case, you could arrest me and bring me to justice. I don't care about what happens to me, as I said before. But I'm not interested in betraying you. What interests me is to help you in order that the Sons of the Harpy pay for what they've done to my son."

Tyrion, Sansa, Missandei and Ser Barristan shared a glance and made up their minds in that instant.

"All right, Lady Loraq," Tyrion conceded, hoping deep down not to regret that risky decision. "Inform us of everything you observe with utmost discretion."

"I understand. We have to catch them all together. Don't worry, I have my methods. I assure you that in less than a month we'll have caught all of them. I hope you have planned a punishment that won't be forgotten in a very long time." The woman's voice did not even tremble.

"We've envisaged it, my lady." Tyrion sighed with a heavy heart. Once more he wished fervently
that Daenerys came back soon. All that cursed matter of the Sons of the Harpy was what burdened him most.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 2. Day 25

At least, shortly after the meeting with Hizdhar mother's, Tyrion had found out who were responsible for the poisoned wine, and he had conveyed the discovery to the devastated and dangerous woman. After questioning the dismayed cooks of the pyramid, they declared that they always purchased the wine to the brotherhood of wine merchants, that sold their products in the market and had stipulated fixed daily consignments for the Great Pyramid. It had been necessary to speak with the members of the brotherhood and they explained that, in addition to the wines that the Mother's fleet acquired abroad, they bought their wines wholesale to the Astapori merchants, who were specialized in Ghiscari wines and who often imported others, like Dornish Red and Arbor Gold. Every month the suppliers of the Meereenese brotherhood of freed wine merchants traveled a couple of times to Astapor for the acquisitions. The merchants who had sold them the latest consignment were not freedfolk, but freeborn merchants who claimed to be followers of the Mother of Dragons. They had recommended strongly for her the wineskin which turned out being lethal, describing it as a product of excellent quality. The guild of freed wine merchants was really devastated for not having suspected their Astapori colleagues. Tyrion knew that of course the Sons of the Harpy not only acted in Meereen, and that their accomplices were spread around the three big slaver cities. That complicated things a lot. It was not going to be easy to catch and take to Meereen the wine merchants of the Red City to bring them before the law. Tyrion thought that perhaps it would be better to make contact directly by letter (because it would be faster than by messenger) with Imarion The Clement (if by when the message arrived he was still the king of Astapor, Tyrion thought with irony), talk to him about the crime some of his citizens had committed and ask his cooperation because of Daenerys' attempted murder, which had resulted in the death of an innocent man. That would suppose depending on the whim of a king whose character, to tell the truth, Tyrion did not know, aside from the rumours he heard sometimes. Moreover, Daenerys had played him along with the matter of the proposed marriage, and finally the messenger that Imarion has sent to Meereen weeks ago had come back to his city with no answer to the wedding proposal. Probably Imarion had felt wounded in his pride and he would not be up very much in the mood for cooperating in the issue of the poison. Anyway, Tyrion was sure that those men would pay either way. Hizdhar's mother would take charge of that.

The majority of the fugitive slaves from Yunkai had been arriving along the days and it had not been easy to house them. But at least Tyrion had been right that the freedfolk's sense of solidarity would awaken enough to collaborate on taking in their new neighbours and that enormous task definitely calmed the scrambled spirits after the incident in Daznak's amphitheater. Kerro had done an extraordinary work in that sense, not only in his role as organizer of the camps, but as an orator too. He little by little had managed to appease the people and make them understand that the tragedy had been an unfortunate accident, like so many others which fortune sent. He made them see that no one had had the intention to trigger the disaster, and that it was the result of a panic situation in a place where there were more than fifty thousand people. When some replied to him that the dragons were responsible and they should not be loose, Kerro answered that precisely thanks to the dragons their slaver enemies were afraid of the Mother and besides, thanks to everything she had accomplished, helped largely by her dragon blood, they did not have to endure any masters any more. Life was not easy, but it was not nearly for anyone in the world. Accidents and tragedies happened everywhere. He reminded them that the Mother herself had lived very harsh times since her birth and she too had been sold, like they had been. She had not had a pampered life and her dragons gave her the strength she needed to defeat slavery. At last, the freedfolk listened to reason and with that Kerro managed to prevent a greater harm.
Chapter 400

Meereen: Month 2. Day 25

As regards the free citizens native of Meereen who were affected, it had been even more difficult to prevent the uprising, and Tyrion was not very sure that many of them had not decided to join the Sons of the Harpy in retaliation for being permanently damaged by the accident, both physically and psychologically. Some of the survivors had horrible injuries and scars caused by the burns, and others were crippled for the rest of their lives, having lost the use of their legs or of all their limbs after being crushed in the turmoil. And others had lost loved people. All those had been much harder to placate. Tyrion himself had addressed them a speech in the Square of Graces, measuring exactly all his words, the best weapon he possessed to try to persuade them that violence was not the way to honour the victims. Many insisted on reminding that Daenerys Stormborn was a foreign queen who had imposed herself on Meereen and none of them had asked her to do that. Tyrion reminded them that she was concerned about their well-being the same way she was concerned about the freedfolk's; she listened to their requests and their troubles in the audiences, looked for even-handed solutions and cared that no one was helpless or neglected, everybody had the right to have a place to live in and to have their most basic needs covered, and in that the queen made no distinction between native-born and freedfolk. Since her arrival she gave her help to anyone who needed it, though of course nobody who received that help could expect more privileges than others for having been born free. Tyrion continued to emphasize Daenerys' good deeds and many native people stopped protesting. Tyrion hoped that their conscience was pointing out to them the things she had done, which had been of benefit to them one way or another. Things that the Great Masters, on their elevated pedestal, never had done for them, despising them for not belonging to nobility. Always astute, Tyrion was developing subtly a ploy with which he expected to keep many citizens far from the Sons of the Harpy, making them see that the criminal organization was led by the nobility, and the noble people would never treat the commoners as equals. They considered them inferiors. So the commoners did not have to play the game of the aristocracy, that only wanted them to manipulate them and for their own interests, and their well-being did not worry them in the least. Tyrion had not made them guess it directly, but he had hinted at it cunningly.

Another factor that had brought its molehill to achieve that people accepted with resignation their misfortunes had been the religious one. The Green Grace had offered a touching speech in the funerals, and once a week she officiated a ceremony in the temple in memory of the deceased at the recent tragedies in Meereen and many attended to feel a little consoled with the Grand Priestess's well modulated sentences. Moreover, the red priestess from Yi Ti was preaching tirelessly along the streets and lots of witnesses talked with astonishment about some strange phenomena which surrounded the enigmatic woman, such as the fact that she never felt cold and she was able to read the mind of anyone she had in front of her.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 2. Day 25

Every day, Tyrion wrote messages and received others by raven. One of the first things he had done the evening after Daenerys' vanishing, had been to write to Varys informing him about that setback. He did it in code, and he smiled thinking how the Master of Whispers liked riddles. If there was a man able to decipher coded messages, it was him. The problem was that Tyrion did not like riddles or codes; he was not good at it. He preferred things crystal clear and straightforward. But he could not communicate with the Spider otherwise. Tyrion already had received some messages from him with hot news and he had needed Sansa's, Ser Barristan's and Missandei's help to decode them completely. The most anticipated news was the siege of the mountain clans, that were harassing the lords of the Vale. As Varys, Daenerys and Tyrion had foreseen, the lords had refused to acknowledge the tribes' right to possess any piece of land and, due to the rejection, the hardened mountaneers took action. Varys was making sure that they kept their positions without yielding an inch. For the time being the conflict was bursting on Littlefinger's face. The lords, as Daenerys and Tyrion had imagined, insisted on not giving up on the mountains, and that unwise obstinacy would cost them dearly if they did not change their minds. It seemed that Littlefinger was trying to gain time and persuade the lords to let him deal with the heads of the tribes, which the lords absolutely refused. They would not allow him to give the clans a single rock. It was clear that, as they mistrusted him as a very likely suspect in the death of their legitimate lady, they did not recognize his authority, and without them Baelish really was no one in the Vale. He had the forces of the Eyrie, in case that they did not rebel against him, but they were outnumbered and besides an internal war against the lords of his own territory was completely impossible. If they attacked one another, they would be making it easier for the clans the conquest of the Vale. In short, Littlefinger was in a serious predicament. Varys added too that all the ravens who flew from the Eyrie were being taking down and the messages on their legs, removed. They were requests for help headed for King's Landing. Baelish intended to ask for the assitance of Lannister and Tyrell troops. One of the letters was addressed to Lady Olenna, in which he reminded her that, in exchange for the valuable services rendered, he expected the favour to be returned to him. Valuable services rendered? It sounded like Joffrey's assassination, with which Littlefinger had set Margaery free from the monster and had cleared her way so she could marry Tommen. That confirmed Tyrion's suspicions regarding the plot. That information supplied by Varys about Littlefinger's mail proved that he and the Tyrell matriarch were in cahoots with one another and they had plotted to do favours to themselves. Baelish was reminding the debt to the old woman. Not only the Lannisters had debts. The other letter was for Tommen, and in it he appealed to the urge to stifle any attempt to threat the peace of the realm.

The clans on their part, according to Varys, were claiming their right to be the legitimate owners of the mountains, as it should have been since a long time ago but no one, except for Tyron Lannister and his father and the king's grandfather, Tywin Lannister, had ratified it. The former Hand of the King and his son the Halfman had promised them that the mountains would be theirs, as a form of gratitude for their direct cooperation in the war against the Northerners, and that was what they claimed, what was legally theirs. Because of the refusal of the lords of the Vale to give them the mountains peacefully, they had had to take by force what belonged to them.

Tommen and Kevan were in a very delicate situation. The Hand of the King would not deny anyone a right granted by his brother, who he had admired so and whose decisions he had always payed heed to. Tyrion knew that he would not turn a deaf ear to the claim. But, on the other hand, the Vale was being besieged, and the king could not permit uprisings of any kind. And they were not Tywin; they would not annihilate entire clans or houses to settle the conflict. The word given
by Tywin and by Tyrion would incline Kevan to respect it, although it cost them the contempt of the lords of the Vale. Though in the time of his troubled round trip to the Wall Tyrion did not have any authority yet, nevertheless being a Lannister his word had weighed a lot as well.

Anyway, the lords had not contributed to the war, they had not taken sides, and they were not very esteemed in the capital. And Littlefinger would have to manage to make them return to the fold. As lord regent, his duty was to keep the loyalty of his vassals towards the king, because it had been very questionable in the last times.

Daenerys, Tyrion and Varys had calculated the move correctly. They just needed to wait for Littlefinger to end up being cornered among a lot of vassals who would hate him. A lord hated by his vassals (little Robin Arryn's vassals in truth) was a threat, because the king could not tolerate any internecine war. Indeed, the present situation could not bear another war.

But what had disconcerted Tyrion was Varys' veiled allusion to that he had discovered something which could help definitely to remove Petyr Baelish from the board, if the Spider was successful. Tyrion was very intrigued. Would Varys be trying to gather the elusive evidence of any of his crimes?

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 402

Meereen: Month 2. Day 25

Another news was that Stannis' armies were trapped in the middle of the terrible snow storms, scarcely some miles far from Winterfell, and the cold was wrecking havoc. Tyrion was not surprised. The Boltons hardly had to do anything, only let winter close its icy claws around the invaders. Tyrion remembered the red priestess who accompanied Stannis, that represented a dark magic and a mysterious power which Varys hated and feared since it stole his childhood, his innocence and his wholeness from him. It threw him into the mud of all the miseries and he, an intelligent boy quite full of hatred and desire for revenge, raised above the mud. The lack of virile attributes and passions had turned him into the best spy in the world. But Tyrion understood. Varys would have given all he had to turn back and be a whole boy. But as that was not possible, as not even all the magic or the dark arts could give back a stolen childhood, the Spider made the most of his situation. The truth was that Tyrion had understood that part of him, but there were others that he would never understand.

The red witch, as everybody called her, looked more like a fraud than anything. Yes, it was rumoured that she had done things no ordinary person could do, and terrible things. But she also had failed miserably. What would she do to make the winter which was consuming her protégé's army move backwards? Was she thinking of roasting the dying men to feed the other men? Tyrion had a bad feeling regarding Stannis. He never had liked him, and he agreed with Varys that someone who permitted people to be burnt around him to satisfy a bloodthirsty god, did not deserve to be a king. But it was true too that the Boltons neither deserve to occupy Winterfell. Stannis was the only hope for the moment to defeat the usurpers of the North. Hope? Tyrion grimaced sarcastically. What a hope. Too great would have to be the miracle that the red witch performed. And until then she never had performed a single miracle.

As if it was not enough the issue of housing the new freedfolk, Gilean with his merchant ships and the Dornish fleet which escorted them had arrived triumphantly and anchored in the harbour at last. The city welcomed them with cheers, because the holds were full of first need products and other goods which were very necessary to the guilds' production. They were welcomed as heroes of legends. Gilean and his family, modest people who always had gone unnoticed, walked in astonishment and intimidated to the applause. The Dornish sailors greeted and bowed, followed by their families, all the ones who had moved from Dorne. The soldiers had formed a cordon between the gate of the rampart and the one of the Great Pyramid, to clear the way to the newcomers. The royal counselors who were available were waiting at the entrance of the pyramid. Tyrion, who in those days hardly knew a peaceful moment, was tense. Sansa, who had been admitted as a member of the Council, had insisted on staying by his side at all times, refusing to move away from him, and she took his hand, a gesture that filled him with a great relief. She practically did not unstick from his side since so many responsibilities had fallen over him and, though he had protested a lot, at last he had to yield. He would not have endured all the pressure without her presence. Moreover, Sansa did not limit to support him quietly, but she offered him advice and ideas whenever she thought it was proper to intervene. Meereen has to thank her that I've decided not to send all of them to hell, he thought, full of pride for his young and sensible wife.

Finally they had managed with great effort to find site for the newcomers in that overcrowded city. The houses in construction were nearly finished and within two or three weeks at most people might begin to move. They would have to live cramped, but there would be a solid roof above their heads and they would be sheltered from the cruel outdoors. The dothraki would stay by their own choice in the camps together with the Unsullied and the Second Sonds. They were not people
acquainted to closed places. At least with them Tyrion did not have headaches with regards to their housing. In addition, as they were a warrior tribe, whose members learnt to handle the *arakh* as soon as they learnt to walk, and as they had become more disciplined since they accompanied the Mother's entourage, they knew how to take good care of themselves and they were not a nuisance for the soldiers by which they had settled.

*(Part 5 of a longer chapter)*
At least that morning in the end of the month Sansa had told him something that had filled him with hope and joy. Her moon period should have come several days earlier, but there was no sign of it. It might be due to a delay caused by the stress of the recent days. Both of them restrained their emotion, keeping their prudence. It could be very likely a simple delay. They would have to wait a few more days to confirm or deny their suspicions of pregnancy. But anyway, Tyrion squeezed her hands while she was smiling at him. By the moment they did not want to get excited, and besides they had too much to do to allow themselves to be carried away by an emotion that might result in a false alarm. But the little hope was there, and it gave them strength to face the tiresome tasks of the day.

The fact of being in the end of the month reminded Tyrion that prince Oberyn would arrive at Meereen in a short time, within one or two weeks at the latest. He was traveling directly from Dorne in good and fast ships, so in Meereen they must get ready for his arrival. The bad thing was that Oberyn's betrothed probably would not be there yet to welcome him, and the wedding would have to be postponed until she was back. Tyrion was a little worried about the presence of the extravagant Dornishman, who would become a part of the Council. Tyrion ignored what kind of counselor he would be, if one who would truly help or one who would make things more difficult, and things were already quite difficult. Moreover, Oberyn did not like the Lannisters very much. It would not be very pleasant to bear barbs and rude remarks, though Tyrion was more than used to an entire life putting up with that type of behaviour towards him. But Meereen had been a great change he was thankful for, and he did not fancy going back again to the times when he daily had to face people who despised him. And the Viper would be the queen's husband, so he would have to deal with him every day. Well, perhaps far from Westeros Oberyn would start to dissociate Tyrion from his former family. And either they liked one another or not, they would have to make an effort to get along well. Sansa assured him that she would give a helping hand in that matter, and it was not difficult for Tyrion to guess how she would influence the mood of the prince and future king. It would be enough for her to chat with him some times. She knew very well how to make her conversational partners feel comfortable. Her beauty, her timid sensuality of which she herself was not fully aware when she was before the others, her impeccable manners and her mix of sweetness and resolve made an impression on the men who surrounded her. No man could remain stone-hearted in front of a girl like her. Tyrion did not know if smiling or if feeling jealous. The prince was a man very sensitive to beauty, whether it was male or female. Too sensitive for Tyrion's taste. Even more than himself, as Tyrion only had eyes for his pretty wife, whereas the Dornishman had eyes for any beauty who was around. Tyrion hoped that Oberyn's marriage to Daenerys would make him become more measured, though that was like asking the sun not to rise every morning.

Well, they would see what would happen when the prince arrived.

And to round off that morning of little surprises, apart from the delay in Sansa's moon period, they also had received Jon's reply. But his words were not very hopeful. It could not be otherwise, the way things were in the Night's Watch.

"Dear Sansa and esteemed brother-in-law:

There is nothing to forgive, dear sister. I've never harboured a grudge against you for anything. I only wished you well, and I knew you loved me though you didn't show it. I regretted very much
I found out about your wedding to Tyrion a few weeks after it was celebrated. I admit that it made me feel upset, but not because of the fact that you were her husband, Tyrion, but because I knew that Sansa was a hostage of the Lannisters and with that match, she remained definitely trapped in the lions' cave, if you let me use that expression. Unless Robb had won the war, but deep down I knew it was impossible. Stand up to Tywin Lannister? We all know how everybody who has resorted to such madness has ended up, including my brother (our brother). You know I appreciate you, Tyrion. That hasn't changed since I met you, and I took comfort thinking that you would take care of Sansa. Within the dire circumstances that surrounded her, you were the best ally my sister could have in King's Landing.

We already know the saying: that the Night's Watch doesn't take sides, nor must show loyalties or hatred towards the houses of Westeros, but excuse me if I don't feel any fondness of your family, Tyrion. What happened to Robb hurts me like an open sore. What would you feel if your brother Jaime were snatched from you? I know you love him, and that you couldn't forgive. Well, none of that can be remedied by now, but I know you're not to blame, and you've done for Sansa as much as you've been able to. I'm very glad that she's happy. That's something very difficult in these times. I on my part don't know what it means to feel that way since I lost the last person I loved. She was the person in whose arms I would've liked to be at the time of leaving this world, but she got ahead of me and left in my arms. Enjoy your love, because you won't obtain anything else from this life.

I'm not sure how I feel about being the Lord Commander. On the one hand I want to imagine that father would be proud. This is not what he'd have hoped for me, but I do it the best I can, and father taught us that we should give the best of ourselves. On the other hand, I'm frightened. The Night's Watch is not in the slightest the Kingsguard or any other sworn institution. Here we fight against an everlasting winter, against freezing, against the lack of almost everything, against a loneliness that freezes more than cold, against the horrors that lurk beyond the Wall and are the real threat of this world. The White Walkers aren't Old Nan's tales and they're coming for all of us. The worst winter in millennia is falling upon us. I feel it in my bones. Soon I'll go to confront it face to face. I must try to save as many people from the Free Folk as I can, if my efforts are good for something. You see, that doesn't turn me into the most popular Lord Commander, and many are against me, but I have to do it. I can't close the way to thousands of people who deserve to live as much as us. If you believe in any gods, pray for my success. I doubt someone will listen to you, but when one is ready to commit the craziest of acts, any support is welcomed, though it's only a moral support. I'll need it plenty.

Maester Aemon died. He spent his last night raving, believing he was a child again. At least he didn't realize what was happening and left peacefully. My friends Samwell and Gilly and myself were by his side until the end, we closed his eyes and got him ready for the funeral. We said goodbye to him such as he had wished, with a very plain ceremony, because so are funerals here. There aren't any temples, nor marble tombs, but Sam made us all feel touched with a gorgeous speech which described wonderfully what the maester meant for lots of generations of black brothers. Tell your queen that he departed the best way he could have left, given his old age and the scarcity of this place. But many of us loved him truly. He has been a legend of the Night's Watch and will continue to be as long as the centuries remember him. I wish the Watch had more men like him, had more sources of wisdom like him. His niece Daenerys Stormborn would be very much proud.

I can't write more. My responsibilities are calling me and tomorrow I'll march north of the Wall.
Once more I ask you to wish me good luck. Remember I love you, Sansa, and I too would like to meet you again. And you, brother-in-law, know that I'll do whatever I can so my sister doesn't have to cry for me, but if I fail you'll be with her and will fight to be always with her, and she won't be alone. It will be me who will chase you if you make her cry.

For you, Sansa, your brother who loves you. And for you, Tyrion, your brother-in-law who esteems you.

Jon Snow."

Sansa's eyes had turned wet.

"He's going to march on an expedition to convince the Free Folk to reach safety in the South... It's very brave... And very dangerous," she had commented, gazing at the horizon at the other side of the window.

"Extremely. He's going to face the hatred many people from the Free Folk feel for the crows, and also to the opposition of many of his own black brothers. Not to mention the great menace," Tyrion summed up, taking her hand and looking through the window as well.

"He speaks about a woman he has loved and who he has seen die." Her tone was melancholic.

"Probably a girl from the Free Folk. During the time he has lived with them some woman must get her eyes on him, and when those girls desire a man, they get him." Tyrion smiled a little to cheer up Sansa. "But that couldn't last. And sooner or later he'd have to return to the Wall, and then their fate as irreconcilable enemies would be sealed. At least he has known what the love of a woman is. Let's feel happy for that." He caressed her hand.

"She had to be a special girl. No other girl had managed to get him before. Fear of begetting bastard children had paralyzed him." Sansa turned to look at him with her blue eyes, and in them was already dancing a slight smile.

"She had to be. For our special girl we do things we wouldn't do for anyone else." Tyrion kissed her hand, holding back the desire which was running through his veins. One of the reasons why he detested the long list of tasks he had ahead of him was that he could not fuck Sansa even once in the whole day, and sometimes when they fell in bed at night they were so worn out that they fell asleep promptly, without any energies left for sex.

Better times will come, Tyrion told himself to resign himself to the lack of physical intimacy.

But just in that moment Sansa surprised him. She pulled him quickly to the bed.

"Well, your special girl is asking you to do something for her right now, and to hell with everything else. Today your duties will wait a little more."

She was undressing without wasting a second and he did not last to imitate her.
Sansa woke up screaming in the middle of the early morning and Tyrion, snapping out of a deep sleep, one of the rare times of deep sleep he had lately, jumped on the bed and made an instinctive gesture of seizing the dagger, which of course was not under the mattress, because since they lived in the pyramid with guards patrolling the corridors day and night, with the door of their rooms locked and with a puppy which detected any slight strange movement, Tyrion had relaxed the habit of sleeping with the dagger near his hand.

"Sansa!," he exclaimed in that state of confusion between sleep and wakefulness, searching for her instinctively in the dark, verifying that no one had attacked her and that she had not suffered any physical damage. She was sitting on the bed, breathing heavily with the head resting on her knees. He got close to her silhouette. "Darling. You've had a nightmare. Nothing happens, you see? We're in our bedroom, there's no one else here apart from ourselves and Ray," he said to calm her, stroking her arm. He heard the little dog howling and scratching the door to the adjacent hall, clearly fearing for his mistress, but Tyrion appeased the animal with a low whistle that Ray had learnt to identify as a sign that his masters were all right. Tyrion had started to use it to silence his whimpers every time he and Sansa cried a lot when they made love. He soon learnt to become familiarized with those noises of his masters, and the whistle strengthened him in the conviction that nothing bad happened to them.

"Oh, Tyrion." Sansa turned to him and embraced him tightly. He felt that her skin was wet with sweat. It really had been a bad dream. Tyrion lied down onto the pillow drawing Sansa onto his chest to comfort her. He encircled her with his arms and kissed her head. "It's been horrible, Tyrion. I hardly dare to speak about what I've dreamt. It looked so real as if I truly had been there."

"Shhh, my love. Yo don't have to speak if you don't want to."

"But I have to tell you or it will chase me." She grasped him a bit more tightly and he felt her shudders stopping little by little. Tyrion kept silent, waiting patiently for her to continue. "You and I were at The Twins. We had been invited to my uncle Edmure's and Roslin Frey's wedding. Your father had commanded us to attend, he alleged that my uncle's wedding was a state matter and you and I had to be there in representation of the Lannisters." Sansa swallowed with difficulty and breathed deeply. Tyrion knew already what was going to happen in the nightmare, at least the main facts, and sank his face in the silky hair which smelled lightly like lemon. He kept silent, letting her go on without interrupting her. "The great hall was full of people, there was everyone I was told that had attended. Even Lady Maege Mormont, Jorah's aunt, who by then was the lady of the Bear Island since her nephew fell from favour. I saw her so clearly as if I had known her when she was alive. And my sister-in-law Talisa... I don't know how she really was, but such as I saw her she was beautiful, with dark hair, brown skin, black eyes and she was very tall and slender. Her look was serene and warm and I understood why my brother had fallen in love with her. I could understand it perfectly, I immediately felt affection for Talisa when I saw her beside Robb, but at the same time I was scared, and angry with Robb for giving in so thoughtlessly to the impulses of his heart, disgruntling that snake of Walder Frey... There he was, presiding over the feast with his toad smile, eating nonstop and watching the whole scene with a great satisfaction, too much satisfaction for a man forced to accept the leftovers when he might have had the main course... I didn't like his smile at all, and you agreed with me. That old vulture is gloating. I don't think it's due to catching a trout after he had been promised a wolf, and the head of the pack, no less. Why is he smiling so much? We both agreed that it wasn't a good sign, and I had goosebumps. I got the feeling that that feast
was a grotesque farce. In the gallery upstairs the musicians were playing their instruments horribly wrong, and you made a sarcastic remark about that. But the atmosphere changed as soon as The rains of Castamere started to play. The air seemed to charge with tension suddenly, or that was my impression, and you exchanged a gaze with me, confirming what I was imagining. Then my mother observed something strange. Roose Bolton was wearing his coat of mail beneath his tunic, and she opened her eyes very wide. In that moment, the musicians replaced the instruments with bows and arrows and the feast turned into a slaughter in an instant. Sansa sobbed on his chest, and he had not interrupted her a single time. He would let her vent herself if it freed her from that weight. "Everything happened such as I heard it in King's Landing. But I was staring at Talisa. I couldn't tear my eyes from her. When horror unleashed, she was sitting next to Robb and a man who was standing right behind her stabbed her belly with his dagger, several times, so quickly that she didn't even have time to react. She was eight months pregnant, Tyion..." Sansa's voice broke completely and she could not speak any more. She cried inconsolably over him, and Tyrion held her, caressing her back and making soothing sounds.

"It's all over, my love. She doesn't feel any more pain, nor her baby," he murmured against her hair.

"I'm pregnant, Tyrion," she declared, lifting her head to look at him, with tears running down her cheeks. He gasped and took her face in his hands, making an effort to breathe again. It was not as if he were not expecting it, but hearing it so suddenly from her lips, had shaken him profoundly. "I know it. I feel it inside of me. I'm aware it's soon, it's only been a week since my period's been delayed, but I'm sure. We're going to be parents, my love." Her eyes were huge and in those moments the love with which they were looking at him filled everything, filled all his soul of unworthy man until he believed he would burst with emotion.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"Oh, Sansa, honey." He drew her to him and kissed her with absolute devotion, overwhelmed, unable to process so many emotions. Hot tears burnt his cheeks, or perhaps they were his tears mixed with hers. Sansa dried them with her fingers. They moved aside a little to look at each other, smiling.

"It's been just when I've had that dreadful nightmare when I've been completely sure of my pregnancy. Probably I've dreamt of all that because I've felt so much happiness and fear at the same time... I hadn't dreamt of Talisa before. In my nightmares my brother and my mother always were present, I was a witness of how they were slaughtered, but my sister in law didn't appear... Until today. When she was stabbed with the dagger... It's the most horrible thing anyone can do, Tyrion. Killing like that an innocent baby who hasn't even been born..." Sansa broke again into sobs and Tyrion comforted her once more.

"Easy, my sweetheart. Our baby is fine, and I won't let anything happen to him or her. You hear me, Sansa? I'm here, and as long as I'm alive, and I have the intention to live for a long time, nothing will happen to you or to our child, you know it, don't you?" She nodded and smiled through her tears. "You've had that nightmare because a baby is always such a great surprise that it's frightening, although one is expecting all that, but the certainty of having a new life within you... It's difficult for me to imagine how you must feel, when I myself can hardly breathe," he said grinning, because his sense of humour was the only thing which managed to keep at bay the torrent of feelings that was overflowing them.

"It's a miracle. I think that word is what best describes the feeling of carrying a life in the womb. Leena described it in a similar way when she told me about her own pregnancy." A few days earlier, Leena had revealed it to Sansa. Them both had hugged and laughed and cried and jumped with joy, while Pod was smiling with his usual shyness. Sansa had congratulated and hugged him too, and the young father-to-be had turned as red as a ripe pomegranate. Tyrion had given some light taps on his arm and had looked at him full of pride, and he had kissed Leena's hand, wishing her a lot of happiness. "She's only one week or so ahead of me. Our babies might be born almost at the same time, or a few days apart," Sansa commented, excited, having already forgotten the terror of her nightmare.

"It's likely, darling. And now, we should try to sleep. There are still several hours left for dawn and we have to rest, especially you, because you have to take care both of yourself and the baby. From now on, that little child will consume your energies and you have to save them," he suggested, arranging properly the bedcovers over her, to tuck her in and prevent her from catching cold.

"I feel so happy that it's your child, Tyrion...," she whispered, because despite the joy of that moment she started to feel that sleep was closing her eyelids. She felt so good, so safe and loved with her head resting on her husband's shoulder while he encircled her with his arm, that she relaxed quickly.

"And I'm even happier that it's yours, my sweetie," he responded, kissing her forehead.

"It's impossible that you feel happier than me." She smiled on his chest, with her eyes closed.

"What do you bet?," he challenged, and them both burst in laughter lazily. A few seconds later Sansa's breath turned steady and deep and Tyrion felt her completely relaxed, abandoned to sleep
upon him. Though he knew he should try to get to sleep again, especially because some hours later another day full of tasks and duties was waiting for him, sleep was resisting to come.

So it had happened what he desired and feared so much. Sansa was expecting a baby. He hardly could believe it. Before being corresponded by Sansa, Tyrion had never seriously thought that he one day would be a father. In fact, he had never really considered it. When he married Tysha he was too young to think about that, and moreover he did not even have time to reflect on it carefully, because he lost her too soon. With Shae, in a moment of beffudlement, he came to believe that he would be willing to have children with her, the night he offered her the gold chains, but she had rebuffed that stupid madness. Bastard children with a Lannister whose father had threatened to hang any whore he caught in his son's bed, and who also would hang his own grandchildren? Tyrion had felt like a fool, because Shae was right. Just then his hesitant aspirations for paternity had ended, at least in the short run and with a woman he loved, as by then Sansa was just a stranger with whom he had to marry by force. On the other hand, to tell the truth, he ignored if his seed had born fruit in any of the whores he had bedded along the years, but he understood that they took precautions. In most brothels the procurers forced them to drink the moon tea as a part of the contract they agreed to when they worked in those establishments. But he had not only bedded whores, and he did not know if those other women took precautions. As not a single one of them had gone to claim to him, nor had they left any little bastard at his door, he took for granted that his seed had never produced babies. Due to that he had wondered more than once if he was sterile. But now he could confirm that he was not. Indeed, Sansa had got pregnant as soon as she had stopped drinking the moon tea, what proved that his capacity for engendering was not damaged. That made him immensely happy, but that feeling of euphoria was inextricably linked to fear, and he suspected it would always be that way. He had that fear very rooted in himself after a whole life being blamed for how he had killed his mother when he was born, and nothing could make disappear the apprehension that because of him the woman he loved might suffer the same fate if she had a child who was like his or her father.

He knew that Sansa did not want to hear any more of that apprehension and so he was silent about it, besides he tried to push it as deep into his mind as as he could because he did not want to let it consume him. No, he would look at the bright side and would focus on his happiness, because it was not worth wasting his precious time with Sansa allowing himself to be eaten up by his fears.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 406

Meereen: Month 2. Day 29

He figured that Sansa must have conceived between two and three weeks earlier, a few days after her nameday. That meant that if the baby was born after nine months exactly, it would come more or less at the middle of the month, in midwinter. Would they still be in Meereen by then? Such as things went, Tyrion did not think they would go before the birth. And for Sansa it would be very uncomfortable such a long journey being pregnant, and besides he wanted for her a stable environment in which giving birth. On board of a ship or at the edge of a road did not sound very reassuring. Moreover, he wanted maester Maero to tend to her, he was determined about it. He was a very experienced healer and he had helped many children to come to the world. He was affable and knew how to keep his patients calm. No, Tyrion would not allow anyone to tend to his wife in such an important process if he could offer her the best care. And if for a case of absolute necessity the maester in person could not be present at labour, Tyrion would only admit the best midwife Maero chose.

Sansa soon would need more time to rest, when the baby started to grow and her belly became heavier. He knew she would not complain and would insist on staying at his side most of the time to give him her support and her advice but, though he missed her during the most tiring events and during those which required more deliberation and making difficult decisions, he would not permit her to get too much tired. To his relief, it was very likely that by when Sansa's tummy was clearly visible, Daenerys would be already back there.

He again thought of his own parents, and not for the first time he felt that, partly, he understood Tywin better, or one side of him which Tyrion had not known. He had not been one of those husbands who regarded their wives just as vases to beget children and take care of the house, but he had involved her completely in all his affairs, he had consulted her opinions and even when they were forced to be far from each other because of his duties as Hand of the King and he had to remain for long periods in King's Landing without his wife (queen Rhaella did not want Joanna at the court, aware that the king had an evident crush for her, and it was not difficult for Tyrion to suppose that Tywin neither desired for anything in the world that his beloved was next to her harasser), there was a constant exchange of ravens between the Red Keep and Casterly Rock, as Tywin continued to consult her opinions in the distance.

The best time as a person and as a ruler that Tywin had lived occurred when his only love was his right hand. She softened his cruelest side and she not only managed to keep the image of power and prestige that House Lannister had recovered with great effort (and with a lot of blood spilled at the hands of an extremely young and harsh Tywin before getting married), but she also managed that the paralyzing terror with which the majority of people conjured the Lannister surname turned partly into a respect a little less branded by the stories of massive destruction which the coteries told. To that contributed that Joanna endeared herself to people, not in a calculated way (which was the way how Margaery Tyrell attracted the smallfolk), but in a more honest way. Or that was what Ser Barristan had told him one of the times they had talked about her. Ser Barristan knew that he was craving for treasuring more details about his mother and sometimes, in some of their meetings or in other times when the knight was present, this one remembered something she had said or done. He even commented to Tyrion that, when he saw him and Sansa so close at the head of the government, he had the impression that he was seeing again Lord Tywin and Lady Joanna in their best times. That moved Tyrion more than he expected, because it made him see that, in more things than he believed, he was not so different from what his father had been. And he did not know how to feel about that. But those little details made his father more human before his eyes.
Tyrion suspected that that was the intention of the old knight, that he realized that Tywin had not always been a heartless monster, and love had turned him into a better man, at least while it lasted. A sad smile curved Tyrion's lips. He ignored if it would come a time when he would feel pity for his father and if resentment would disappear any time, but he doubt it. For a start, what made him closer to his father was to understand truly that he had been happy with Joanna, in a way he had not been before marrying her or, of course, after her.

In the end, all that was important was reduced to love. Not all the wars had begun because of ambitions or interests, many had started in the name of love. More than the ones that had started due to any other reasons. He himself had been captured by Catelyn Stark because of the love she felt for her children, and that incident had been one of the triggers of the war between the Lannisters and the Starks (without forgetting that behind all that, Littlefinger had been the one to pull up the flame to the wick). Tyrion's own example was only one among thousands.

Because the most important thing for the people who had at least a little heart, were their loved people. Even Tywin, who had harped on so much repeating that the family's honour was above any self interest, had contradicted what he had always proclaimed. Even he had put his heart before everything else. When he chose his cousin Joanna as the companion of his life, he did not do it thinking about the grandeur of the dynasty. He did it, simply, because he loved her. And all he did from then on revolved around that love. Later, the bitterness of losing her marked with fire and blood all his acts. Deep down, all for love.

Talking about that... Why Tyrion had risked going over thousands of miles to help a rebel queen, who had a great part of the world against her? He had done it out of love. For Sansa. For the baby that was starting to live in her womb. Now he was also helping Daenerys because she was a true friend and ally. So in that case, affection and friendship intervened too.

And... Why Daenerys, at bottom, did all that she was doing? Because all she had been taken from her and all she had lost. She did it for all she missed. For what she could not have. She wanted others to live the dreams forbidden to her, because it was the closest way for her to graze them, and Tyrion knew that Daenerys wished sincerely that her people had those chances. In her heart, she did it out of love too. Above any reason of state.

Maybe it was not the most sensible, purest or fairest reason.

But it was the only true reason why anyone was willing to fight until the end, and die.

Because it was the only one that, at the end of the road, was really worth.
Meereen: Month 2. Day 30

The day after the announcement of Sansa's pregnancy, in the morning, Tyrion's joy shot up when he received news from Jaime. But the greatest surprise was that it was not the usual coded message from Varys, but a letter written in Jaime's own handwriting, which was irregular and unsteady. It indicated that Jaime had made the effort to write it with his left hand. He was training it seriously, such as Tyrion had suggested him to do. He could never use it with a great skill, but it would be useful to him, and Tyrion was glad that Jaime still listened to his suggestions. He felt a sprout of affection for his brother. If Jaime had bothered to take the quill, he who was not fond of writing (and even less since he had lost his sword hand), he had done it because he missed his little brother and surely he wanted him to know that he did not blame him for Joffrey's death.

It almost seemed a deed of the gods that those days both Tyrion and Sansa were resuming their contact with their respective brothers, but Tyrion had not expected Jaime to write to letter had filled him with relief even before reading it, as it made him harbour hopes that Jaime was not angry with him.

Tyrion had asked the Great Maester that, if some day a raven came with information about his brother's whereabouts, he let him know immediately, and Maero catered to his wishes with haste, sending Mhyraz with Jaime's missive. The boy carried it along with breakfast. Tyrion was glad that Sansa still was in the bedroom, washing and tidying herself up, when he opened the door to the boy and this one announced that his brother had written to him. He had to restrain his enthusiasm, because it was not convenient that Sansa knew anything about that letter until Tyrion was sure that he could reveal its contents without compromising Jaime. Them both had written to Jon and he had answered to them both, but Jaime was another story and moreover he was not on close terms with Sansa. Tyrion knew he had written only to him. Anyway, he had to be sure of the contents before notifying Sansa of it. So he read the letter quickly and furtively before she stepped out already dressed to have breakfast. It was a long letter, very long to be Jaime's. He probably had not written so much before in his life. So Tyrion was grateful to his own reading speed after so many years reading books as thick as his own arm or even more. He might read it more carefully in other moment.

"My dear little brother:

Some time ago I knew you had fled with Sansa to join the service of Daenerys Targaryen. You did the right thing when you left King's Landing promptly, as we know our sister and, if you had stayed, she'd have ordered your arrest for Joffrey's poisoning and she'd have tried to kill you anyhow. In fact, she became completely mad. She didn't try to find out if there could be other possible culprit, she wanted to catch you. She didn't listen to reason. I suggested her that there could be many others with reasons to kill Joff, because he hadn't been a model king precisely. I kept wanting to remind her that she neither had been a model mother and that, having brought up a monster, it wasn't strange that he one day ended up like that. But I kept quiet because I'm not really one to reproach her a lot. He was my son too and I haven't been a father for him, so I've no right to judge her. Well, she got absolutely furious with me when I told her to consider other possible culprits, and she yelled that I was blind, that my affection for you turned me into a stupid and she would find you wherever you were hidden. And she also said a few nasty words about your wife, but I won't repeat them to you because I know you respect her too much to even tolerate that someone says or repeats in front of you an insult addressed to her. I'm glad you're so far away, because at least you're out of Cersei's clutches, and I'm glad too that she's lost all her power. She
only committed an atrocity after another. Do you know that the killers she sent to search for you took to her dozens of dwarves' heads? Each time she saw that they weren't yours, in order not to discourage your pursuers, instead of giving those slaughterers what they deserved for taking her for a stupid (for more stupid than she is), she sent them to resume their hunt and the slaughter of dwarves, with the hope that any of them would be you. And so a lot of poor wretched lost everything from the neck up. As I couldn't bear her any more, I listened to one of the scarce right ideas she's had and I went to Dorne, to see with my own eyes that Myrcella was fine. Cersei was obsessed with the idea of taking her back to King's Landing and sending to hell her betrothal to Trystane Martell. I made very clear that I'd make that journey exclusively for my daughter and not for her unbearable mother, and I left as soon as I could, to leave her alone with her conniption."

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 408

Meereen: Month 2. Day 30

"I didn't have the intention to force Myrcella to come back if she didn't desire it; only if I saw that she was unhappy at Sunspear I'd take her with me, and who had tried to prevent me from it would've had a very rough time. I asked Bronn to accompany me, in case I needed help to take Myrcella out of there, and he agreed reluctantly. He's about to marry Lady Lollys Stokeworth, and wasn't keen at all with the favour I asked from him. In exchange, of course, for an indecent amount of money.

I arrived at Sunspear announcing myself openly, in my condition of Kingsguard who went to visit my niece and the king's sister. Of course Doran, who isn't a fool in spite of his reputation for lacking blood in his veins, knew my hidden intentions, and he right away allowed me to see how my daughter lived. I had an interview with her and could verify by myself that she's happy and is very infatuated with that boy. I asked her if she wanted to break the betrothal and return with me to King's Landing, but she repeated to me what she had already written to her mother: that her house was in Dorne with her fiancé. I also talked with this one and he looked honest and he seemed to love her truly. He's a little mild for my taste. It must be that the fatherly instinct I've never had has awoken with Myrcella and I want the best for her, a man who really knows how to take care of her, as I'm sure you take care of Sansa. But something tells me that when Trystane matures a little more, will be a good husband.

As I had nothing else to do there, after several days getting fat with so much spicy food and getting a tan with the southern sun (and Bronn in addition tasted certain pleasures, checking, according to him, that the reputation of the Dornish women hasn't been too exaggerated), we departed. It was strange that Doran hadn't commented anything about the seat of the Council that his brother Oberyn has left vacant. When the Red Viper killed The Mountain, he lost his interest for staying at the capital and announced that he was quitting his post as a counselor. I think that he went back to Dorne, but I haven't seen him there. I'd have liked to see again, in a more relaxed situation than Joff's wedding, a man who is a true legend, as much as I am, and to have a couple of chats with him. A pity we aren't rivals any more, because I doubt he would find exhilarating to fight, even for amusement, with a one-handed Lannister. Despite his hatred towards our family, he loves Myrcella and she too feels affection for him. The Red Viper is lots of things, but he respects children, and I have to admit that he leads me in that quality. Well, it seems that the Dornishmen are no more interested in taking the seat in the Council our father offered the Martells to calm them. As soon as the Viper killed The Mountain, he went away and neither he nor Doran have mentioned anything more about the seat. They already have the revenge they wanted, as even father had died, surely too peacefully for the Martells' liking. Cersei, who didn't trust that incompetent of Pycelle, and for once I agreed with her in something, had bid Qyburn to examine father's corpse and he didn't find any traces of poison or anything apart from his own old age. Unless someone had used an undetectable poison, father very probably died of natural causes. I couldn't help but laughing at Cersei's face when she declared that surely you had sent a hired killer from the other end of the world to poison father. I'd rather believeng that nonsense having to do with the Martells, but I doubt it. Doran has had many years to do it at any moment he had wanted to, and Oberyn kills with his spear, face to face. Yes, a poisoned spear, but he at least he fights with the person he wants to kill, without hiding his intentions. You already know the saying: poison is a woman's weapon. When it's proved that there's poison in the body of someone who doesn't seem to have died because of any other reasons.

I've just arrived at King's Landing, after being disconnected from the world for weeks, and I've
found out about some quite unpleasant news. Cersei's stupidity has caused a wave of religious fanatics and that has provoked her own fall. I've heard that she was locked in a cell for "her sins" with me, and that the Tyrell siblings also spent a few days in the dungeons. That high sparrow believes himself above the law, and our sister is to blame for all that. But that's not the worst. The worst is that Tommen has converted into that Faith, because it seems that his wife Margaery's brain has been washed and between her and the high sparrow have washed Tommen's. It wouldn't surprise me that those vultures (because that's what they are, and not sparrows) come for me one of these days, to try me for my supposed crimes and to attempt to wash my brain too. Let them try. I intend to take a few of them with me if necessary. I am the Lord Commander of Tommen's Kingsguard and here I am. Let them come for me. I'll be waiting for them.

With regards to Cersei, I hope she enjoys her seclusion in Casterly Rock. I won't move a single finger for her, at least until she stops behaving like a manic. She has treated me like shit since I returned from my captivity in the Riverlands and she has committed excesses after excesses, typical of a lunatic woman, and she deserves a punishment. You won't believe that it's me who confesses this, but it's the truth. Cersei at this point has become insufferable even for me.

By the way, there is another unpleasant news which is going to send me far from the city for a while. Ser Brynden Tully, the Blackfish, has retaken Riverrun by surprise. No wonder, with those Frey idiots who are good for nothing. Tommen and uncle Kevan send me to do Walder Frey's dirty work and take back the Tullys' former stronghold. So I'm on my way again. Lately I don't do anything apart from wandering through half of Westeros like a fucking begging brother. I don't complain much about that, because at least I can delude myself believing that I'm not completely useless.

Well, little brother, you must know that you're the privileged recipient of the longest letter I've written in my whole bloody life. It's taken centuries, as I'm not a prodigy with my left hand. I've been on the verge of sending this letter to the seven hells a few times, but if I haven't done it has been because of you. You owe me one.

I know you're not guilty about Joff and I'm not angry with you, not at all. I miss your sharp tongue and the good laughs we had. Bronn is a funny crook, but now he's too busy preparing his wedding, and moreover no one can replace you in the comedic duo of the two nuts Lannister brothers.

Be happy, keep your head upon your shoulders and, whatever happens, even if one day we had to be enemies in the battlefield (I haven't much to fear about that as I know what a mess of a warrior you are, worse than me even being one-handed), I'll always love you and I'll never fight against you or hurt you. I don't give a shit for your queen, but she's got guts, I have to grant her that. And besides she doesn't seem too much of a fool, if she knows how to value your qualities.

Take care of yourself and keep on being so headstrong as always.

Jaime.”

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Tyrion came to the conclusion that he must tell Sansa about the letter. He did not like hiding from her that Jaime had written to him, and moreover it would be like betraying her if he did not confide to her something so important to him. Jaime was one of the scant loved people he had left in Westeros. He would reveal to Sansa all he could, but without showing her the letter. The brutally straightforward way in which Jaime wrote, and a certain detail which worsened Tyrion's suspicion regarding that his brother was involved in Bran's fall, advised him against Sansa reading it. She would understand that he wanted to respect Jaime's privacy. After all, Sansa and her brother-in-law had not stepped beyond a stiff greeting and a formal exchange of courtesies, in which she was wearing her mask of expressionless lady and had recited her usual repertoire of sentences repeated hundreds of times. She had not even let any emotion show when Jaime mentioned that Catelyn and Robb were all right when he had been freed, and that Catelyn had allowed him to go under the promise of the exchange with her daughters. He added that, as the exchange was not possible because Sansa was married to Tyrion and Arya had disappeared, he nonetheless was willing to honour his word in any way he could. Tyrion already knew all that, as Jaime and he had talked at length, but he observed his brother during his brief conversation with his wife, slightly amused. Tyrion only a few times had seen Jaime speaking to someone with the respect with which he addressed Sansa. Catelyn must have made a deep impression on him. Ignoring how to react before his sister-in-law's wall of inexpressiveness, Jaime bowed quickly and left.

Then it had been Brienne's turn to pay her respects to the young lass and, as Tyrion expected, Sansa did not modify in the least her distant and cautious attitude. She limited to listen in silence how the blond and tall woman talked to her about the oath she had sworn to her mother, and she even knelt to show her loyalty and declare that she was at her disposal, but Sansa asked her to stand up, thanked her and said with her atony voice that her home was at King's Landing with her husband and she did not need her services. Tyrion had sighed inwardly while he observed the frustrated reaction of the blond warrior. This one pushed her lips together and looked as if she wanted to add something else, but she thought better about it, bowed and left, probably with the same feeling of discomfort that must have filled Jaime as well.

It was logical that Sansa in that period did not trust anyone, and Tyrion did not reproach her for it, quite the contrary. He admired and pitied her at the same time.

A few nights earlier, while they were chatting in bed before falling asleep, Sansa had remembered that incident with Jaime and Brienne.
"Now I regret being so cold with her, but I couldn't trust her, as I neither could trust your brother," she commented, resting on his chest, while both were relaxing in each other's arms. "I would've liked to speak more with her about my mother and Robb. I was truly yearning for it. She looked like a good woman. But I didn't want to risk showing interest. I had to keep my façade at all costs."

"You did what you had to do, honey," he said, caressing her back and her hair.

"Perhaps she's looking for my sister right now. I think she took very seriously the oath she swore to my mother." There was a light hope in her voice. "She didn't give me the impression of being a woman who stays idle. She looked like a person of action."

"It's possible. If there's someone able to find your sister, if she's still alive, it's her. She has to be really headstrong and full of resources to have helped Jaime to survive until arriving at King's Landing and, besides, to have put up with my brother's difficult character. I know him very well and he's capable of making even a silent sister lose her patience and swear." Tyrion smiled with nostalgia. Them both remained in a melancholic silence and succumbed to sleep some minutes later.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 410

Meereen: Month 2. Day 30

Sansa went out of the bedroom and pulled him from his memories. He squeezed Jaime's letter in his hand and turned to her.

"Darling, it's arrived a letter from Jaime. He informs in it about something Varys haven't even told us by raven yet. Your uncle Brynden, with the help of men loyal to House Tully, has retaken Riverrun from the Freys. Now Jaime is heading for there with an army, by order of my uncle Kevan, to force the Blackfish to yield the castle. I'm very sorry, Sansa." His look was cautious and compassionate.

She had stopped dead in her tracks and stared at him, stunned.

"Then... He's been hidden there all this time? Oh, it's madness, Tyrion... What can he do with a few men in a besieged castle? He has no chance. Not against your brother." Her chin was trembling and she bit her lip to stop the shivering. "The Freys keep my uncle Edmure as a hostage. They'll use him to try to persuade Brynden to surrender, I'm sure. But if he has taken back the castle, knowing that his nephew is in his enemies' claws, he's done it because he wants to die at home. He knows the consequences very well. He knows that if he doesn't give in, the Lannisters and the Freys will hurt Edmure. They won't kill him, or so I hope, because he's a highly valuable hostage, but they can torture him. Do yo think Brynden would be able to allow it?"

"Sometimes crazy old fellows get any kinds of fixations into their heads from which no one can make them desist. Your uncle has chosen and I'm afraid he won't change his mind, unless he values in the slightest his nephew's health and life. It's curious how people often is willing to maintain a pile of stones at all costs, even at life's cost. It's not something strange. It happens constantly. There are many who value more their lands and stones than their own people. And perhaps, when one reaches an age in which stones are nearly the only thing that remains, the only palpable trace of the gone generations, then one doesn't mind dying among them, like one more generation that the stones have seen passing by. For Brynden, he himself and Edmure are just missing links, sentenced to disappear ingloriously in the dark pages of the Tullys."

Tyrion led her softly to the table, where Mhyraz had just served breakfast. Sansa sat down silently, making an effort not to cry.

"Then, it's almost the end of the Tullys too. My uncle Edmure is the legitimate lord of Riverrun, and he has a child with his Frey wife, and that boy should be the heir when his father dies. But they're Freys' puppets. Now that scum has usurped the ancestral home of my mother's family, like the Boltons have usurped my father's. The assassins of my mother and Robb are defiling with impunity the places that have been mine's and my family's home. Sometimes I dream that Roose Bolton, Walder Frey and the others who have been accomplices in their butcheries are reduced to ashes by the dragons." Sansa squeezed her fists and closed her eyes. She did not want to cry. Her plate was still untouched.

Tyrion held her hand over the table, to convey a little comfort to her. "You have to eat, honey. Starvation won't improve your uncles' situation and moreover, think that very probably you now have someone else to feed." He smiled at her tenderly, hoping that the allusion to the baby would cheer her up.
It worked. Sansa returned a weak smile and started to eat.

"Is there something else in Jaime's letter you can tell me?", she asked, more serene.

Tyrion felt immensely relieved with the change of subject.

"He's been in Dorne to assure himself that Myrcella is fine and that she doesn't want to go back to King's Landing or, even less, to go locking herself with her mother in Casterly Rock, wich is probably what Cersei wishes. He also comments that he's surprised that the Martells have renounced to their seat in Tommen's Council since Oberyn left the capital. Jaime reckons that the Martells are plotting something. Anyway, everybody'll soon know why they've dismissed that seat, as soon as it's divulged that Oberyn has traveled here. Varys is doing a great job stemming the rumours. It's curious, coming from the Counselor of Whispers," Tyrion joked. "He's managing too to make the information about the troubles in the Vale spread slowly. In fact, Jaime doesn't comment anything about that. Kevan sends troops to Riverrun and, by when he knows what's happening in the Vale, the conflict will be very fierce and, if he sends help, it'll arrive late. We'll see if Olenna contributes with Tyrell troops. She has pending her debt with Littlefinger, but we'll see if she pays it. We already know she's a very tricky and unscrupulous woman. We must remember that she also has quite a considerable debt with us both for having us involved in Joff's death. We have to keep an eye on her too. She's one of the most dangerous ones nowadays." He did a pause. "Jaime doesn't blame me for Joff's death, and I suppose that he doesn't blame you either, but he doesn't clarify it. He knows me too well to say to me a single word against you, and he at least shows respect to you. He wishes us happiness and assures that he'll never fight against me in any battlefield, though we're on opposite sides. What an epic fight it would be, worthy of a song. The Lannister brothers, a one-handed and a dwarf." His smile was between sarcastic and bitter. He decided not to reveal to Sansa Cersei's follies, nor about the murdered dwarves. He did not want to sadden her more after the news from Riverrun.

Ray, that always noticed when something worried his mistress, rubbed himself against her legs and she burst in laughter, stroking him between his ears. The dog had grown during the month he had been living with them, and it was evident that he'd be a big specimen when he became an adult.

They finished their breakfast and got ready for their endless list of daily tasks.
The Summer Sea

That morning he woke up with a slight hangover. He was not a heavy drinker or used to give
himself excessively to the pleasures of a bottle, but not because he was precisely a prudish person,
or one prone to stint himself of pleasures, whatever they were. He simply did not need to get drunk
to escape from a too cruel reality, or to summon courage, or to feel the fake euphoria all the
drunkards searched for. When he drank, he did it only as a part of the fun, but he had never become
an alcohol addict like many people around him. For him the most addictive things in life were sex
and killing. Not killing anyone, of course. He did not find pleasure in killing people who had not
done anything to him, or people who did not challenge him, and he had never laid a finger on any
child. He was a killer like any other, but he had his code of conduct, like most killers. He found an
immense delight in a good fight and in a tight battle, in which he confronted a worthy rival. But
when he had obtained the greatest satisfaction in his long path as a warrior was when the monster
who raped and split his sister in two suffered the most horrible of agonies. Generally he gave the
opponents he respected a quick death to spare them the torture of an endless end, but when there
were involved people he hated and despised, they'd better not crossing paths with him. The
Mountain had screamed in pain for days, not only due to the effects of the poison with which
Oberyn had coated the head of his spear. He had ripped out little by little different parts of his
body, caring not to make him bleed to death quickly, as it would have been very disappointing that
he had kicked the bucket in a slip-up. The best of all was when the prince heard him confess what
he had done, not because Oberyn liked hearing from the lips of that beast what his sister had
suffered during her last minutes alive, but because Oberyn wanted to hear him saying it in his
agony, he wanted him to be so broken and weak as to confess that crime he had committed almost
nineteen years ago. Oberyn wanted the monster to remember expressly that crime amongst the
thousands he had committed.

I raped Elia Martell after piercing her little girl with my large sword
and crushing her baby boy's head against the wall. When I was finished with her I cut her in half
as if she were a watermelon.

In the end, the monster was no more than a wreck which did not resemble at all a human being. He
had taken four days to die, and by then he did not have eyes, ears, nose, fingers, balls, nor his cock
any more. When he finally confessed, Oberyn cut his tongue, because he did not need to hear
more. Shortly afterwards, that horribly mutilated bulk succumbed, probably due especially to the
venom of progressive effect, which finally succeeded in paralyzing the hulk's heart after having
tortured him with unbearable pain.

After obtaining his delightful revenge, Oberyn had no more to do in the stinky capital and returned
with Ellaria to his dear home. He loved to travel, but there was nothing like going back to his warm
land, where winters were not rigorous and the Water Gardens bloomed throughout the year. And
where people in general was warmer than in the rest of Westeros, and less hypocritical. Over there
no one cared a shit that he had the sentimental partner he wanted, bedded whoever he wanted and
had all the bastard children he fancied. What for did he need to take a seat in the Council of Tywin
Lannister's grandson, in that damned Red Keep where his sister and his niece and nephew had been
murdered? The Lannisters could put that seat into the places they had fit for it.

Doran had talked to him about Daenerys Targaryen and her need to get allies to gain the Iron
Throne, thus removing the Lannisters from power. His brother had set out then the opportunity to
marry her. He himself could not do it, because his wife Mellario was still alive in Norvos (them
both had separated by mutual agreement), and moreover he was sick and aged. But his youngest
brother was still a very good-looking man and brimming with health.
Nineteen years ago, Oberyn had declared himself to be a mortal enemy of his brother-in-law Rhaegar when this one abandoned Elia to flee with Lyanna Stark. To try to soften the affront and dishonour, Lord Rickard and Brandon Stark had spread the version, more decorous, which stated that Rhaegar had abducted Lyanna, but Oberyn knew that the truth was different. There was no abduction, Rhaegar's lover went with him willingly, and so between the two provoked the war which led to the death of Elia and her children.

Oberyn would never forgive the noble, honourable and brave crown prince, son of the Mad King.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
The Summer Sea

But Rhaegar's little sister was not to blame for any of that. Just when happened those events which
snatched the person Oberyn most have loved for all his childhood and youth, until he had his first
daughter, Daenerys was born in Dragonstone in the middle of a terrible storm, and her mother
would die a few hours later. And the poor little girl survived miraculously, sentenced to exile. He
had nothing against her personally, as the girl had not caused him any harm. And it seemed that the
young Targaryen girl, who was forced by her idiot brother Viserys to marry a dothraki khal who
led a khalasar of forty thousand men, was not weak, because in a short period of time she had got
things that had surprised him, the Red Viper himself. At last it seemed that someone had true
dragon blood after centuries.

Oberyn was aware of the age difference between himself and the lass. He was forty-seven and she
was not nineteen yet, but she was a real woman who had seduced khal Drogo in bed and there were
rumours that she had lovers in Meereen. Oberyn did not care in the least about that, in fact he liked
experienced women who were not prudish. He did not see why, if he could fuck all the people he
wanted, she could not do the same. He considered unfair and terribly backward the custom of many
men from the rest of the Seven Kingdoms who had wives only to get them pregnant and to make
them clean their shit, and out of their houses they had lovers to have fun. In Dorne they were much
more civilized in that aspect. Moreover, the bastard children in Dorne had the same status than the
legitimate ones. The rest of Westeros did not acknowledge them that status, another evidence of the
hypocrisy and the retrograde mentality of a great part of the continent.

Ellaria had not disagreed with his marriage to the Targaryen girl. When he and Doran had
discussed about the advantages of that alliance, Ellaria agreed. She told him, as if she were
reprimanding a stubborn old fellow, that it was time for him to get married and to contribute to
make Dorne become a stronger kingdom. The strongest in Westeros. Oberyn at first had felt
reluctant. Marrying never was a part of his plans, and even less doing it with such a young lass. For
him it was enough to live together with his partner of many years. But soon he started to feel
attracted to the aura of the Dragon Queen and the benefits she would bring to Dorne. He loved his
land and wanted the best for his people. Becoming the king of Westeros at the side of a strong
queen who had three dragons would bring glory and wealth to Dorne. He was not interested in
being a king; he was not very fond of the shady deals of government and politics. He was not
stupid, but he preferred to leave those matters in the hands of someone more capable, and Daenerys
was showing to be capable, at least according to what he had heard of her since she was ruling
Meereen. Oberyn knew that city-state. He had been there for a visit and he even fought for fun in
the fighting arenas. He knew how tricky the Great Masters were, how archaic that Ghiscari society
was, and he had got an idea of the great blow she had delivered to them snatching their slaves from
them and, with that, their ancient way of life. And she had not only done it in Meereen, but she had
destroyed the slaver system throughout Slaver's Bay and, by extension, she had ruined it in the rest
of the world. Only by her guts she was a woman worthy of being taken into account, and Oberyn
liked fierce women. It was said as well that Daenerys was one of the most beautiful women in the
world, and he was curious to see with his own eyes to what extent that rumour was true. Gossip
tended to exaggerate about almost everything, but he had known Rhaegar. The dragon prince had
earned fully his reputation as a heartbreaker, because he was so handsome that half Westeros
sighed for him. Oberyn would not have minded screwing him, at least until he married Elia. He
would have never seduced his sister's husband, as she was crazy about him. But Oberyn admitted
in his heart that, until Rhaegar betrayed Elia, even himself felt captivated by the greatly handsome
prince.
All in all, he rejoiced with beauty, and Daenerys promised to offer him beauty. He had bedded lots of beautiful women (and many good-looking men) and he did not care that they were blondes, brunettes or redheads. All of them pleased him.

The fact that the queen was sterile did not worry him. He already had all the daughters he might wish for. He was sorry that Daenerys could not know the joys of motherhood, but that had no remedy and was something with which neither him, nor anyone, could help her. The matter of the inheritance of the crown was a subject that was not his business. It would be her who would have to choose her successor to the throne.

What he liked least of all that was that, while Daenerys was still the queen of Meereen, they could not reveal anything about their marriage. Yes, he understood that it was not convenient to make the Meereenese noble people get furious (more than they already were) imposing a foreign king on them. And it was not convenient either by the moment that in Westeros people found out about their alliance by marriage. He had agreed to the condition because it was a temporary situation. But he knew how to be patient and discreet when he had to, and the proof was that he had waited for almost nineteen years to get his revenge for Elia's crime. It would have been more complete if Tywin had died in a less painless way. The old scumbag had pegged out without further ado while sleeping, without sufferings, after having spent all his fucking life turning the lives of a lot people into hell. For Oberyn it was a disappointment not to attribute the merit of that death to himself, but he at least found solace in the fact that the bastard who had given the order to The Mountain would not screw over anyone else.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 413

The Summer Sea

In Meereen he would meet face to face with the Imp, who Daenerys esteemed highly. Despite being a Lannister, Oberyn did not dislike him very badly. Perhaps it was because he and his father never could stand each other, and Oberyn felt more predisposed to someone who had known how to get in the geezer's hair. Myrcella had spoken to him a lot about her uncle, always with great fondness, and had told him funny anecdotes, in many of which her uncle got on Cersei's nerves conspiring with her youngest children to do things she detested them to do, and the kids were delighted to follow Tyrion in his mischiefs. Someone who knew how to treat the little children with tenderness had more options to be liked by Oberyn.

After nearly a month on the high seas, he was starting to get bored. There was only a limited number of things one could do on board of a ship, and Oberyn had tried all of them by far. Thank goodness that, to make his wait more enjoyable, one of the sailors warmed his bed every night. He was a young man in his early twenties, with a body which looked as if it had been sculpted and who had not had time to become ruined yet with the harsh life on the sea. At the first night Oberyn and the lad had come to an understanding with a suggestive exchange of looks. The prince had felt drawn to his bronze-coloured skin, his hair with golden locks and his hazel eyes. Moreover he had a beautiful voice and sang quite well. He verified that from the waist down the lad also was well-endowed and well versed in sex arts. Since the first night, they shared cabin and bed, and the captain of the boat, tolerant, turned a blind eye to the fact that the boy usually joined his work late. Not always one had the chance to carry into oneself's ship a Dornish prince, and the captain bragged about that.

Oberyn mused that, thereafter, he would have to be more discreet with the matter of his lovers. He and Daenerys had agreed that they would accept their regular lovers, but perhaps she would not like very much his promiscuous sex life. And anyway, when he were the king of Westeros, he would have to keep up appearances for show, though everybody knew his reputation and he did not give a shit about appearances. But he was willing to make a little effort to maintain the discretion he was demanded. When one thought about it, that was not a big deal. The former kings had not set the standards of decency very high, and that did not bother him in the least.

Daenerys had not been brought up in Westeros and, according to what he had heard, she had a more open mind due to the many places she had passed through since she was a baby, and to her irregular and diversified education. But she was not yet like him and Ellaria, who enjoyed openly all the sex they could. Oberyn would agree to her conditions, as long as he had full freedom regarding his own privacy. If the only thing he would be demanded was to keep a more chaste façade publicly, he saw no trouble in that. Anyway, it was not his style to fill the place where he resided with ephebes and lewd wenches. He reserved that for the places which were appropriate for the pleasures of the flesh.

The blond boy, whose name was Devian, stirred next to him in the bed and stretched his gorgeous muscles. Oberyn stared at him, amused. That lad was a natural exhibitionist. He loved showing himself off, but he was likable, a prankster and a flatterer and because of that his mates liked him and forgave him that in that voyage he joined late the tasks of the boat. The fact that their prince Oberyn was aboard had its influence too, and all of them admired and respected him and, if he had chosen Devian's company, he had done it because the lad was worth, at least in what really mattered, that is, bed activities. And, as good Dornishmen, they valued and celebrated that quality.
"Good morning, my prince," Devian murmured. He always called him that way, *my prince*, and Oberyn liked how that sounded in the young man's pudgy lips. "How does His Highness feel today?" The previous night they had drunk several bottles of the best Dornish red and, as the lad had awoken fresh as a daisy, Oberyn felt the effects of the excessive drinking in the throbbing of his head.

"It's not very elegant to ask that question to a codger," he protested with his provocative tone while he was massaging his own temples.

"I see no codger over here," refuted his young lover, smiling with naughtiness and staring with lewdness at Oberyn's athletic naked body. "Does my prince have a headache? I can give him a massage that will fix him up like new." The boy used to address him in third person. That game excited him, and Oberyn played along with him. For him there was nothing better than the excitement of physical delight and contemplating it in someone beautiful, and that sailor offered a glorious view.

Devian indeed had very skillful hands. They were the only parts of his body, along with his perfectly shaped muscles, which gave away the harshness of the work on board. His palms were callused, but that roughness was enticing. The lad knew where he had to touch and what pressure he had to apply. Little by little the massage became more intimate, going down from the head to the rest of the body.

While he released once more with the young man, Oberyn thought about Daenerys' body, which doubtlessly would be very white, and his climax was even more intense, imagining what he would feel sinking into the rosy flesh between her legs, and how she would move against him and what sounds she would release while she were doing it.

He smiled, recovering, and told himself that he had fucked women from all walks, from whores to highborn ladies, but that would be the first time he would fuck a queen.
Chapter 414

Lys

The bad weather had forced the Coral Reef to stop over at Lys unexpectedly. They had been lucky that the storm had unleashed when they were passing near the isle, and the ship had managed to take a detour to reach the cliffs and anchor in the harbour without having suffered too much damage. The forced stop would last until the rough water subsided and the crew had repaired the heavy damages to the masts and hull.

Brienne cursed that delay, though it was to be expected that sooner or later an incident like that would happen. It was not for nothing that it was winter. Probably that setback was only the first of a series, if Brienne was lucky enough to reach the end of the voyage. In that moment, she got the feeling that it would be quite difficult. But that did not discourage her. It was not death what she feared.

She searched for a presentable inn and resigned herself to the lack of activity which usually implied the fact of awaiting in a provisional place where there was not much to do. She exercised in the bedroom to keep fit, but even so there were always a lot of idle hours, and she was not a woman who relished being enclosed within four walls, so she went out to take strolls through the city. If one, of course, could regard "take strolls" as walking with the five senses on alert and with a hand always close to the hilt of the sword and the other hand touching the dagger. She did not allow herself to get relaxed for a single second when she was outside.

If not for her height, her short hair, her armour and her stern face, she might have pretended to be a Lysene woman, she thought with sarcasm, as there everybody had platinum blond hair and blue eyes. Probably those were some of the scarce things she had in common with those people.

Sex was felt in the environment. In all the streets there were pleasure houses of all categories, from sleazy dens to brothels decorated as if they were palaces and where probably one night of sex cost more money than the salaries lots of people earned in months or years of work. There were female and male prostitutes at the entrance doors of most establishments, displaying the stuff to the pedestrians and inviting them to gain access to the seven heavens of pleasure. Brienne passed by, ignoring the insinuations. Many alluded to her stature and assured her that with a body like hers she might enjoy double. And that it was a blessing to have more body surface to take advantage of. Brienne was used to hear taunts of that sort and, though those people did not say them to her as a taunt apparently, but as a way of tempting her, she had already heard too many times phrases of that kind to let herself be touched by them in the slightest.

She continued to walk along the street, and she was thinking about returning to the inn, but when she passed next to an alleyway she observed a scene that made her react. Four men in a circle were beating another man, who obviously could not defend himself, as he was half naked and did not have weapons. One of the bullies was yelling at him to go stealing the moneybag to his whore mother, and to give him back his moneybag from wherever he had hidden it. The poor battered insisted that he had not done that, and that the author had been a street urchin who had hidden quickly amongst the crowd and had vanished. With his lips bleeding by the blows, the young man affirmed he had witnessed it, the pilferer had cut the cords of the bag just when its owner and his friends were passing by the door of the brothel where the young man worked. The men laughed and spat at him. In that moment, Brienne got close to them, threatening, with the sword in her hand. Those four loafers were no match for her, and she knew it.
"Leave him alone right now," she blurted.

The men turned to look at her, stunned. A hint of mockery appeared in their eyes, but they also stared at her Valyrian sword with respect. All of her gave off an aura of consummate warrior and those third-rate bullies must read determination on her face. It was obvious that they were not true fighters, only a bunch of braggarts Brienne would have split in two simply with a few slashes of her sword.

"Stay with that one. I'm sure you'll make a happy couple. The fag and the dike," said the one whose bag had been stolen, and the four guys went away laughing.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 415

Lys

Brienne walked close to the young man and helped him to stand up. He had a swollen eye and his lip was split, and he must have been kicked all over his body, but he stood bravely, without a single groan.

"Thank you," he said with a shaky voice. He had rested on her shoulder to stand up, and in that moment he released her and looked at her, surprised. "My lady."

"I'm not a lady," she replied, as she always did automatically when someone called her that way.

"Well, whatever you are, you've saved me. Why have you done that?" The lad tried to take a couple of uncertain steps to test the firmness of his legs.

"I don't like braggarts," she answered dryly.

He addressed her a smile which looked more like a grimace of pain. "I can imagine that you don't."

Afterwards he added, while he was limping slightly beside her: "No one else would have done that for me."

"Luckily for you, I'm not anyone else."

They walked together to the entrance of the brothel. Brienne wanted to make sure that the lad was not very bad and could manage before she left. He turned to her.

"Why don't you go in? I'll talk with the owner about what you've done and I'm sure she'll give you preferential treatment. It wouldn't be bad for you to get a little relaxed." The man seemed sincerely grateful, but of course, he was trained to seem like the clients wanted him to seem. Only that Brienne was not a client, nor did she intend to be one.

"I don't frequent these places," she rejected, and was about to turn around.

"Please," he pleaded softly. His sad tone made Brienne stare at his face for the first time. He looked a bit like Jaime and that coincidence made her waver. "No one has been so kind to me in a long time. Never really, I think. I don't want to lose my saviour so soon. You don't have to do anything you don't want to, regard this as an invitation. I'd like to hang out in your company. As friends, if you don't desire anything else. I don't have friends." He really seemed sincere. Or he was very good at feigning or he was telling the truth. Brienne had not met many honest people, so the chances that he was lying were very high.

"How do I know you don't have other intentions?," she pressed, mistrustful above all. *Trust kills more than a sword.*

"I'm not armed, and you are probably one of the best warriors who walk today through the streets of Lys. How many chances do I have to steal your moneybag and cut your throat before you slit my own neck?" He was smiling, and in his greenish-blue eyes (almost like Jaime's!) was sparkling a shade of humour. "You and I, hanging out in each others' company. To chat, nothing more."

Brienne made her mind up. *Surely I'll regret this. But to hell. I'm fed up with speaking to the walls nearly all day.*
"All right. But I'll pay for your time the same you earn with an ordinary service," she insisted, stubborn.

"No. Friendship isn't paid with money. And tonight you're my friend," he refused, equally stubborn.

"But the owner will demand the money from you. I haven't met a single procurer who refuses money."

"She won't demand for it if I tell her what you've done and she sees that you're a really honourable person who has saved the life of one of her workers. Deep down, she's a sentimental."

"As you like, but if she raises objections, I'll pay you."

"I insist. And now, if it doesn't bother you, come with me so I can speak to her about you. She's right there." The young man pointed to a woman who must have overtaken her fifties, with ample breast and very wide hips. The grey strands of her blond hair were concealed in the platinum tone, but her mane lacked luster and looked like straw. The light gown typical of Lys exposed the bulk of her prominent and flaccid belly. Brienne allowed him to lead her while she was running her eyes over the hall, feeling out of place in that sordid establishment. The prostitutes and the clients who were there looked at her with curiosity. They surely did not see many female clients with the height of a tall man, wearing an armour and with weapons in their belts.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Lys

The procurer gazed at her from head to toe and let out an exclamation when she noticed her worker's deplorable appearance. He explained to her what happened and the woman thanked Brienne. Such as he asked her, the woman invited Brienne to spend the night for free with him in compensation for rescuing him, and she also offered her a jug of wine as a gift. Brienne was about to refuse it but she decided it would be impolite and accepted it.

"I'm afraid he's not up to many sorts of things after the beating, my lady," the procurer said as an apology.

Brienne reddenned with that bawdy insinuation.

"I don't... I don't want his company for that. Besides, I myself will check out his wounds and I'll clean them. I know how to do it to help them heal well." Brienne's proposal surprised the woman and the young man. He smiled at her, grateful once more. "I'll need water, soap, clean cloths and some disinfectant salve, if you have."

"Of course. I'll promptly send your request to Larko's bedroom. I hope your stay here is pleasant, my lady."

"I'm not a lady," Brienne opposed. "I'm no one."

The procurer nodded, with an expression which showed that she cared very little about who she was, and she pointed at the corridor.

Larko led her to the bedroom where he worked. That was a middle-ranking brothel, so the room at least had a clean appearance and the decorations were plain.

"The bedrooms are cleaned every day and the sheets are changed twice every night," he explained, inviting her to enter. "There are lots of inns in this city where you would have no choice but to sleep in a filthy hellhole full of bugs. At least here I live and work in a place where rats and cockroaches don't keep me permanent company."

Brienne was standing, uneasy.

"Sit down, please. There are no chairs, but the bed can be used to sit too, if you like." he walked to a chest and opened it. For a moment Brienne feared that he would take out some kind of weapon, but it only was a chest of clothes. Larko, without the slightest shyness, undressed completely, dropped his ripped clothes in a corner of the room and took out other garments he put on the bed. He observed her expression and sighed, amused.

"Relax. I already told you that you don't have to do anything you don't want to do. If you're going to clean my wounds, it'll be better that no piece of cloth gets in the way. But relax, I'll get dressed later if you don't like the sight."

Her only response was to turn around and she barred the door. She did not want anyone to pay them a suprise visit.

He observed all her movements.
"I can understand how you've managed to survive alone until coming to this lost island. May I call you by a name?"

"I'd prefer not," she denied.

"Well, it doesn't matter. Most people I meet every night don't even tell me their names, and if they do I can't remember them afterwards." He was smiling. His smile was a bit like Jaime's, but Larko's did not have the rictus of bitterness which curved the corners of Jaime's mouth. "So what? What are friends supposed to talk about? We agreed we'd be friends tonight. You have any idea what to do?"

She smiled for the first time that night.

"Neither have I great experience," she confessed. Only Renly and Jaime had been her true friends, and she had lost them very soon.

"Well, to begin with I think we should share the wine." Larko took the bottle and the glasses from the nightstand where he had left them previously. He handed a glass to Brienne. She was flushed to the roots of her hair and avoided looking at him. "Ah, of course, I know that friends normally aren't naked in front of each other, but in an emergency situation that can be overlooked, don't you think?"

Both were sitting on the bed. Brienne was rigid, with her back stiff and she did not look at him yet.

Larko served the wine in the glasses.

"What about a toast? To a new friendship." He made his glass clink against Brienne's. We're now supposed to drink. To seal the toast and all that." He drank a gulp, gazing at Brienne. "Eh, look, it's not poisoned."

She shot him a glance, frowning, and drank.

"You see? It's not so difficult. And now we might chat. What would you like to talk about?"

In that moment someone knocked on the door. Brienne stood quickly and got to the door in a jump.

"Who is it?," she asked.

"I bring what you requested to treat Larko's wounds," a female voice answered on the other side.

Brienne put her hand on her dagger, lifted the bar and opened. A girl who was carrying in her arms a bowl with hot water and some packages looked at her, astonished.

"Relax a bit the heavy artillery, sweetheart. Mina doesn't hide a knife beneath her skirt. Well, that's what I think," Larko said, mockingly.

The girl left the things on the chest and stepped out in a rush, evidently frightened. Brienne closed the door and barred it again.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 417

Lys

"I'm impressed. You're very nimble despite... well, despite wearing that armour."

"Come on, say what you were going to say. I'm very big, am I not?"

His gaze softened.

"You are, but I like it. I don't tell you this as an insult or to tease you, really. It's admirable how well you move. It's impressed me how fast you've reached the door. Were you very young when you decided you wanted to be a warrior?" Larko drank another gulp and gestured to Brienne indicating her to imitate him. She complied. "Well, and now, while you think about telling me how you decided to lead that kind of life, you might begin to examine my wounds, if you want."

Brienne put the glass on the nightstand and opened the packages the girl had left on the chest. They contained the clean cloths, the soap and the ointment. She soaked a cloth in the hot water, impregnated it with the soap and started to rub it softly over the wounds and bruises, beginning with his head, trying to look at him as little as possible. He was tall too and had a thin and slender body, with fibrous muscles. "I was ten and a head taller than the boys my age. That didn't make me very popular." She finished with his face, bent down and began to clean his torso. A few ugly bruises were already spreading over nearly all the skin.

"You weren't the queen of the party. You were mocked. You decided to learn how to beat the living daylights out of them and you learnt it very well."

"Us girls don't have it easy."

"No, you certainly don't." He was staring at her and she avoided those eyes which disturbed her. "See, I... I'm not... I bed men and women because that's my job, but I don't really feel attracted to men. When I'm with them I imagine that they... are women, and that way it's easier."

Brienne flushed even more. Why was he telling her that? Was he imagining that she...?

“How did you end up working on this?,” she asked suddenly, not very sure why she was asking that question. She descended to his legs, and that way she avoided looking at his face. But the worst was that she had just in front of her his... virile attributes. Jaime was the only man she had seen completely naked before, in those bathrooms at Harrenhal, when he told her the truth about king Aerys.

"My whole family died of a fever and I was left alone in the streets. Mama Cora found me and brought me here. She lacks maternal instinct, but if it weren't for her I'd probably have starved to death, lying in any puddle."

"I'm sorry about what happened to your family," she said. She was not very good at offering condolences.

"Thank you. And you? When did you leave your family behind?” Brienne stood and took another cloth, which she smeared with salve.

"Five years ago. I know I broke my father's heart, but I had to go." She dabbed onto his slit eyebrow with the cloth and he hissed.
"Damn, that stings," he protested.

"I thought you were a tough dude," she joked, and she glanced at his eyes for an instant.

"And I am. But tough dudes have our low moments. You must know that, you're one too. You know I mean it as a compliment. If not for you, I wouldn't be here with you right now." She continued to apply the ointment onto the wounds of his face. "It's a strange night. I've never had anyone like you in my bedroom. Certainly, not anyone so overdressed like you. You never take off that armour?"

"When I take my single bath of the month," she answered, ironic.

"It has to be a drudgery to don and doff that thing every day. You don't have anyone to help you? The Westerosi knights usually have squires."

"I'm not a knight. And I don't need a squire."

"Well, I think you do." Larko looked at her thoughtful. "Wherever you go, I think you mustn't go alone."

"I can take care of myself."

"That's obvious. But I'm sure you wouldn't regret to allow someone to accompany you and take care of you."

"I doubt it." Suddenly Brienne raised her eyes again and looked at him stunned. "Are you suggesting to join me?"

"You shouldn't travel alone and being in this place isn't the dream of my life. I'm not a squire and I don't intend to be one, but I can learn everything necessary to be your companion and I'll help you in everything you need." There was plea in his eyes. "I owe you my life. You're a good woman and I want to go with you. Please."

"You owe me nothing. And I don't know you. You might betray me at the first opportunity, cut my throat while I'm asleep and leave with my moneybag and my weapons," she opposed.

"Damn, you didn't tell me you were so rich. You think that with all I'll steal to you I'll live it up and I might retire from this crappy job? Is that the reason why you travel in little walnuts in winter, lodge in inns no better than this brothel and take strolls through the slums? I see, you do all this because you're bored of being so rich," he blurted. He looked truly hurt.

"Larko... I can't take you with me. I'm not traveling for pleasure and I don't have an easy life, you understand?" Brienne had finished to smear the ointment onto him and stood, without looking at him.

"You think I'm not aware of that? Neither I have a very easy life, in case you haven't noticed. Winter is here. Wherever you go, the journey will be very harsh, and if you go alone, you don't have the slightest chance to reach your destination. You'll lose nothing for taking me with you."

Brienne sighed and remained silent for a while.

"You want to come with me and you don't even know my name." She turned around and addressed him a slight smile.

"Well, that can be easily fixed. How did you say your name was?" The young man's eyes flashed
with hope.

"Brienne. My name is Brienne."

"Then I'm glad to meet you, Brienne." Larko stood and made a comical bow. She lowered her eyes again, as red as a poppy once more.

"I think you should get dressed. You don't have the intention to join me looking like that, do you?"

Larko shot her a mischievous smile and picked up his clothes from the bed. He got dressed and took again the glasses of wine.

"We have to drink to our new agreement, Brienne."

She took the glass and hoped it was not a mistake to accept Larko. But, for some strange reason, perhaps due to the wine, she felt happy for the first time in many weeks.
Chapter 418

Meereen: Month 3. Day 9

Tyrion was at the port, thinking about the ironies of fate. That was the second time he was going to welcome Oberyn Martell. The first time he had expected to receive his brother Doran, and he had positioned at the fork between the Kingsroad and the Roseroad with Pod, Bronn and fifty Lannister guards. Bronn was not a model of patience and he entertained himself making bad jokes, and next to them there was a great bustle of lowly people going and coming loaded with baskets and carrying animals and carts. When the Dornish retinue appeared displaying the banners of their houses (all but the Martells', the sun pierced by the spear), Tyrion was startled. And shortly afterwards he got alarmed when he discovered that it was not the measured eldest brother who was attending Joffrey's wedding, but the quarrelsome youngest brother, who besides had skipped the ceremonial presentations and had gone directly to the place where Tyrion imagined he would be: Littlefinger's brothel. The first thing Tyrion saw when he entered the chambers was a dagger piercing the wrist of a Lannister distant cousin.

And there he was again, waiting for the fractious prince. But in that occasion the Viper could not have come ahead of time, unless he had jumped into the sea and swum to the shore for the last metres of the journey, what Tyrion doubted.

It was a windy and inclement afternoon at the Skazahadhan Bay. Gilean's fleet and the forty-seven ships which had escorted the merchant captain were moored in port, though they would not last very much to move again. Tyrion was already organizing a new business trip, and he was sounding out the Dornish captains to find out which of them had good aptitudes to dedicate themselves to the merchant marine. It was too much risky and insufficient to have a single captain to sell and buy products abroad. If they had two or three more, they might be alternated and thus at all times there would be at least one captain carrying out the transactions so important to the survival and prosperity of Meereen. Tyrion understood that Gilean had earned a more than deserved rest with his family, that he had just brought from Tolos. His eldest son had been recruited as a sailor and he had other two sons who were cabin boys, in the process of learning the craft. He also had taken with him one of his daughters, the youngest one. He had another daughter who was already married and was the mother of two little children, but she had remained in Tolos with her husband, because he had a stable job there and he had not wanted to abandon it to try his luck in Meereen.

With Oberyn came an escort of twenty ships, and so Doran was keeping faithful to the covenant with which he would contribute to enlarge Daenerys' fleet progressively. He had already sent at least seventy boats, of which the majority had managed to arrive at Meereen safe and sound. Meanwhile, Illyrio Mopatis had promised to send one hundred boats. Tyrion hoped that he would comply with the agreement and would not put it off or would not try to palm them off with fewer vessels than agreed.

The fleet which was transporting the prince was clearly visible on the horizon. To maintain secrecy about their origin, the Dornish captains, like the ones of the fleet which had escorted Gilean, had agreed not to place the Martell's banners on the masts, so the ships carried no emblem. It was fundamental that the news of the alliance between Dorne and the Dragon Queen reached Kevan's and Tommen's ears as late as possible. It was essential to avoid the conflict between the Iron Throne and Dorne. Myrcella was strategically located as a Martell's guest and Tommen would not want to do anything which could endanger his sister's life. Doran neither was prone to enter conflicts or to threaten children's lives. But Tommen was weak and easily influenced and his Tyrell wife had numerous armies, and Doran knew that his people would be crushed if the Lannisters and
the Tyrells attacked them. Moreover, queen Margaery's homeland, The Reach, was next to Dorne. No, he could not risk a new war. The Dornish had already put a lot of eggs in one basket with their alliance with Daenerys. Doran was being much bolder than his image of a peaceful and spiritless ruler seemed to be. That apparent passivity was pure façade. Doran had spent the last nineteen years brooding over his revenge against the Lannisters, slowly, patiently, and finally the time to put it into practice had come. In return for his valuable contribution, Daenerys must protect his allies at all costs. Due to that, every precaution must be taken, and the Dornish had had to swallow their pride out of necessity and sail to the other end of the world without their banners unfurled.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
But Tyrion was afraid of temperamental Oberyn's reaction as soon as he saw that the queen was not there to welcome him. After more than a month on the high seas, his hot blood must be boiling for beautiful Daenerys, and he would not like much to postpone his meeting with her. If she returned, of course. That was one of Tyrion's deepest fears, which he did not dare to express aloud. She had disappeared twenty-four days ago and, with each passing day without her or her dragons materializing, Tyrion's anxiety grew more and more. He had to grasp the hope that she would appear in front of the city gates with Jorah and Daario, and perhaps the dragons would accompany her as well, if that was the beasts' capricious will.

Meanwhile, he would have to manage to deal with the Red Viper's disappointment and keep him satisfied during the wait. Tyrion did not doubt that the queen's betrothed would wait; he had waited almost two decades to mow down his sister's murderer. What he doubted was how much time the prince's patience would last without challenging or spilling someone's blood. Of course that he would not stay prudently in the Great Pyramid, but he would tramp throughout the city he knew since his previous visit and he would go across the brothels. As it was assumed that no one must know about his future marriage to the queen, he had to behave with normalcy, and for him normalcy consisted in fighting occasionally and leading an untiring sex life. And if for the moment he could not have Daenerys to bed her, he would search for compensation in other beds. He was not very fond of abstinence.

What made Tyrion most nervous was that the belligerent prince might threaten, injure or kill the wrong people, what was very likely in such a populous city. Perhaps what suited him was to fight in the fighting arenas, like he had done years ago, thought Tyrion with irony. Then it would be sure that the amphitheaters would be filled to the brim, with the expectation of seeing in action the reckless Dornishman. The thought about the arenas brought to his mind another problem that was pending. The games had not been finished because of the disaster in the Daznak's pit and the finalist fighters who had survived the tragedy were demanding their final combat so one of them could win the prize of two hundred gold coins, which had been given to no champion yet. Tyrion and the other counselors had managed to smooth them over with the promise that their fight would be put on when the queen had returned and the situation in Meereen had settled down, but those fighters did not shine by their patience and were causing trouble. They were foreigners and had stayed in the city waiting for their combat, and they were giving the guards a lot of work, because the Unsullied and the Second Sons often had to go to quell the brawls that the arena fighters provoked. They were a nightmare, and Tyrion wished that they got out of there once and for all. After how much effort it had cost to restore peace, the last thing they needed was a bundle of brutes in the mood for quarreling.

More refugees from Yunkai had arrived. The Yellow City was a ruin and the survivors who had stayed there were trying to rebuild it from its ashes. Thousands of Wise Masters and rich commoners had died and a few of them had escaped. It was said that many of them had perished wandering through the wastelands and a few had managed to flee in their ships. The freedfolk had just elected a Council of Elders to rule the destroyed city. They had asked for Meereen's help, and Tyrion and the other members of the Council decided to send supplies, but they could not offer more. Meereen already had enough trouble by itself and more than a quarter of a million mouths to feed. Probably Astapor would give the Yunkish a helping hand as well. Now the three cities were allies in their fight against slavery, and they could not turn a blind eye to their neighbours' problems, but first things first, and a ruler had to provide for the people who depended directly on
him or her. So for Tyrion, Meereen went first.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 3. Day 9

The events in Westeros were not encouraging, though they brought promising news. Littlefinger was under arrest, watched by the lords of the Vale. Finally he lords, due to the implacable blockade the clans had submitted them to, had had to back down. The clans had cut off the passage of provisions and the total isolation in the harsh winter of the Vale had made a dent in the lords, who did not expect that group of *wildlings* to have such tenacity and strategic capacity. They had to swallow their pride. Meanwhile Littlefinger had already been forced to leave the Eyrie because it was uninhabitable during winter, and he had descended to take shelter with Robin Arryn in the Gates of the Moon, hoping to count on Lord Nestor Royce's support. Littlefinger himself had given him in perpetuity the safekeeping of the settlement at the foot of the Eyrie. But he met with an unpleasant surprise. In the middle of the turmoil, someone had dropped a stone which had added to the infuriated spirits. A handmaiden who had been in the service of the Eyrie had told Lord Royce a secret which was eating her away and which she had not told anyone before out of fear. She had left the Eyrie hastily but the bad weather forced her to ask for asylum at the Gates of the Moon and, as she could not go on keeping that secret for herself, she persuaded herself that she had to reveal it to someone. So Lord Nestor welcomed Littlefinger with a coldness comparable to the winter outside, and he promptly ordered his arrest.

The girl, shaking in fear, told in front of an assembly of lords and ladies gathered in the Gates of the Moon, summoned by Lord Nestor, that she had heard a conversation in which Lady Lysa was speaking aloud and Lord Petyr was trying to silence her, but she was overexcited and there was no way to make her lower her voice. The lady had said things like she and the lord Petyr had poisoned Lord Arryn and she was very glad she had relieved herself of her former husband, besides she exclaimed that it was her who always had loved the lord Baelish, her and not her sister Catelyn, and that she had done for him everything he had wanted her to, everything, she even had got rid of the baby she had conceived by accident when she was still unmarried, and later she had to endure her beloved's absence when Petyr was banned from Riverrun because in the same period when she aborted, he challenged Brandon Stark out of love for Catelyn. Lysa had felt so jealous, so humiliated, that she had wanted to die... Lord Petyr murmured something, trying to calm her, but she started to yell at him that he had deceived her, that he had never loved her... And then he said something that could be clearly heard: *You're right. There has only been a woman I've loved. Cat.* Lady Lysa shrieked and the handmaiden had the impression that there was a struggle, and then another scream and a sudden silence. And afterwards Lord Petyr rushed out saying that the bard that always accompanied Lady Lysa to ease her with his songs had thrown her through the Moon Door because his lady had disdained his amorous advances.

Littlefinger of course had denied the handmaiden's testimony, but Lord Royce, and with him many other lords and ladies, replied that they believed in the girl's sincerity, because a simple handmaiden ran a serious risk and had much to lose accusing a lord, and they were sure that if she was taking the risk, she did it because she was telling a truth that was consuming her. To all that they had to add the fact that the bard had not stopped telling until the moment of his own death, falling from a sky cell, that he had not done anything, he even told the same version of the story that some time later the handmaiden had dared to confess. Two people had told exactly the same version which framed Littlefinger. This one was sent to the dungeons, awaiting his trial.

*(Part 3 of a longer chapter)*
Chapter 421

Meereen: Month 3. Day 9

The news about all the problems in the Vale had reached King's Landing and Kevan, surprised that he had not found out before, felt forced to make emergency decisions. He ratified the clans' rights on the possession of the mountains, disregarding the complaints of the lords of the Vale, but as a concession he acknowledged them their right to try Baelish for his crimes. The information about Lysa's indiscretions had come to his ears, and especially the part in which she had confessed her own involvement, and Littlefinger's, in Jon Arryn's death, made an impact on Tommen's honest great uncle.

Varys' move had been a masterstroke. He had found that frightened maid and had managed to make her confess in front of the lords of the Vale, who already suspected Littlefinger and moreover they were quite angry because of the clans' rebellions, and they were also hurt in their pride for having lost the mountains. Now they only had to wait for the trial where the fate of the despicable lord regent would be decided.

Sansa's eyes had sparkled with the cold flash of revenge. That was the rat who had killed one of her father's best friends, the man who had been like a second father to Ned, and he had disposed of him so as Robert chose Ned as Hand, knowing that the Lord of Winterfell hated the capital and its intrigues. Later he had collaborated on the betrayal by which all of Ned's guards were slaughtered in the throne room and he put a knife on Ned's neck to hand him to Cersei on a platter.

No, Sansa did not feel pity for that rat.

To stain the satisfaction for Littlefinger's arrest, the news from the North had disheartened Sansa. The letter from an appalled Varys had shaken her and Tyrion. Stannis had burnt his own daughter at the stake. The horrible influence of the red witch had gone as far as condemning a poor innocent girl to the worst of deaths, because the flames dictated her that that atrocity would help Stannis to make the snow back up. It seemed that the sacrifice achieved its purpose, but at the cost that the trashy king lost more than half of the army that he had still left, which had deserted overnight after witnessing the atrocious show of the little girl screaming, calling her parents and crying for mercy while she was devoured by the fire. The same morning when Stannis awoke turned into the worst of monsters, abandoned by the scandalized sellswords and other soldiers who had been loyal to him until then, his wife, Selyse Baratheon, had hanged herself on a tree. She who so blind had been with the murderer witch, at last had showed compassion for her daughter, when it was too late, and guilt pushed her to suicide. The day dawned calm, without any blizzard, but, at what price? The witch, seeing that Stannis was condemned as well, as the Boltons would crush him easily, abandoned him as the treacherous bitch she was and rode to the Wall to lick the wounds of her failure. Varys gave off an uncontainable hatred in his words, and even Tyrion felt afflicted by poor Shireen, a sweet and intelligent little girl who had suffered a terrible end because of her parents and a screwy witch. Sansa, who was starting to feel her pregnancy in her morning sickness and her hypersensitive mood, cried for the assassinated little princess.

As expected, the dumber Stannis insisted on advancing against the Boltons' well equipped army, that defeated him quickly and put to the sword his lessened forces. It was Ramsay Bolton himself who executed Stannis, thus putting an end to an undesirable candidate to the Iron Throne. It was not that Varys was glad that the Boltons still were the usurpers of the North, but he neither felt the slightest pity for that pathetic applicant Stannis had been, a killer of his own progeny.
Sansa's eyes flashed with hatred against Stannis, against the witch and against the Boltons. Tyrion would have wanted to spare her those violent emotions, but he could not hide the truth from her, so he tried to appease her caressing her hand and trying to get her distracted with the daily tasks.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 3. Day 9

At least another raven brought her a little payback, announcing the death of the lord of the Iron Islands, Balon Greyjoy. It had happened coinciding suspiciously with the return to Pyke of Balon's youngest brother, Euron. It was well known that they always had detested each other, so it must not be discarded that the geezer had not died by accident. He had fallen into the void from one of the bridges of the castle, in a storm. That kind of bridges, made with ropes and planks, were not the most solid thing one could walk along under a strong wind, and perhaps Euron had taken advantage of that circumstance to get rid of the hated eldest brother. It was supposed that the Seastone Chair must be inherited by Theon, or what was left of him. Varys reported that the traitor who tricked Robb Stark, took Winterfell and burnt the Stark boys (or two kids he passed off as them) had managed to escape from Ramsay Bolton's claws, and he probably was on his way to Pyke, if the songs of the little birds were true.

At the capital, Tommen and Margaery were offering an image of devotion to the Faith that Tyrion at the very least found odd, at least what regarded the Rose of Highgarden. She did not do anything without a perfectly studied reason and Tyrion bet that so much religious fervour hid some ploy to undermine the power of the sparrows. The remarkable granddaughter of Olenna Tyrell had not fought tooth and nail to get the crown (even having a stomach big enough to agree to marry a sadistic and later a boy who hardly had reached puberty, weak and malleable) to settle willingly with the setback that another usurped her power, although that one was a priest wearing a burlap robe.

And to finish with the portion of novelties, the last thing they knew about Jon was that he was heading with a group of loyal black brothers and friends from the Free Folk for Hardhome, the cursed city beyond the Wall, where thousands of people had sought shelter after losing their leader, Mance Rayder. Sansa was worried about her brother, because he, in addition to struggle against winter in the coldest lands in the world, had to struggle too against people's prejudices. She was praying again after months without doing it. Tyrion ignored if she addressed her prayers to the Seven or to the old gods, but he on his own addressed them a defiant rebuke. If you don't listen to her, then you're not worthy of kissing her soles. Perhaps that would sting their pride and they would bother to listen to her even once in their state of permanent deafness.

Sansa's pregnancy made up for the tiring days, the tiresome duties and the news which did not augur anything good. Her condition was not visible yet, it was too soon (only a month) but they did not have the least doubt that a Lannister and Stark baby was developing. Every morning Sansa tried not to vomit her breakfast, sometimes without success; she captured odours that had gone unnoticed until then, and Tyrion joked telling her that she almost competed with Ray; and she had mood swings and cried at the slightest thing, what embarrassed her, because it reminded her of her period in King's Landing. Tyrion treated her with as much kindness, tenderness and patience as always, no matter that she did not bear herself at some moments. Sometimes she spoke to him rudely or raised her voice, reactions which she regretted instantly and she put her hands on her mouth, aghast for losing her composure in such a way before the man she loved and who only showered her with attention. But despite those mood swings, understandable in her condition, Sansa was very happy, and he pushed his fears to the bottom of his mind to share her happiness.

He squeezed her soft hand while they were waiting at the port for the twenty ships to dock. Sansa knew he was a bit nervous and she tried to calm him with a graze of her fingers and a smile.
From that day Meereen would be surely a less quiet town, because Oberyn was the kind of person who got greatly noticed.
The prince stepped down with his well known agility from the recently docked ship, flanked by his guards. Tyrion, Sansa, Ser Barristan, Missandei and Grey Worm stood waiting at the quay, also flanked by Unsullied and Second Sons, and Pod was right behind Tyrion. Oberyn looked at them all with a smile which wavered as soon as he noticed that his fiancé was not in the entourage reception. But in that moment he addressed Tyrion, sarcastic.

"It seems you have a special fondness for coming to meet me, Lord Tyrion," he joked.

"And it seems you've lost your dislike for welcoming ceremonies, my prince," Tyrion added, returning the jibe.

"I still don't like them, but I supposed that in this occasion I'd be welcomed by a beautiful queen, a considerable improvement compared to the last time I was received by someone. But I don't see her here." Oberyn scanned the quay with his eyes, and Tyrion thought he caught a flash of disappointment in his dark eyes when he did not spot her in the entourage. Now the difficult part was coming. Tyrion breathed in.

"The queen isn't in Meereen at present. During the performing of the finals of the fights in Daznak's amphitheater, a place you are acquainted with, her dragons appeared, panic spread through the crowd and she felt compelled to fly away. Our best soldiers went in search for her and we are confident that she'll come back."

Oberyn's pupils dilated in surprise.

"Really? I was under the impression that she decided to stay and rule Meereen when she conquered it, in order not to abandon the people she had freed. How is it that she has abandoned them now?"

"She hasn't abandoned them," Tyrion contradicted. "The queen had to ride Drogon and fly away with the dragons because both their lives and the spectators' were in danger in those moments, in the chaos which unleashed in the amphitheater, but she still hardly could control them and didn't know how to make the dragons come back. I'm sure that, wherever she is, she's doing everything possible to return, and besides I know that the soldiers who went to look for her won't rest until finding her. It's very likely that they're on their way back. Our queen is stronger than she seems, and here we're confident that she'll be with us again soon." Tyrion sounded more confident than he felt.

But Oberyn did not look angry, only disillusioned. He gave a hint of his ironic smile.

"I suposse I really deserve it after what I did to you last time. In King's Landing I left you in the lurch, and here the queen has done the same to me. I think we're even, Lord Tyrion. We both have tasted the humiliation of being disdained, either willingly or unwillingly."

"Oh, I know that taste since I was born, my prince, you know it very well. But you're lucky that the queen doesn't inflict any humiliation on you, or that's not her intention."

"The truth is that I'm not used to be disdained by ladies, willingly or unwillingly." Oberyn stared at Sansa, with caressing eyes, and Tyrion felt the sting of jealousy. "I remember when in King's Landing you told me you were married, and I nearly can understand that you rejected any female
companion who was not this lovely lady." The prince held Sansa's hand to kiss it, and she, very flushed, responded to the gallant greeting with a curtsy. "When I attended king Joffrey's wedding you were very unhappy, my lady. I've never felt esteem for your father, but he was your father. And I'm also sorry that you lost your family. I know what it means to be snatched the worst way the people you love. But now you gleam, my beautiful lady. Marriage suits you at last. The most surprising talents sometimes appear in the most unexpected people," Oberyn commented, shooting Tyrion a mocking glance. "It's always a pleasure to look at such a beauty and guess that she's not being wasted in the hands of any hick unable to value his good luck. I haven't come to this world to let the pretty flowers I meet wither without having been revered the way they deserve." The prince kissed Sansa's hand again and his eyes ran over her with undisguised admiration. Tyrion could sense the heat which was burning the cheeks of his young wife and he thought that it was time to cut off the seductive prince's flattery. He still had nightmares in which the Knight of Flowers took Sansa away, she straddling the rump of his white horse, and both smiled happily while they rode far from Tyrion, leaving him alone and desperate.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"We're all hicks around flowers like her," Tyrion replied. "No one can revere them like they deserve." He emphasized no one clearly.

"Well, the flowers are who must opine on that by themselves. And we never must stop trying to improve their opinion."

"I agree," Tyrion said, eager for changing the topic. Sansa, sensing his mood as always, intervened.

"Prince Oberyn, I hope you'll feel comfortable in Meereen. People tell stories about you. Here many remember you."

"Yes, the truth is that I had a lot of fun during my former visit. I'm certain that a few inhabitants of this city haven't forgotten me, and not all their memories must be fine. I also see here my old friends, the Second Sons. To start with, my good friend Lester is by there. Eh, Lester!" Oberyn got close to the sellsword, who was part of the escort of the royal counselors. The two men clapped each other's forearms as a greeting of old colleagues. "How are you, rogue? I see that bad life has suited you wonderfully. You are still the nightmare of the brothels and keep on knocking down the others drinking? Don't tell me you've become a teetotaller."

The soldier was smiling with his white teeth under the weather-beaten skin, covered with scars.

"The queen has made us toe the line, my prince, but the old habits aren't wholly forgotten."

"I see that they aren't, my friend. We have to recall the old times one of these days," Oberyn proposed.

"Of course, my prince."

Then, Oberyn looked over the other counselors and gave a nod to Ser Barristan, who returned it. But before speaking to him, Oberyn gazed at Missandei and greeted her as gallantly as he had done with Sansa: he bowed and kissed her hand.

"The queen has an excellent taste to be surrounded by gorgeous women. What's your name?"

"Missandei of Naath, my prince." Her blush was clearly visible even on her tanned cheeks.

"Beautiful island. But I'm afraid that pirates make life difficult there, or else you wouldn't be here, under the queen's protection. You love her very much, don't you?"

"Yes, my prince. She freed me from a Good Master of Astapor."

"That tells me a lot of how she is. Well, beautiful Missandei, I'm glad that from today we'll see each other often." He kissed her hand again and walked to Ser Barristan."

"Welcome to Meereen, my prince." The knight was looking at Oberyn cautiously. Both warriors always had respected one another, but the old man did not trust much the restless and hot-headed prince, Tyrion noticed it, and doubtlessly the shrewd Viper noticed it too, but that seemed to amuse him instead of annoying him.
"How many twists and turns life takes, Ser. I've seen lots of things, but I wouldn't have expected that one of the best kingsguards in history ended up at the other end of the world, serving the last of the Targaryens. That boy Joffrey was an idiot, and his mother was a bitch. The Iron Throne has plummeted definitely if a king does something as stupid as firing a legend like you. I never praise anyone who doesn't deserve it, you know that. I'm not called the Red Viper for nothing. You dismounted me and also the dragon prince at the Tourney of Storm's End. For me tournneys were only a game, a simple display, and dismounting others doesn't make one become a great warrior, but you inspired true respect, even to me. So much respect that I forgave you for later serving the Usurper, because for you it must be more a punishment than an honour. You remained faithful to your oaths to a king who spent the day fattening himself up like a pig among wineskins and whores. If you any time deserved a punishment, you took it amply, I don't doubt it. That turned into a caricature of the Iron Throne and the Kingsguard. I almost pitied you. But at last, the fact that Joffrey kicked you out was the best that could happen to you. You didn't have to keep on swearing allegiance to good-for-nothing dudes. And now you and I are here because of the same woman. Fate really toys with us." Oberyn looked at the old knight with his hint of mockery. "Will you give me a rematch one day? My ass still burns since the time you threw me down my horse."

"I'm afraid my old bones aren't a match for you any more, my prince," Ser Barristan admitted, with a slight smile.

"Don't be so modest. I heard that in the throne room, when you were sacked, you threatened to cut other five members of the Kingsguard as if they were cakes."

"Fighting rats has no merit."

"You're right. Those arselickers weren't even worthy of carrying a sword," Oberyn coincided. He turned to Grey Worm.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 3. Day 9

"I greet you, commander of the Unsullied. What's your name?"

"Grey Worm, my prince."

"You didn't change the vermin's name. Why?," Oberyn asked, curious.

"Because it was the name I had the day when the Mother freed me. Since then it's a special name to one," the young soldier explained solemnly.

Oberyn nodded, understanding. To Tyrion's relief, the prince omitted to joke about the Unsullied's lack of virile attributes.

The maesters who Doran had sent were descending from the ships too. Oberyn made the introductions and Tyrion, tired of remaining standing on the dock, wished that the protocol greetings finished soon. That new batch of healers was fresh out of the Citadel and all of them were young and inexperienced, but they would count on Maero, who would be a good guide and he would make them work hard.

Tyrion urged the welcoming committee and the newcomers to head for the Great Pyramid so the Dornish could settle in their lodgings. Some rooms adjacent to the queen's had been prepared for Oberyn, and he would have to live in them even after marrying her in order not to raise suspicion, but they were so close to her future wife's ones as to be able to pay discreet visits to her.

The wind was very unpleasant and Tyrion did not want Sansa to catch cold or to get too tired, and besides the tension that she was exposed among the crowd plagued him. He did not want to smother or annoy her with his fears and so he kept them for himself when Sansa insisted on staying by his side at all times (another teacher was replacing her in her morning lessons, and she had temporarily stopped attending the meetings of the guild of seamstresses, though Leena and Cloe consulted her often), but whenever they went out of the pyramid he became paranoid and was fully aware of everything that happened around him.

In the pyramid, Tyrion made sure that the new maesters were escorted to their dwelling places and then he and Oberyn held a conversation in Daenerys' private hall. Sansa went with Pod to spend time with Leena, because she did not want to be alone in hers and Tyrion's rooms. She deserved that little rest with her friend.

"How is your brother Doran? And my niece?," Tyrion asked, eager to have more news about Myrcella.

"The gout pain keeps him disabled in his wheelchair and he spends many hours watching the gardens from his terrace, but his mind is still so active as ever. He has been planning this alliance with House Targaryen since the moment our sister was killed and the Usurper planted his ass on the throne with the help of your father-in-law and of your family. Do you know that I wanted to make Dorne revolt against Robert to support Viserys Targaryen? But my brother warned me we'd be crushed and he persuaded me to postpone the revenge. We agreed to seal a secret deal with Ser Willem Darry, who had assumed the custody of Viserys and Daenerys. I traveled to Braavos and Ser Willem and I agreed to marry one or both Targaryen siblings to members of my family. By then it had been still a short time since Doran had wed Mellario and he hoped to have several
children, but he only had Trystane, who was born a couple of years after the pact. We proposed Trystane as Daenerys' betrothed, but years later the idiot Viserys rejected that match, eager to get a large army with which invading Westeros. When he gave her to the dothraki khal, he ruined our plans. Shortly afterwards, you offered Myrcella to Trystane, and Doran saw the opportunity of an alliance with the Lannisters. I detested the idea of any deal with your family, but Doran is cleverer than me and a much better politician and tactician. Moreover, Myrcella is a sweet and charming child who has brought joy to our home and happiness to my nephew. But we knew that having Myrcella with us wouldn't help us to carry out our vengeance. We didn't have the intention to kill an innocent girl. At most, we might make sure that Dorne would be safe from the Lannisters' viciousness, because Tywin and Cersei wouldn't want Myrcella to be in danger. And, well, as we didn't have anyone else to offer Daenerys, at last my brother thought of me as her husband. I had objections, especially due to the age difference, and because I already have Ellaria, but I'm not a geezer yet, Ellaria agrees with the alliance and I can be a good husband, because I take care of my family. And thus things have ended up this way. Though Viserys hadn't spurned the pact with us and hadn't died, we had no one to marry him to. That haughty stupid wouldn't have accepted any of my daughters for being bastards, though he might have legitimimized by himself the one he had chosen as soon as he was the king of Westeros, if he had been a more intelligent and capable person. Luckily, I didn't have to betroth one of my daughters to him, and he died like he deserved, and at the appropriate time to make way to his sister." Oberyn drummed his fingers on the table and shifted in his chair. He was too restless to remain seated for a long while. "Is she so beautiful as they say?"

"Even more. Rumours can't describe her beauty fairly enough. You'll have the chance to check it," Tyrion answered without irony.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 426

Meereen: Month 3. Day 9

"You're an expert in women, so I believe you. I'll try to honour such a beauty. If she resembles Rhaegar even a bit, she'll make sigh at least half the inhabitants of the realms where she'll inspire devotion. That I ended up detesting the dragon prince doesn't diminish the great appeal he had. Well, I already knew I wasn't coming here to marry a hideous woman. But tell me... Is she the real woman she seems to be? Is she not simply another pretender to the Iron Throne who has been lucky to obtain three dragons and competent people around her?"

"She wouldn't have obtained any of that if she wasn't the real woman she is. She has true dragon blood. I've never been a bootlicker, and I don't acknowledge in anyone the qualities he or she lacks, starting with myself. I suppose you're well acquainted with my reputation for having a sharp tongue and speaking openly, though in King's Landing we didn't have the chance to talk at great length. You were very thirsty for killing Lannisters." Tyrion smiled with sarcasm. "You can be sure that if I'm telling you all this, it's because she really is worth, prince Oberyn," Tyrion said simply.

"I'm still very thirsty for killing Lannisters," Oberyn pointed ironically. "But I wouldn't find pleasure in killing you. I admit it."

"Because I'm a Halfman?," Tyrion asked with a tone just as ironic.

"Because your father would writhe in his grave if he could see you right now. I like people who knew how to get in Tywin's hair, and you were an expert in that since you were born. I saw you in your crib at Casterly Rock and shortly afterwards Tywin rejected that Jaime or Cersei married Elia or me, fortunately for my sister and for me, and instead he offered you as a husband for Elia, what was an insult for House Martell. But in spite of that I knew I couldn't hate you, not because you were a pitiful dwarf, but because you'd always be a thorn in your father's heart. And I liked that," the prince admitted.

"Well, that's not bad. It's a good start for a blooming friendship. And what regards to Daenerys, I'm not kidding, my friend. Your marriage with her will be the most advantageous you could find. You'll have everything you might wish in a woman."

"As long as she returns, of course. Well, my little friend, I won't steal more time from you to be next to your pretty wife. I have to pay my respects to this hell of a city where I spent so good times when I was hardly more than a lad. I need to seek compensation for being more than a month stuck in a floating mousetrap." Oberyn stood up.

Tyrion looked at him with apprehension.

"I plead with you that while you have fun in the streets of Meereen, please remember that the city is in a very delicate situation and there are people who want to kill us. Don't be careless."

Oberyn smiled openly.

"It's been long years since I don't have a father to lecture me, but don't worry, I'll take your warning into account. I'm troublesome but not that much idiot."

"I'm happy to hear that," Tyrion replied, not very convinced.

Both walked to the door of the private hall.
"And by the way, congratulations, little friend. I hope the baby will be born in good health," Oberyn added while they were going out.

Tyrion looked at him, surprised.

"How do you know? Sansa's been pregnant barely for a month by now and we haven't tell nearly anyone yet."

"I'm a very experienced man. And I've had eight daughters, at least as far as I know. I'm a bit familiarized with pregnant women. Take good care of her, little friend. The best things in this world are sex and family, when one has a family that's worth it."

"I know, my friend. And remember..."

"I won't burn half the city before tomorrow, I promise," Oberyn laughed, and walked away along the corridor with his springy steps, which reminded those of a feline getting ready to go hunting.
"What did prince Oberyn refer to when he told you at the dock that he nearly could understand that you rejected any female companion who was not me? How could he know such a private thing if he had just arrived at King's Landing?," Sansa blurted with a reproachful tone when he picked her up at Pod and Leena's rooms and they were both in the corridor, far from earshot of their friends.

Tyrion looked at her, surprised by her vehemence and her hurt tone. He'd never thought that a simple remark that had nothing special about it could make such a deep impression on her, but then he remembered that his young pregnant wife was in a state of hypersensitivity and things affected her more than before. He summoned up his patience, anticipating the downpour that was coming. He sighed inwardly when he realized that she must have been turning over and over in her mind Oberyn's damned remark for most of the afternoon.

"See, Sansa, when he arrived in the capital, he went straightaway to Littlefinger's brothel before I could welcome him. I remained waiting for him on the outskirts of the city, but our exotic prince has an ass too restless to follow protocols and he went to do as he jolly well pleased, like he's always done. As I have a little knowledge about human psychology, as you know well, I imagined where he'd be, and I was right. I went to the brothel and, well, I'll spare you some details about the first thing I saw when I entered. Let's say that he was maintaining an argument with one of my Lannister distant relatives, to put it mildly. He wasn't in a rush to greet me and, when he did, he invited Bronn and me to participate in the... activities that had been interrupted by the argument. I declined the offer and told him I was married, and he looked at me as if I was a fool for missing the opportunity. Obviously he didn't understand why one thing had to be at odds with the other."

They had just walked into their rooms and Tyrion was locking the door. He thought that she was content with his explanation, but he immediately would discover that he was completely wrong.

"So you went to the brothel, didn't you? You couldn't resist, of course," she attacked. Tyrion turned to gaze at her, hurt in spite of himself.

"Sansa, I've already told you why I had to go there, but I truly didn't want to go. I had stopped visiting those places long ago, I've told you before, and I repeat it to you now. I've never been unfaithful to you."

"But there must be naked women over there. They knew you well, surely some of them went close to you to tempt you. And are you going to tell me you declined the chance to have easy sex? At home you had a stupid and weepy child wife you didn't bed, you were craving for having sex... And you did have the strength to reject other women, even the ones in brothels?" Her voice was sarcastic.

Tyrion was resorting to all his self-control. Sansa's reproaches were really offensive, no matter how much he knew he was to blame for his own reputation and that shortly after she by herself would regret having expressed that suspicion.

"Yes, Sansa. I rejected them. I did it because I was married to you and I respected you. Please, understand."

"But you desired other women. You know what I think? That you desired even Shae." Her face
was red with fury, but Tyrion's turned white when he heard that disclosure. "You see? I'm right. You wanted her. You often feigned that you didn't remember her name, you who never forget a single name. You sometimes shot her furtive glances when you thought I wasn't looking, and she returned them. Knowing glances. Now I realize everything, how much blind I was, how naïve I was. Do you know that one day I found one of her bracelets in one of your drawers? What was doing there one of her bracelets? It was made of silver. How a handmaiden could afford a silver bracelet? I saw her wearing it several times. You gave it to her! How could I forget those details until now? And those resentful glares Shae shot you... They weren't aimed at protecting me, they were out of jealousy! She was jealous! For the gods... How could I be so stupid? There was something between her and you, now I'm aware of it. You've deceived me!" She walked furiously towards one of the windows and stopped, looking through the glass without seeing anything.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 428

Meereen: Month 3. Day 9

An abyss opened at Tyrion's feet and he had to gather all his strength not to let it swallow him. He got close to her, trembling. He must choose the words very carefully, but he knew that she would only accept the truth, and he would feel too much contemptible hiding it, though the certainty that he, indeed, had not been unfaithful to her made him feel better. Yes, he had fantasized with Shae and with other women, but he had not fucked any of them. That gave him strength.

"Please, Sansa. I've never deceived you, though I admit that I've hidden a part of the truth. If you promise that you'll listen to me, I'll tell you whatever you want me to, but first of all I want you to know that I've never been unfaithful to you and that I haven't lied to you. Will you believe me?"

She turned around. There were tears on her cheeks and her eyes were reddened, and he hated himself for that.

"Come, let's sit down. You want a glass of water?", he offered, attentive. He did not touch her, fearing that Sansa would rebuff his touch, but he held out his hand to her, indicating her to accompany him. She hesitated but took his hand stiffly and let him lead her to the chairs. Tyrion considered it would not be appropriate to sit on the bed. She might misunderstand even that trivial gesture in her altered state.

"No, thanks, I don't want water. I only want you to tell the whole truth." She sat down and her eyes were wells of anguish. He would have given anything to erase that expression, to deluge her with kisses and caresses and thus showing her his love. He would give anything to rip his own heart out if necessary, so Sansa would see that it only belonged to her.

"I met Shae in the military camp my father had deployed in the Riverlands, when I arrived there shortly after all that had happened to me with your mother, the clans of the Vale mountains and your aunt Lysa on my way back from the Wall. My father had summoned his armies to free me from Lady Catelyn's claws, because the sacrosant Lannister honour was at stake. But then I appeared and ruined the party he had thrown because of me. I settled in a tent and asked Bronn to go look for female company for me. There are many women who follow the armies and sell themselves to the soldiers. In wartime most men need to vent their instincts even more than in regular times and prostitutes know it very well. Shae was one of them."

Sansa was gazing at him wide-eyed, distraught.

"I always knew that she hadn't been a handmaiden before working for me, she ignored many of handmaidens' duties and her manners showed that she had never served any lady. Shae insisted that she had worked for foreign ladies, but I doubted it. Now go on telling." She was still stiff and offended.

Tyrion swallowed hard and resigned himself to reveal the story, without going into the scabrous details, of course.

"Bronn brought her to me and I hired her to keep me company. I had to engage in combat the next day in the vanguard of the attack together with my new friends of the clans, thanks to my father, and I feared that that would be probably my last day, I was very scared and I didn't want to spend alone what I thought to be my last night. But I survived with only a blow to the head inflicted by one of my own men (don't go divulging that, please, or my wonderful reputation would be
seriously damaged)," Tyrion joked, trying to soften her stormy mood, with no success. "When the war stretched on, as your brother proved to be a much better strategist than what my father had imagined, he passed on the torch to me as Hand of the King and sent me to the capital. I took Shae with me."

"Oh, dear me. You liked her very much, didn't you? Otherwise, you wouldn't have taken her to King's Landing. I suppose that Shae didn't offer much resistance. One of the richest men in the realm was maintaining her." Sansa's sarcastic tone was caustic and it hurt, but Tyrion concealed his wounded feelings. After all, it was logical that she was consumed with humiliation believing that he had played a dirty trick on her. The truth was that even he would hardly believe a tale like the one he was revealing to Sansa.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 3. Day 9

"I knew it was madness. My father was very sensitive to all about the Lannister honour and, given my well deserved reputation as a whoremonger who sullied that so-called honour, he threatened to hang any whore he found in my bed. I, even knowing that he never made idle threats, turned a deaf ear to him out of rebelliousness and Shae came with me. Yes, I liked her and I payed her well."

"And once in the Red Keep, you sought an occupation for her as my handmaiden, so no one suspected that she was your... lover." Tyrion thanked her silently that she did not say what she had been about to say. Shae had been her only true friend in King's Landing and both had grown very fond of each other. No matter how much jealous Sansa was of her, Tyrion knew she was incapable of calling her whore.

"Yes, Sansa. She needed to have something to do apart from waiting for me for nearly the entire day. And when I saw you so helpless, I got the idea of putting her at your service so she would take care of you and you both could enjoy each other's company. You were two lonely women with harsh lives, each in your own way."

Sansa churned, enraged again.

"Did you have a good laugh in the night, commenting the childishness and the dull routine of the silly Stark hostage?"

"No, no, Sansa, Shae loved you and she only told me good things about you, or she conveyed to me her concern when you suffered and when she thought you were in danger. We never made fun of you. We respected you. We were your protectors in the shadow."

"Oh, so nice. All you needed was to adopt me." Sansa still did not yield.

"Please, Sansa, think what you want of me, but Shae felt like your eldest sister. Respect her at least for that. Her life had been very difficult, but she still found compassion and affection in her heart."

"She surely fell in love with you. She would've been very blind not to give in to your charm when she started to see how you were."

"I don't know, Sansa. Sincerely, I never knew what she really felt for me. She never told me, and she was very reserved when it came to speak about herself and her feelings."

"But you did love her. She was very pretty, with her gorgeous olive-coloured skin, her brown hair, her dark eyes, her wit, her insolence... What man wouldn't have been seduced?"

"Yes, I loved her, but there was always a barrier between both of us, and for me it was not enough. And I suppose that she had hardened her heart so much against love that she couldn't open herself completely even if she wanted to. No, our relationship was condemned for many reasons, both the obvious ones (I couldn't keep her with me in secret indefinitely) and the sentimental ones (there wasn't enough love or trust between us). And I needed a partner with whom sharing everything with no fear."

"And when your father engaged us? What did you and she do?"

"I stopped having... physical contact with her. I still loved her, but for me the first thing was my
duty to you. I owed you respect and fidelity, and I fulfilled it. It was hard, but I little by little pushed Shae away from me with all the strength of my will."

"And she resigned herself to it?"

Tyrion did not want to tell her anything negative about Shae, but the truth was the truth. Sighing and closing his eyes for a moment, he continued.

"No. She fought to keep us together, but to no avail. That had nothing to do with you, I mean, she didn't have the intention to offend you. For her you were a child and I was a fully grown man who would be to you a father more than a husband, and I imagine she believed that our marriage would never go beyond a sort of parent-child relationship without love or desire. I doubt that she consciously intended to hurt you."

"Did you meet behind my back? Did she try to seduce you?"

"When you and me hadn't got married yet, she used to go to my rooms but I pushed her away. And the same happened when we got married. Little by little she began to get angry and desperate because of my coldness. And I was determined to send her far away, to a safe place, because she was becoming more and more reckless and my father wouldn't last to discover her. And besides, the situation was unsustainable. Shae couldn't carry on living in the Red Keep."

"Certainly I remember that many days she acted strangely and seemed distant since I was betrothed to you, but I blamed it on her fear towards the new situation, because she was very protective of me, and moreover she perhaps was afraid that she would be separated from my side when I was married. What a naïve I was. And once we got married, her attitude towards me became very shifting. She was just likely to show herself very maternal as to behave brusquely."

"She was very frightened and also jealous of you, I suppose, and that made her suffer because she loved you, Sansa."

"But even so, she wouldn't have hesitated to bed you if only you had asked her. She'd done it without thinking about the poor cuckolded girl."

"She was afraid of losing me, of losing the life she had, and she did the only thing she knew to try to get me back. But her insistence fell on deaf ears."

"What do you think that happened to her when we escaped from King's Landing? You reckon she left for another place?"

"The day of Joffrey's wedding I sent her in a ship to Pentos, where Varys got her a house with servants and enough comforts so she wouldn't have to live in the streets again."

For some reason, that made Sansa cry. She burst in tears.

"Oh, Tyrion. Everything was so unfair for us and for Shae. But she was your lover. I thought she was simply my handmaiden and you bedded her. Though by that time there wasn't any marriage link between you and I, she got into bed with you, she did to you all the things you liked. She was a professional, she knew perfectly how to please men, whereas I... How could I have compared myself to her? Surely you'd have got bored to death with me if then we had consummated the marriage, I hardly knew anything about sex and King's Landing stifled me... And I was only a silly girl." Her sobs were unstoppable.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 3. Day 9

Tyrion held her hands firmly.

"Sansa, look at me." She did it. "I can't change what I did. Taking Shae to the city was a mistake, I know. I was selfish, but I felt very lonely. That doesn't excuse the harm I did to her endangering her, making her suffer when I started to distance myself from her because of you. But, you know what, Sansa? I'd do it again. As terrible as it sounds, I'd do it again if with that I was here with you once more, loving you. I wish things hadn't had to happen this way and Shae hadn't been another victim of my bad actions. But I'd repeat everything in another life if that led me to you. I'll tell it as many times as necessary, my love: I haven't loved any woman like I love you. All the roads of my life have taken me to you and now I don't envisage my life without you walking by my side."

Sansa smiled under her tears and took his face in her hands. She kissed him fiercely until they both ran out of breath and he felt the fire running through his inflamed veins.

"She kissed you like this? She stripped you like this?" Sansa started to tug at his clothes and he let her do, entranced and tremendously relieved for taking off his mind the load of hiding to Sansa his secret relationship with Shae. She evidently was in the process of forgiving him, he thought, trembling with excitement.

"Did she lick your chest and your belly like I do?"

Her tongue almost made him be delirious.

"She sucked your cock this way?"

Oh. Gods, I might spend my whole life with her mouth around me.

She pulled away suddenly, took off her gown and her underclothes and straddled him.

"She rode you like me?"

The warmth of her insides were, as always, an abyss of endless pleasure. She moved furiously over him while she rubbed herself with her fingers. She brought him to the edge quickly and both broke out.

"No, darling," he said, panting and with his forehead beaded with sweat. "No one has ever fucked me like you. You're my sex goddess, remember?" He smiled at her with his face still showing the ecstasy she had hoisted him to.

Sansa was recovering, lying onto him and embracing him possessively.

"I'm doing the same that Shae. I seduce you and attract you to my body to make you mine. I really understand now what she must be through when she lost you. But I won't let you escape."

"And I don't want to escape. I want life sentence in the prison of your gorgeous body," he murmured, relaxed and happy, caressing her soft back.

Sansa raised a little and rested her chin on his chest.
"With Shae you also used the erotic toys, didn't you?"

He felt a bit uncomfortable, but he had no choice but to answer.

"Yes. But, as in any expression of sex with you, you make everything be infinitely special. You make me feel that everything I've done before being with you has been a poor substitute of how truly beautiful sex can be."

She tickled his chest languidly.

"And when my tummy gets fat with pregnancy, will you desire me the same?" That question worried her slightly, and that made him smile.

"Maybe I'll desire you even more, my pregnant sex goddess."

Sansa flushed, though she knew perfectly well that he'd say that to her.

"I can't believe that men find a paunch attractive."

"And don't forget that your tits will grow a little too. Indeed, I think they're beginning to be... fully ripe for picking." He was getting aroused again thinking about those magnificent tits which were resting upon his abdomen. Within several months, they would be even more appealing.

"You're impossible, my provocative husband. What am I going to do with you?"

"Mmm, I can give you a few ideas. Or let you choose. What do you prefer?" He began to run his avid hands over that warm flesh that was home to a new life, though its shape did not give it away yet.

The next time they peaked, Sansa apologized for having doubted him and for having been nearly sure that he had continued to bed Shae after becoming her betrothed and her husband. He admitted that her suspicions had hurt him, though it was understandable that she harboured them, and he added that if she was at peace with that part of their past, then he was too. And Sansa affirmed with full honesty that she was at peace.

"But if I find out that there's been another one you haven't talked to me about...," she threatened, grasping his hair, which was long once more.

He denied it vehemently.

"I swear it to you, Sansa. There hasn't been any other. You really believe I'm a machine to pick women up?"," he joked, looking her in the eye with his naughty sparkle.

"Of course I believe it."

"Great. Now I don't know if feeling flattered or worried by your statement."

"Both things."

They burst in laughter.

"And you, wife. Be careful as well. Oberyn seemed quite captivated with you. Should I feel flattered or worried?"

"Both things," she repeated, laughing even louder. He, as a revenge, started to tickle her softly and Sansa tried to rebuff him with the pillow, cackling until Mhyraz came with dinner.
Chapter 431

Volantis

Larko was cursing the ship where they had sailed to Volantis and to which they were saying goodbye at the port. The young Lysene man had not ever went out of his native island, what meant that he had not used any means of transport, either by land or by sea. The journey in the Daughter of the Rhoyne had been an ordeal for his stomach, that was not used to the constant movement on the high seas. He had spent half the time vomiting and the other half struggling no to. Brienne had taken care of him, feeling sorry for his terrible state. That made her remember an adventure she had lived at nine years old with her brother Galladon, a couple of years before he drowned. That memory broke through the pain of the loss that still tormented her.

She loved staring at the sea surrounding Tarth, so blue that it competed with the sky and was the reason that Tarth was known as the Sapphire Island. Little Brienne dreamed with the lands on the other side, where there were true knights, and there was nothing she admired more than knighthood. So she had got an idea and told it to Galladon, knowing that he would be enthusiastic for seconding her. Brienne took a stroll along the harbour with an alert ear to find out which ship set sail to Westeros, and on the morrow, just at daybreak, she sneaked out of the castle with Galladon when the drawbridge was opened, hiding in the shadows so they would not to bee seen. They ran to the port and Brienne emptied on the sly two boxes that she knew were part of the cargo which was to be carried in the ship sailing to King's Landing, hiding the removed contents under some old tarps that were there. Quickly, before the dockworkers saw them, she and Galladon got into the boxes. Brienne hardly fitted into hers, as her high stature made her very large for her age, but she shrank as much as she could and prayed to the Seven when she felt the clattering and knew that she and her brother were being transported to the hold of the vessel. She had lectured Galladon previously not to make any noise, and she felt proud that he did not let out a single whimper during the minutes the sailors carried the boxes.

When they guessed they were alone in the dark, they got out of their reduced confinement and Galladon was eager to climb up to the deck to breathe fresh air and warm himself in the sun, but Brienne, who by then had already a pronounced sense of practicality which coexisted strangely with her ideals and her fantasies about knighthood, explained to him patiently that they would have to wait until the nightfall to go out if they did not want to be caught. She had prepared a small bundle with supplies and, moreover, in the hold there were boxes with fresh food, so they would not lack food during the journey. Brienne was very clear about what she wanted to do when they set foot on dry land: to witness a tourney of knights. Later, they would sneak into another ship to return to Tarth, and she knew that her father would forgive them for that prank, no matter how much he had got scared and infuriated. Yes, he would punish them for a while, would give them a lecture on how dangerous was what they had done, but he at last would forget the incident.

The ship began to move and then the nightmare unleashed. She barely felt the effects of seasickness, but Galladon turned green and vomited nonstop over the floor of the crammed hold. The smell became insufferable and the worst thing was that Brienne could not go out to ask for help or fetch clean water to wash the floor, and she had to hold her brother and console him until he fell asleep at last, worn out. She picked up a bucket and a rag she found there, cleaned the best she could and, when she sensed that the night had fallen as soon as she stopped hearing the usual noises of the crew, Brienne slipped out of the hold and climbed to the deck to empty the bucket, to which she had tied a rope she had found, and then she filled it with clean water to wash Galladon up a little and finish to scrub the floor, dirty with vomit. She managed not to be seen, filled the pail and went back to the hold.
Chapter 432

Volantis

Them both slept laying onto some sacks, but in the morning they were unlucky enough that the cook stepped down to look for supplies and found them. They woke up startled when the man shook them very rudely and grabbed them by their ears.

"We are Lord Selwyn Tarth's children!," Brienne shouted with all the authority she could gather.

The fat man hesitated and released them.

"And what are Lord Selwyn's children doing here?," he asked with a worried air.

"My brother and I wanted to go to King's Landing," Brienne said, but she did not dare to reveal her intention to witness a tourney.

"You both alone? And your father knows you're here?" The man was making an effort to feign a severe air, but the corners of his lips trembled, trying to suppress the hint of an indulgent smile because of that kid's stuff.

"No." Brienne lowered her head, suddenly ashamed.

"Well, I think you've got into a lot of trouble, kids. This isn't a pleasure boat and we can't turn around all of a sudden. We have business to carry out in King's Landing that cannot wait. Come with me without a word of complaint. You've sneaked into here as stowaways and it'd fair that you offer the captain your explanations and ask for his forgiveness for causing so much trouble. Your father isn't going to like at all your little adventure. Sure he's searching for you like mad, thinking you drowned or abducted. You haven't thought of that?"

Brienne remained staring at the floor, crestfallen.

The man led them to the bridge and the captain was very surprised to see the two kids appear. He recognized them before the cook told him who they were. He scolded them too and told them that, as soon as they arrived in King's Landing, he'd send a raven to Lord Selwyn to explain to him what had happened, and when he had finished his business he'd take them back. The harsh tone of his voice softened when he looked at poor Galladon, who again was turning green, and he indicated Brienne to take him to the deck so he could vomit overboard.

"But hold him tight, or he'll drop into the water and then your father'll hang me on the highest tower of his castle."

It was a relief not to hide any more and to breathe fresh air, but they had to put up with the sailors' mocking. When they heard that they had young stowaways on board they went in a rush to see them. Some of them made rude remarks about Brienne's stature and teased her, assuring her that she'd do the hard work of the ship better than most the crew. She tried to ignore them and focused on her brother and on preventing that, during one of his attacks of retching, he leaned too much over the board.

One week later, the two overawed children were carried in front of Lord Selwyn at the harbour of Tarth. Brienne never had seen her father so enraged or frightened. The raven must have arrived several days ago and it at least should have soothed the anguish that they might have died or disappeared, but it surely did not erase his worry, as his two children were alone out there in a ship,
with strangers who Lord Selwyn knew from their business in the island and little more. He shook Brienne by her shoulders until her teeth chattered and tears spilled out of her big blue eyes, and right then he hugged her ferociously, including Galladon too in the embrace. Brienne explained to him, mortified, the purpose of her adventure and her father burst out laughing hysterically. He thanked the crew for taking care of them. The captain told that the kids had befriended all the sailors and they even had helped them to perform the tasks aboard. After a couple of days in the sea Galladon's seasickness had vanished and the youngster had recovered his liveliness. The sailors called him affectionately "little cabin boy." Lord Selwyn payed them for the trouble and he got back to the castle, hand in hand with his children and making them promise that they'd never do anything like that again or they'd kill him with fright.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Volantis

Brienne knew well the nightmare the journey on the boat had posed to Larko. During one of the rare moments he felt better, the young man joked saying that he was supposed to accompany her so she could have someone to help her, and nonetheless it was her who was always helping him and taking care of him from the beginning. Brienne ordered him softly to shut his mouth and smiled at him slightly, to hide the pain of Galladon's memory.

The morning of the departure from Lys, Larko had met with her punctually at the inn's door. He looked glowing and, with a reasonable amount of clothes over his body, his appearance was like any citizen's unconnected with the world of prostitution. Brienne wondered how his farewell to the brothel had taken place and how the procurer had reacted. After all, Larko was leaving, never to return. Had she wept, had she got infuriated because he was abandoning her like an ungrateful man? He was not talkative about it and Brienne did not ask. His silence showed her that he felt partly sad, probably because that woman, mama Cora as Larko called her, was to him the closest to a family and he would not see her any more. Brienne understood his feelings. When she had left Tarth behind, her father had looked at her as if he had lost her forever and her heart broke a little more, but she had to do it. She had to go. If she stayed, the beautiful Sapphire Island would become her prison.

The prison that the beautiful Lys had been to Larko.

Brienne had bought two passages for the *Daughter of the Rhoyne*, which would set sail to Volantis. Larko insisted on paying her what she had spent in his passage, and she accepted so as not to hurt his pride, suspecting that that money was a part of what he had managed to save along the years. In Lys and other places where sex workers were not slaves (at least on paper, because actually most of them were exploited and treated like dirt), if they were lucky enough to work for a procurer with a bit of humanity, some of them even managed to save a little money and others quit prostitution to get married, start a modest business or search for a more dignified job. Those were the least ones, but a few escaped from the life in whorehouses.

The *Daughter of the Rhoyne* was swinging slightly over the choppy waters of the port, and that circumstance worried Brienne. The storm that had forced her to stay at Lys had passed already, but the weather was still unsettled. The ship where she had arrived accidentally in the island, the *Coral Reef*, had departed the previous day, already repaired, but she decided not to take it again, because the modest schooner was heading for Myr. At Pentos she decided to travel in it because she did not find any boat that traveled beyond Myr and she had no other choice, but in Lys she discovered the *Daughter of the Rhoyne*, so she went to purchase the passages. She was aware that she was losing a part of the money she had payed to the captain of the *Coral Reef*, because he had charged her the whole passage to Myr, though of course, storms, and the sinkings and delays that those caused, were a setback no captain was to blame for, and if Brienne at her own risk had chosen not to continue with the journey in that ship, the captain neither was to blame for her choice, so she did not even try to claim that part of the money. She knew she was not right.

"I've always liked coming to the port to watch the boats," Larko told her as they joined the queue of the passengers who were waiting to embark. "I imagined I'd go to a better place, far from here. Yes, I know you're going to tell me it's nonsense. There isn't any place better than another. I'm not so naïve. Everywhere people is cruel, but there are good people too."
"It isn't nonsense, Larko. As a child I dreamed of going to Westeros and joining knighthood. It was an absurd dream, as they'd never let me be an anointed knight for being a woman. Moreover, there are very few knights who really deserve to be called it. Nevertheless, nothing of that has prevented me from pursuing my dream."

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
You are also from an island and you wanted to get out of it. More things we have in common."
Brienne had told him that she was from Tarth, a midday he went to visit her in the inn, during his leisure time. They had lunch together and chatted a little. "How is Tarth?"

Brienne smiled with nostalgia.

"It's the most beautiful place in the world to those who have been born and have grown up there. It has everything anyone might wish for: mountains, a river with gorgeous waterfalls, woods and vales with fertile lands. The sea that surrounds it is so blue as sapphires. That's the reason why it's called the Sapphire Island as well." Brienne kept silent for some moments, remembering how Jaime had saved her life thanks to the false story he told Locke about that the nickname of the island came from its sapphires, and that Lord Selwyn would pay Locke's weight in those gemstones if he gave back her daughter untouched. "On clear days, one could see sharply the coast of Westeros in the distance. I stared at it from my father's castle."

"But Westeros neither was what you expected it to be."

"I left at twenty. At that age it had been a long time since I had stopped sucking my finger and I knew that, if Tarth hadn't been a bed of roses, Westeros wouldn't be either. But I had to leave."

"As I have to get out of here. I have nothing left in this place. Only a pleasure house where I have to satisfy half a dozen clients every night." Larko smiled at her bitterly and she imitated him, feeling her chest oppressed by sorrow.

In that moment the captain informed that it was time to embark and the small queue of passengers moved forward to the gangway. They got on board and a cabin boy showed everybody where their cabins were. Brienne and Larko shared one, as there was a small number of them and only one available for them both. Besides, it was better to forget about prudery and be pragmatic. If they were going to share the journey, they would also have to share many other things. And it was better not to waste the money.

The pallet was not very wide and Brienne was not used to share the bed with anyone. Her cheeks burned when she thought that it would be the first time she would sleep beside a man in such a narrow space. With Jaime she had traveled in the open air and they had slept on the ground, close to each other but without touching. Larko and she would spend the entire night feeling each other's physical contact. Probably it would be difficult to get to sleep, Brienne thought sighing.

He, judging by the glance he threw at the pallet, also noticed the issue, but he made no comment.

_He has to put up with all kinds of people in his bed. Surely he's used to sleep anyhow._

They left their light luggage in the chest that was used as a seat too and went up to the deck, to see how the ship set sail and the majestic landscape of Lys' cliffs faded away slowly on the horizon.

"I'm not going to miss this," he assured, with his gaze lost in the distance while he was resting on the board. "This land is cursed to me."

They contemplated quietly the coastline growing smaller, bathed in the morning sun, until the movement of the schooner over the rough waves began to make its effects be felt in Larko's
stomach. He started to feel sick and from that moment the journey was a nightmare to him. Brienne barely moved away from his side, gave him spoonfuls of broth when he admitted them, held him when he retched, washed him and allowed him to hug her while they slept, because her warmth helped him to feel better and to sleep more soundly. To distract him, Brienne told him the tales her own mother had told her, Galladon and her sister Arianne. She died giving birth to Alysanne. And now all of them were dead, all except for Brienne and her father. She swallowed her tears and went on speaking about her childhood in Tarth, about her great love for Galladon and her constant quarrels with Arianne, who was not at all like her. Perhaps she was telling all that more to herself than to Larko, but he liked listening to her and his stomach settled when he heard her voice.

Several days before catching sight of Volantis, Larko at last felt strong enough to get up and take short strolls over the deck, because the fresh air did him well. He began to enjoy the journey and the vastness of the sea that surrounded them fascinated him. As a boy he imagined that the sea was infinite and that if the ships ventured too far, they got lost and never returned. Brienne made an effort to recall the tales that the sailors used to tell children in Tarth, in which there were krakens, mermaids, giant squids and other sea creatures that lived at the bottom of the sea and sometimes got out to the surface to observe the land beings. Often the fearful beings that walked over the ground and who moved over the water in strange wooden things attacked the aquatic beings which got too much close, and that way the wars between the land and the sea started.

Larko released a sigh of relief when the *Daughter of the Rhoyne* got into Volantene waters, eager to get rid of that walnut shell which had made him have such a bad time. No matter how much he liked the sea, definitely sailing could not be counted among his pastimes. Brienne smiled while he cursed the modest vessel, and told him that the next time it would be easier.
Brienne and Larko advanced slowly along the Long Bridge, crammed with tattooed slaves. The young man looked at the tears on the cheeks of the prostitutes of both sexes, though women were more numerous. Larko knew that for many people in many places the fact that men bedded other men was seen as an aberration, and frequently in the streets appeared boys murdered in brutal beatings, and onto their bodies the killers used to write with blood the word *fag*. Larko had come across throughout his life with more than a corpse with that word written on them, which the killers left fully exposed in view of everybody as a warning. Since he started to work in the brothel, he often dreamed at night that a bunch of homophobes tortured him to death, and he by stealth trained with a kitchen knife to learn how to defend himself. Mama Cora did not allow her workers to carry weapons during working hours because that gave a bad image and shooed the clients away. If the evening when he met Brienne he had had the knife within reach, perhaps the fight would have been more even. He would not have had many chances against four men, of course, but he could have put a fight, and surely Brienne would not have found him sprawled like a broken doll. Until she appeared with her armour and her impressive Valyrian steel sword, the first one he had seen in his life, Larko feared that he would end up like those smashed boys who chased him in his nightmares.

So he was not so defenseless as a child. He knew how to handle the knife with a certain skill and he had good aim when he threw it, and he had told Brienne about it in one occasion, so as she would not think that she was dragging along with a complete good-for-nothing.

"I'd like to train in fighting with the sword," he burst suddenly, while they were walking among the crowd of the bridge. She turned to look at him, quizzical.

"That's not learnt overnight. Lots of hours of training are required."

"Well, I have plenty of time available now I've become your assistant," he pointed out, smiling.

Brienne sighed.

"Look, Larko, I think it's perfect you want to train, I also need to exercise myself and no harm would come from having another person with whom training, but it's not going to be easy to find places sufficiently spacious and discreet for our practice. I wouldn't like to teach you in the middle of a horde of bystanders and trouble-makers."

"We'll come out with something. And we might do it on the decks of the boats. There are enough room on them and the sailors and the few passengers who will accompany us in the journeys won't care a shit about what we do," he proposed.

She nodded, admitting that it was a good idea.

"Yes, we might train in the boats. But in towns and cities it'll be difficult to find a proper space. Well, it's better than nothing. The ideal thing would be to get wooden swords, like the ones the trainees use to learn to fight in the parade grounds of the castles, but I don't know if they're sold in some market or establishment and I know how to make bows and arrows but I don't know how to carve wooden swords. We'll keep an eye to see if someone sells that sort of things. And if we don't find any, we'll practice with sticks."
Larko grinned, pleased.

"Then you're determined to turn me into your squire," he joked.

"The gods spare me. I've told you many times that I don't need a squire," Brienne said, with an exasperated tone.

"Oh, of course not, I know. But you don't have to need it. I don't need the mole I have on my left cheek, but it's there."

"Are you thinking of becoming a mole on my cheek?"

"I was expecting to become something else than that, and more useful." One of the things Brienne was learning from him was that his natural and healthy good mood, which was improving day after day since he had left Lys, was just as likely to irritate her as to make her smile. And the young man had an infectious smile. "This morning I've even helped you to put on your armour. I thought that's what squires do."

Brienne had allowed him to do that while they were still in the cabin of the ship, before disembarking. He had already recovered from the seasickness and had offered himself, and he had been more skilled than she had expected. Brienne did not wear the armour while she was on board, she simply wore her leather doublet with the sigil of House Tarth, two suns and two waxing moons on a blue and pink background. But each time she had to venture through a city, she wore her full armour.

"And I thought that you had no intention to be a squire," she replied. The intense odour and the incessant bustle of the crowd were sickening, but Brienne broke through quite easily, eager to leave behind the discomforts of the mass of people, that she detested. Most people moved aside from her path. Her appearance was intimidating.

"And I don't have it. It's not my main goal in life, to tell you the truth."

"I'm glad to hear it."

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Volantis

Some of the women with tattooed tears addressed Larko suggestive smiles and shouted at him things in High Valyrian. Brienne did not need to understand the words to know what they were saying to him. He, of course, had no problem to understand the language. In Lys the High Valyrian was spoken as fluently as the common language of Westeros. Her cheeks burnt when she glimpsed the nearly naked bodies of the girls and she quickened her pace while Larko smiled and responded to them, probably apologizing for not accepting their tempting offer or something like that. Brienne, annoyed and almost sweltering, was yearning for going out at once from that jammed space.

"Eh! Why all the hurry? I only was being courteous to them. The poor girls don't receive many courtesies throughout the day, I know that very well," Larko reproached her with a slight tone of mockery.

"It's very hot here and there are too many people," she groaned. "Let's go search for the inn the captain suggested."

"Alright, but... What if when we find it and settle in it we take a stroll around the city? I don't fancy staying indoors and, if you're going to be reprimanding me the whole afternoon, I prefer you to do it in the open air and in front of some jars of ale." Larko's bright smile and his kind beaming eyes were the only thing that prevented Brienne from getting seriously angry with his jokes. Jaime often riled her up with his offensive and acid humour, especially at the beginning, when they still mistrusted each other. Over time she found respect in his greenish irises, but they always were darkened by cynicism. Larko's on the other hand were clear and clean like crystal.

"Neither I fancy a lot being indoors with you. You remind me of my brother when he complained during the rainy days because we couldn't go out to play. He was like the chirping of a cicada that pierced into my head." As soon as she mentioned Galladon, she turned her head and kept silent, suddenly saddened. Occasionally she let memories of him escape out loud. Larko knew that talking about her brother was painful to her and, though she had no come to tell him that the poor boy was dead, it was not necessary to be very clever to guess it.

"At least admit that it'd be good to go out to have a little fun. What for do we live our lives then if not for enjoying ourselves sometimes? Otherwise, we'd better jumping from the top of a cliff. That we have a harsh travel ahead of us doesn't have to prevent us from having good times. And by the way, while we drink that ale, you might tell me at last the true purpose of this trip East," he proposed. "I think that, as your official companion, I've earned it."

Brienne reconsidered his words and she finally nodded.

"All right. But we'll come back at a reasonable hour and I don't want us to drink too much. I'm not used to drink and besides I must keep my senses alert."

He raised his eyes to the sky comically.

"Alright, alright. But at least just for once you might wear your normal attire. That heap of metal draws too much attention," he commented, pointing at her armour. "I think that carrying your weapons will suffice. That Valyrian steel sword alone is flamboyant enough. Will you tell me today how did you get that beauty? I hadn't seen any of those before, but I've heard stories about them."
"I won't take off my armour if we're going to wander around the city," she refused, obstinate. "There are a lot of people and most of them don't have good intentions. I'm not going to make it easy for the evildoers. And that also might save your life."

Larko lifted his hands meaning his defeat, amused.

"You're the most headstrong person I've met, Brienne."

"I'm as well an alive person until this very moment, what suits us both," she finished off.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 437

Volantis

He made a gesture of surrender and they went on walking through the streets of the city, inquiring about the address of the inn. When they found it, spoke with the innkeeper and Brienne gave her approval for spending the night there, then they put their luggage in the room and tidied themselves up in the washbasin. Larko washed himself from head to toe at least once a day and Brienne had had to get used to his almost constant nakedness every time they were alone in the cabin or in the room of the moment. She turned to allow him a little privacy and, by the way, to feel less awkward. Although she knew well the young man's body, she did not feel comfortable in front of a naked person. Her upbrinigng in a Westerosi castle with more or less puritan customs could not be changed overnight. He, as a native of Lys with more relaxed habits, did not give the slightest importance to any of that, he said that the body was something perfectly natural and that if one did not show it off in youth, it was a waste.

When they were ready, they went down to the common hall, because food was included in the rate of the stay, and later they got out again and headed for one of the taverns of the Long Bridge. The market was closed at that hour and, though there was still a swarm of people everywhere, the atmosphere was quieter than at noon. There were no more sellers hawking out loud; the slaves, many of them carrying bundles, waste buckets or pulling carts, moved around hastily from side to side without stopping to talk with anyone, undoubtedly fearing the whip of their masters if these suspected that they spent time lazing around, and most prostitutes were busy with their clients. Some of them practiced their job right there, in view of everyone, against the wall or onto the ground.

"Well, tell me then why a noble Westerosi woman who loves knighthood has left the continent of knights to go to a land where slavers and plunderers are plentiful and no one gives a hoot about knights," Larko required, drinking a sip from his jar of beer.

Brienne stared at her own jar and stopped to think about where starting her tale.

"When King Robert Baratheon died, his two brothers, Stannis and Renly, proclaimed themselves kings of Westeros. Each one gathered their armies and got ready to conquer the Iron Throne. Stannis considered he was who had more rights to the throne because he was older and he demanded Renly to swear fealty to him, but this one refused. I went to join Renly's armies, because he had been kind to me in an occasion when he visited Evenfall Hall, my family's stronghold. My house is a vassal of the Baratheons and in principle I should have listened to Stannis' call, but that cold man as hard as stone meant nothing to me. Renly on the other hand was a charming person. When he carried out his trip to welcome adulthood, like many lads do, he visited various places in the Stormlands. When he passed by Tarth, he did something I never forgot. My father organized a feast to honour our guest and, to my surprise, all the lads competed for getting me to dance and they treated me with kindness. They had always laughed at me and that sudden change astonished me. They were all kind to me and I was enjoying the best night of my life... Until I realized the truth. They were laughing at me. They had made a sort of bet. I felt more humiliated than ever and wanted to rip up my stupid dress and spit at them all, but in that moment Renly got close to me and asked me if I wanted to dance with him. For the rest of the night, he didn't move from my side and shut up the teasing. Since then I knew that, if some day he needed me, I'd swear my sword to him."

"And when he proclaimed himself a king, you went promptly to serve him. You loved him, didn't you?," Larko guessed.
"Yes. No other man apart from my father would have been so considerate of me. I'd have followed him to the end of the world."

"I've heard some stories about him and a certain warrior woman who served him. Then it was you," he deduced, smiling.

"Yes, it was me. There aren't many warrior women in Westeros."

"I know. I'm a lucky man," he joked.

She looked at him with pain and guilt in her beautiful blue eyes like sapphires, and he stopped grinning. Doubtlessly he had touched a deep string that tormented her, and it saddened him how hard she could be to herself. Making an effort to recover, she continued with her story.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Volantis

"I joined his entourage. He had just married Lady Margaery Tyrell. House Tyrell is one of the richest and most powerful houses in Westeros and it provided Renly's forces with a very large army. To show that he considered his claim on the throne as legitimate as his brother Stannis', he held a tourney. He was creating around him his own Kingsguard, that by tradition consists of seven members. But he lacked still one person to complete it, and he divulged that the person who defeated all the opponents in the tourney, including the most gifted knight in the entourage, Ser Loras Tyrell, would become another member of the Rainbow Guard. Renly called it that way, because each kingsguard wore a cape with a colour of the rainbow. I took part in the tourney and fought hand-to-hand against a series of idiots who mocked me and made bawdy bets. I defeated eleven before coming face to face with Ser Loras, and he also lost. So I became Brienne the Blue."

Larko let out a whistle of admiration and encouraged her to continue.

"During the days of the tourney a northern lady had arrived at the military camp, Lady Catelyn Stark, who went to negotiate an alliance with Renly. The North was at war against the newly proclaimed king of the Iron Throne, Joffrey Baratheon, son of the deceased Robert, because that one had executed Lord Eddard Stark, the Warden of the North. His widow, Lady Catelyn, was sent by her son Robb Stark, who commanded the northern armies, to negotiate the deal with Renly and that way, because of joining the forces of the North with the ones of the Stormlands and the ones of The Reach, Joffrey and his family of House Lannister, the richest and most powerful of Westeros, would be crushed. Well, all this is a little confusing, I know. Policy issues are very complicated and the great houses of the Seven Kingdoms almost always are at war with each other." Brienne drank a gulp of her beer. The most difficult part of her story was coming and she ignored if Larko would believe her or if he would look at her with disbelief. He probably would have heard the rumour of the murderer shadow, but he hardly would have swallowed it. Around them both, there were more costumers drinking and eating, slaves and free citizens who walked along the bridge and prostitutes at the doors of the brothels. She observed the bustle for some moments before deciding to tell the most difficult part.

"One night, Lady Catelyn and I were in Renly's tent. That same day he had refused to pledge fealty to his brother Stannis and he was confident, sure of the victory against Joffrey and the Lannisters. Suddenly, a dark shadow resembling Stannis' figure and face materialized in the tent and stabbed Renly's back, vanishing an instant later." She sighed and swallowed. Larko was listening quietly, and in his face there was no mockery, only compassion. "I couldn't do anything. I had sworn to protect him, and suddenly a shadow had just assassinated him before my eyes. What kind of kingsguard I was?" She lowered her eyes.

"Even in Lys people talked about that, but many believed it had been you, and others believed it had been the other lady, the Lady Catelyn. I didn't pay much attention to any of that, to be true," he said.

"Stannis was taking with him a red priestess of Asshai and I know it was her who conjured up the shadow. That woman is capable of terrible things, and Stannis killed his own brother with her witchery. But he'll pay for what he did. One way or another, he'll pay." Hatred contorted her pale complexion. "I cried over Renly's corpse. I stained myself with his blood. In that moment I wanted to die with him, but Lady Catelyn managed to persuade me to escape or we'd be condemned by Renly's assassination. Who was going to believe an absurd tale about a shadow?"
"You're right, no one would've believed it. Their king had just been murdered and only you both were in the tent," Larko reasoned.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Volantis

She had to admit that she was attracted to the young man. He was very handsome and she could not remain indifferent to the sight of his body. His smile gladdened her spirit and his cheerful, simple and natural character made her feel more comfortable each passing day, despite that she often was grumpy and irritable, but he faced her usually sullen mood with his own, happy and disinclined to give up.

"I understand it's difficult for you to see that you're beautiful, Brienne. Many idiots had told you otherwise. Don't listen to them, because you are. Your eyes are gorgeous. Under that armour you have the body of a real woman, a strong woman who rebels against those who want to tell her how she has to live."

She felt that something inside of her tingled intensely and her heart beat faster. He seemed sincere. But she had already suffered too many disappointments, so she did not let herself be carried away.

"There's no place in my life for any kind of love, Larko. Even in the extremely rare case that someone loved me, a very unlikely thing, I'd have nothing to offer that person. I devote my life to my mission, understand? That's why we're traveling East. Because of that and nothing else."

Larko looked at her with saddened eyes, as if her stubborness hurt him, but he quickly made an effort to get back his usual mood.

"What happened with Jaime later?," he asked, continuing with their previous conversation.

Brienne blinked with relief. She was thankful that he stopped talking about the topic which made her feel most uncomfortable and confused.

"When we arrived in the capital, it turned out that Lady Catelyn's youngest daughter, Arya, had disappeared from the Red Keep, and the eldest daughter, Sansa, had been married to Lord Tyrion. The oath Jaime and I had sworn to Lady Catelyn became difficult to fulfil, but I couldn't quit. Soon afterwards, we heard that Lady Catelyn and Robb Stark were murdered by the Boltons and the Freys and I felt that I had also failed when I swore my sword to Lady Stark. Her throat was sliced and I wasn't there."

"You're not infallible, Brienne. And you couldn't be everywhere. It was her who sent you to escort Ser Jaime to the capital."

"Yes, and he arrived with one hand short. You see what a great bodyguard I am." Brienne addressed him a sarcastic toast, smiled humourlessly and drank.

"You helped him to arrive alive. Hardly anyone would've achieved that," he insisted, refusing to throw in the towel. "Well, go on. Lady Stark died and you couldn't return her daughters to her. What happened then?"

"King Joffrey died poisoned at his own wedding and Lord Tyrion fled with Lady Sansa. Cersei Lannister, the mother of the deceased king, hated her little brother Lord Tyrion and she instantly blamed him and Lady Sansa for his son's assassination, but they weren't there any more and she couldn't caught them. Then I knew what I had to do. I'd search for Arya Stark and, if I found her, I'd offer her my protection and would take her to a safe place. For the mission, Jaime gave me his
Valyrian steel sword, *Oathkeeper*. And I went to look for her.

"You managed to find out something about her?"

"I found her. But she didn't want to come with me and escaped while I was fighting with the man who had kidnapped her, the Hound Clegane, a former member of Joffrey's Kingsguard who had deserted like a coward. He was nearly dead when the fight ended. He fell down a cliff onto some rocks and I left him there, dying. I sought Arya, but she had vanished. Another failure." She raised her jar again and drank one of the last gulps.

"At least you found her, but you weren't to blame for her flight. And you decided to come East to look for the other girl, Sansa, didn't you?"

"Exactly. She lives in Meereen with her husband and them both are under the protection of the dragon queen, Daenerys Targaryen. I have the intention to go to swear my sword to her and devote myself to protect her. I don't want to fail once more. Not this time." She squeezed the jar determinedly, and her hands were shaking.

Larko put his hand on hers and, when Brienne lifted her face with surprise, Larko looked directly into her eyes.

"I'll help you to find her, Brienne. But you have to be less hard on yourself. There are lots of things you cannot prevent from happening," he murmured.

She felt his warm hand onto hers and the feeling was like a balm, and at the same time it seemed to burn her.

"You don't have to come with me or help me if you really don't want to, Larko. This isn't your mission." She stared at his hand on hers, confused.

"Now it is. And I want to do it. I've already got involved in this travel with you and at this point I'm not going to back out. We'll go to Meereen together, you'll find Sansa and you'll protect her."

Brienne looked at him with very wet eyes, as if she was about to cry. She couldn't allow herself to cry.

"But this night is only ours and I want to see you cheered up. We won't talk any more about sad things. We'll ask for a refill and we'll drink and laugh until we believe life is a little better. What do you think? For once don't say no to me, please. I'm pleading with you as a friend, the only one you have beside you right now."

She smiled tremulously, yielding to his charm, and nodded.

"Alright. For today, to hell with everything else. Let's drink and laugh at our own shadows."
Chapter 440

Meereen: Month 3. Day 10

That day had been especially touching. The queue of the public audience had been joined by a pair of freed boys, two more among the fugitive ex-slaves from Yunkai who arrived every day. They would have been only other two boys, but the oldest of both started to tell their story and shook Tyrion, Sansa, Missandei and Ser Barristan profoundly. These were presiding over the audience.

"We aren't from Yunkai. We were born in Astapor and we lived with our parents in the pyramid of the Good Master, but the master sold my brother and me to a Yunkish slave trader. Our father's name was Kerro and our mother's name was Jalima, and we had three little siblings. We want to find out about their whereabouts to return with them, if you can help us."

Most of those present in the hall stared at them stunned, as nearly all of them knew Kerro and Jalima and the story of their lost children. Sansa, moved, squeezed Tyrion's hand and he looked at her with eyes full of astonishment, unable to believe in such a good luck. That those boys had appeared had seemed to be a possibility as remote as trying to touch the moon.

And nonetheless, they were there.

"You're Kuro and Tebo," Tyrion affirmed, smiling.

Now it was the turn of the boys to be stunned.

"How do you know, master?" Kuro asked, with his mouth agape.

"Because here we all know your parents. Kerro and Jalima are very good friends of us. They're here and have been looking for you. They've never abandoned you."

The two kids fell on their knees onto the floor and hugged one another, weeping. For a momento the whole hall contemplated the heartbreaking scene and then Tyrion reacted.

"Take them to their family. It's time that they reunite and their nightmare ends."

Two Unsullied accompanied the boys and from then on the audience passed for Tyrion as if he were on the clouds, because only very few times such a happy event happened. Kerro and Jalima would be beside themselves with joy.

That evening, after having dinner, Sansa and Tyrion kept one of their bed chats, which ultimately they missed a lot, as they generally ended too much tired to do other thing than sleeping, except for rare exceptions like the previous day, when Tyrion had told the truth about Shae.

"The reunion of the entire family must have been very thrilling. I can't believe yet that they've been so lucky," Sansa commented over Tyrion's chest. "Jalima's eyes were so sad... Now her look will be very different."

"I suppose that a mother never gives up on hope," he murmured.

"No, she doesn't," she assured, caressing her own belly, still flat. "What about going on the morrow to see them? Today they need their time for themselves, but I think it would be good that tomorrow we pay our respects to Kuro and Tebo."
"Yes, it'd be good," he agreed. They would take Pod and several soldiers as their escort and Sansa, of course, would go to the camps in the palanquin. Inside the closed vehicle she was safer than walking and, moreover, she would not get tired.

"They have to be very strong boys to have survived so much harshness. They were sold, taken out from Astapor by force, they endured new masters, they've lived the two uprisings in Yunkai, they've escaped and walked through the waste toward here. It's really incredible," Sansa listed with perplexity.

"Their parents taught them well. They are survivors, Sansa. They overcome obstacles others don't dare even imagining."

"Perhaps because they have hope. Like a mother," she suggested.

"Maybe it's that, yes," Tyrion nodded, with his fingers in her hair.

"Tyrion... Don't get angry with me for what I'm going to ask you. Yesterday the topic of Shae was clarified, I know, but she was my friend and there are some things I'd like to comment with you, if you don't feel very awkward about it. I don't want to know anything else about... your intimacy, don't worry, neither will I let myself be carried away by jealousy, I promise. Today my mood is much better than yesterday and I'm sorry for having made that scene."

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"I have nothing to forgive you for, darling. And you already know that we can talk about whatever you want." The truth was that he did not feel very comfortable speaking about Shae, even though Sansa had got over her outburst of strong jealousy, but he did not want to hobble any topic of conversation. For him it would never stop being like a treasure that she opened her soul to him. In King's Landing he would have given anything in order to see much more of her than her nearly permanent mask of courtesy.

"Did you know that she came from Lorath, like captain Letho?" Sansa asked.

"Yes, but that was one of the few things I could guess about her past, and that because her accent gave her away."

"She told me that she was from there but, like you, I couldn't find out anything else. She mustn't live a pleasant childhood if she wasn't even able to speak about that. When we were in Maegor's Holdfast, during the Battle of Blackwater, Cersei payed attention to her and ordered her to get close. Your sister behaved the way she always does, she threw darts with a smile on her face. She quickly humiliated Shae because of her humble origins, comparing her to another Lorathi servant she'd had, but that one was of noble origins, and she wanted to know how she had come from so far away to the Red Keep without even knowing how to curtsy. In that moment Lancel entered, with his arm injured, to plead with Cersei to persuade Joffrey to command the men, and she shoved his wounded arm and got out with Tommen. So Shae escaped from telling her story. But she had said something about her thirteen years, and I suppose that at that age she had to begin practicing prostitution and she probably left Lorath. One of the times when we went to the docks at the foot of the Keep and I wanted us to play invent things about the ships we saw, she said that she'd been to Dorne and had met there people who weren't so warm like the Dornish are believed to be. Undoubtedly she had traveled a lot and seen too many things. And put up with too many men. But she had a strong character. She surely never submitted herself completely to any of the men who paid her. Despite the humiliations, she kept her head high. In a certain sense, I admired her. And that taking into account that I didn't even know the truth about her and her harsh past."

"Men paid her, but they weren't her owners. Prostitutes only rent their bodies, nothing else, though men think that they have a right to more."

"Now that we're talking about this topic, which is linked with your arrival at the Red Keep as Hand of the King, will you go on telling things about that period later? Remember we have pending that story."

"All right, gorgeous," he nodded.

"I recall perfectly the first night Shae came to my rooms. It was a night when I had dinner with Cersei, Myrcella and Tommen. You know, I wanted to throw my dinner plate at your sister's face. Each time I had to eat with her, it was a torture to withstand her remarks full of poison and hold back so as not to reply to her like she deserved."

"I know very well how it is to live together with Cersei, my dear. But in that aspect I was luckier than you, I didn't have to hold my tongue, at least when my father wasn't before me," Tyrion said with irony. "I've told you more than once that I admire the self-control you showed while you lived there. It was really difficult to be near Cersei without wanting to pull up her hair at the very least."
Sansa smiled on his chest.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 442

Meereen: Month 3. Day 10

"After that dinner, the only thing I wanted was to get to my chambers as soon as possible. On my way I crossed paths with the Hound. That was the last straw of that charming night. I sensed that he wouldn't hurt me, but he was hard on me for my own good, though in that moment I wasn't in the mood for his taunting. He wanted me to sing to him, but I blurted that I knew no songs anymore. And right then you appeared, got Clegane off me and you looked at me as if you wanted to say something, but you didn't. What were you going to say to me?"

"That you were very beautiful that night and I wanted you to know that as Hand of the King I might help you and that you didn't have to hesitate to ask from me whatever you needed. I was about to offer you to put an end to your engagement to Joffrey and return you to your mother. I was beginning to plan the exchange between Jaime and you. But I kept silent. That wasn't the moment or the place, and I knew you wouldn't trust me."

"No, I wouldn't," Sansa admitted. "By the way, you also were handsome that night." She preferred to keep to herself she was sure that Shae must have thought the same Sansa was thinking now, that he was especially appealing. And that Shae surely showed it to him in bed shortly after. It was painful, but Sansa consoled herself with the fact that it was her who was with him in bed currently. And that her man's heart belonged to her, she saw it each time he looked at her, spoke to her and touched her. Had Shae ever felt that way?

"Oh, very handsome, sure. Any fourteen-year-old girl would be crazy for getting into my bed," he replied, mocking.

"Don't forget that I got into your bed when I was still fourteen." She straddled him.

"Yes, to my immense luck you awoke to my innumerable charms and became an insatiable girl." He was smiling at her with lewdness and put his hands on her thighs. "How could I refuse to accommodate the wishes of my ardent and beautiful lady?" He slid his hands to her hips and pushed her to his erection, moaning softly and closing his eyes with advanced delight.

Sansa pulled off her undergarment, freed her breasts and they made love again, with her onto him. Tyrion preferred to do it like that since they knew about the pregnancy. He did not want to place himself upon her and hurt her by accident. He let her take the initiative.

Later, they resumed the interrupted conversation.

"When I arrived at my rooms, I felt really low. A little later someone knocked on the door and it was Shae. Did you decide to send her to me when you bumped into me on the stairs, or had you thought about it before?"

"I thought it on the stairs, when I saw you so sad and helpless. Shae needed a friend and so did you. I knew that in Winterfell you and your kin treated the servants kindly and didn't look down on them, so I supposed you wouldn't mistreat Shae."

Sansa flushed a bit and lowered her eyes.

"The truth is that that first night I didn't treat her very well, Tyrion. I was very sad and she couldn't do anything of what handmaidens are supposed to know. I wasn't in the mood or had any patience
to start teaching her. She asked me if I wanted her to leave, with her defiant air, but it would be worse for me to stay alone with my frustration, and moreover I'd feel guilty if she was fired because of me, so I indicated her to brush my hair. She at least could do that. Little by little I calmed down and asked her to forgive me for my abruptness. Shae told me I didn't have to apologize, though it was evident that she was hurt and must think I was a bitch. She said it as if suggesting that the lords and ladies don't need to apologize to the servants, because the servants have no value. I answered that to me it was important that she knew I was sorry. She smiled for the first time and so did I. I felt better."

"Shae understood what was happening to you, Sansa. She wasn't the most patience person in the world, but she was compassionate. She wouldn't have held any grudge against you. She knew that you didn't mean any harm to her."

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
"The night after the street riot, she treated my wounds. I told her how I had felt when those men tried to rape me, how I had seen the hatred in their eyes, their thirst for hurting me. She explained to me that they hated everything I represented, because even my horse ate better than their children. I confessed to her that I loathed Joffrey as much as those people and if I had had bread, I'd have given it to them, but she urged me to shut up and warned me not to tell her those things. She warned me not to trust anyone, because life was safer that way. There was a very sad and hard expression on her face, and I felt ashamed of myself for grumbling about something that hadn't come to happen to me. Something told me that she had been through worse things, things she kept for herself."

"It was her way of surviving, as yours was your armour of courtesy. Shae protected you and because of that she didn't want you to take off your armour in front of anyone, not even before her."

"And she neither took off hers in front of you, did she?"

"She never took it off completely."

"I won't forget that she was good to me. She tried to help me to conceal my first moon blood, and the day of Stannis' attack she remained by my side all the time in Maegor's Holdfast, until she told me I'd be safer in my bedroom, because Stannis wouldn't kill me, but Ser Ilyn Payne would, if the castle was taken. Cersei had said that the royal executioner would prevent Stannis from catching us alive. I asked Shae to come with me, but she showed me the dagger she was hiding beneath her skirt, said that no one would hurt her and that she had to bid farewell to someone. She referred to you, didn't she?"

"I suppose so. But I was outside, convincing the men not to let Stannis conquer their city, and leading them to a lost battle that nearly cost my face and my life, and all that so as my father arrived in the precise moment, like a great saviour hero. I know that the only thing I should care about is that the city was saved, but my ego got deeply hurt and I haven't forgiven my father yet for claiming for himself almost all the merit of the victory. It was as if everything I did was useless. The only thing I gained was a pretty wound for which I spent weeks in a cubby where not even the stable boys of the Keep would sleep. And talking about that, Sansa. Tell me how it was that you took turns with Pod to take care of me beside my sickbed." Tyrion smiled at her sweetly and traced the outline of her jaw with his fingers.

She kissed his chest.

"All right, but before that you have to tell me all about how you planned your tactics and how you experienced the Battle of Blackwater, and then I'll tell you about my own experience and what happened after that night, you agree?"

"Of course, sweetheart. But it'll take us quite a while. If you feel sleepy and my voice serves you as a lullaby, get to sleep when you fancy it. I don't want you to get tired by staying up late."

"Don't worry, my love, it's still early. It's been weeks since we had our last long talks like this one and I miss them, Tyrion."

"Me too. Well, then I'll start with the moment when we were informed about Renly's death, as it
was right then when Stannis got moving with all his troops, the ones he already had and the ones that changed sides, except for the ones of the Tyrells. When Margaery was widowed, Littlefinger was in Renly's camps because I had sent him to take your father's bones to your mother and also my proposal to exchange Jaime for you and Arya. Moreover, it didn't cost much to Littlefinger to bring the Tyrells to the Lannister's cause. Margaery always has been very ambitious and what she has desired most in her life is to be the queen of Westeros. As she couldn't achieve it by means of Renly, she'd achieve it through Joffrey. And for that the armies of The Reach must join the ones of my house as soon as possible, if they wanted to arrive in time at King's Landing. Stannis was about to get moving and if he reached the capital before my father and his allies, the city would be lost and Joffrey's reign would be even shorter than it was."

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 3. Day 10

"Stannis was my only hope in those times. Within a few weeks I'd have to marry Joffrey, I didn't know that Margaery was planning to keep him for herself. I'd have gifted him to her on a silver plate and would have danced a northern dance in front of the whole court if I'd known that she had the intention to free me from the monster," Sansa joked. "To the fear of war I had to add my terror of my wedding. I think I'd have said a prayer for Margaery if by then I had known about her plans. I'd have prayed for her safe arrival to the city and that she didn't withdraw as soon as she saw how Joff was."

"I'm sorry that you had to be through that terror, darling. They were very harsh days for everyone. The perspective of a war in the city where you live never is very inviting, not even for someone who is eager to escape from it."

"Tell me how you organized your tactics to repel Stannis. I want to hear how my intelligent husband set his prodigious mind in motion. You told me about the wildfire, but I want to know everything." Sansa kissed his chest again and he got hard with the touch of her lips, but held back. During the pregnancy it was up to her the initiative to start any sexual activity.

"Well, your intelligent husband spent hours consulting books fatter than himself about wars and sieges and he didn't come up with a single damned idea."

"Oh, goofy. You're not so fat," Sansa needled, tickling the hair on his chest.

"Ah, thanks very much. Now I feel much more handsome." He squeezed her shoulders against himself for an instant.

"You should." Sansa sat up a little and kissed his lips. Afterwards she returned to her previous position, smiling widely.

She's provoking me with full intention because she knows that whatever she does I won't pounce on her, and she takes advantage of it.

With his member hard as stone and his naughty grin, he made the effort to go on with his tale.

"Cersei and Joffrey didn't help much in the matter, and I feared that, if the issue of the city defence was up to the royal hands, it would not make any difference if we opened our doors widely to Stannis and received him with outstretched arms. I had to think about something before Joff codemned us all with his stupidities and his cowardice. My dear sister didn't seem to realize the seriousness of the situation, or she cared a shit. I was afraid that she was plotting anything but something that would save King's Landing. It'd rather be something which would save her precious son's neck. If it were down to her, the entire city could go to the seven hells with all of us inside it, as long as her children were safe and sound. But the truth is that I can't criticize her too much for being a mother above all in those moments of panic. It's perhaps the only thing by which I can't reproach her for behaving like a bitch."

"I'm getting a precise idea that you didn't have much help, my love."

"No, But I did have a spy who provided me with fundamental information about my sister. Lancel."

"Ah, yes, it's true. He was your sister's lover and you coerced him into spying her for you, and thas
was how you discovered the wildfire."

"Yes. I discovered that the Order of Pyromancers was producing jars of wildfire for my sister, but I ordered that from then on they produced them for me. Cersei would waste that valuable weapon using it inappropriately. It occurred to me how to attack Stannis's fleet with the wildfire in a way it would cause the greatest destruction possible. Though it'll sound strange, I'm not proud of that, Sansa. The screams of those men who were dying burnt still torment me, and they will until the day of my death. I don't regret having defended the city, but I do regret the way those men died, though they were enemies."

"Of course you're not proud of that, my love. You're not Joffrey." Sansa squeezed his hand.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 3. Day 10

He sighed and continued. "I decided that the best way to try to stop the enemy fleet and cause the highest number of casualties was to send a ship with no crew and loaded with the wildfire. When Stannis noticed what was happening, it would be too late to try to tack. Bronn would shoot a fire arrow just in the area of the sea where would be spilled the flammable liquid which would be overflowing the boat. And the nightmare would start there. If the explosion killed Stannis, we'd have won the battle. Without their leader, the armies would've got out of order and they probably would've withdrawn and fled. But if something distinguished Stannis was his warrior instinct, at least when he hadn't yet let any red priestesses trick him. He was a brave and very gifted soldier, but not as reckless as Robert. He wouldn't be so stupid as to place himself in the first front line of his fleet. It was difficult that the explosion reached him. Not impossible, but I doubted that we were that lucky. So I also got ready our second defence plan, which consisted in sending all the possible men to the Mud Gate, where Stannis would attempt to pass through when he disembarked. But, no matter how much I racked my brains, the numbers were still there, and they were terrifying: the enemy armies exceeded ours amply. Most of my father's forces were far away and, even though the alliance with the Tyrells gave us numerical superiority, it was useless if they didn't arrive in time. The situation was desperate in the best case, but I couldn't simply sit down and remain waiting with my arms crossed for the enemies to devastate us. The city would be sacked and thousands of innocent people would die. Thousands of women would be raped. Thousands of children would be sentenced to be orphans. And the perspective of losing my own head didn't seduce me very much either."

"You did it the best you could with the resources you had. Wars are always terrible, my love. We always lose a lot in them."

"Yes, always. Only the idiots and the sadistics believe in victories. The majority of those who die in battle are men with wives and children who had to follow their lords to war because of a pledge of allegiance. There also die entire families whose sin was to live in a wrong place, where the scuffle caught them without having asked for it. I was a fool for wanting the acknowledgment for my doubtful merits in the Battle of Blackwater. A proud fool too much worried for contributing to the Lannister honour and hurt because my father took all the credit for himself. And later, he was cheeky enough to tell me that you were the reward for my achievements. Another of his great rewards." His tone was sarcastic and bitter. "Luckily, I've managed to twist his plans once more. With your help." His expression softened when he looked at her and he smiled at her tenderly. "Well, coming back to those days, I was mortally scared, like anyone who was a little sensible. I prepared for what might be our last days."

"I was scared too, but in a different way. It was logical that the rest of you saw Stannis as a threat, but for me he was my only chance to reunite with my family. I had to cling to that. If I began to think about the massacre, about the more than probable plundering of the city, or that Stannis' men might find me before he did and rape me without giving me time to explain to them who I was... I'd turn insane."

"Of course, darling. Each one of us had our reasons to be afraid. During those nights I didn't sleep a wink. I turned and turned in bed and sleep didn't come. I knew I'd need all the rest I could gather, but anyway I was never very good at sleeping."

Sansa thought of Shae in his bed, trying to distract him from his fears, but though it hurt her to
imagine her in his arms, she didn't say anything about that. She didn't want to make him feel uncomfortable again with a past relationship.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
"The day when Stannis arrived at our gates, I got ready for battle the best I could, what wasn't much. I saw you and Shae and I got close to say goodbye. My concern for you was sincere, Sansa. And I was willing to do as much as I could to stop the sacking and prevent you from being harmed. But I feared that it wouldn't be enough."

"I also was sincere when I told you that I would pray for your return. It wasn't simply a courteous phrase of the many I said along the day."

He slid his fingers through her hair. "I know. I noticed. Your gesture moved me and gave me determination to protect you. Of course you wished Joffrey to fall, but as you've said wars are terrible, no matter what side prevailed over the other. And many innocents from both sides pay. Cersei wasn't far wrong when she said that you'd be an appetizing plate to a horde of bloodthirsty savages with their blood boiling, and in battle all men turn that way. But certainly that night it wasn't the most proper moment to bring it up. Even as a little girl, Cersei liked to have fun with little tortures. She tormented me, hid things and blamed the handmaidens accusing them of stealing those things so as they were punished and fired, she killed small animals with stones and other charming things of the sort. Joffrey didn't get his sadistic instinct out of thin air. Well... Tell me about your enclosure in Maegor's Holdfast."

"It was packed with scared women and there were a few children too. Cersei started to drink goblet after goblet of wine and insisted on calling me to her side to entertain herself mocking me and giving me her maternal advice. According to her the only way to rule was through cruelty and fear, and that was what she tried to convey to me, but I knew that one can rule as well through respect and devotion. And if there was something I was completely sure of, was that I wouldn't be the kind of queen Cersei was. But I didn't want to be a queen any more. What I had really wished was to be the wife of a good man and a good king, and that stupid dream had been shattered a long time ago. I thought that, if Stannis didn't manage to prevail and rescue me, I'd have to do all I could in order to survive and be a good queen in spite of Joffrey. I wouldn't be like Cersei."

"Of course you wouldn't, gorgeous. You're a million times better than her," Tyrion praised, smiling.

"She turned more and more impertinent and, instead of boosting her protégées' morale, she said cruel remarks out loud. I escaped from her side whenever I could and joined Shae or other ladies to pray and sing and try to make everybody keep calm. That infuriated Cersei even more. She envied your innocence, integrity and pureness. Attributes she hasn't had since she stopped being a baby," he pointed.

"At last, she went away with Tommen and then Shae told me to go to my bedroom and bar the door. I ran in all haste and, when I entered my rooms, the Hound was there."

Tyrion looked at her in astonishment.

"The Hound? I thought he had left directly when he told Joffrey to go to hell."

"He offered to take me with him to a safe place, surely North. He assured he'd take care of me. But
I refused. I was hopeful that Stannis would win, and anyway, what was I going to do out there, a helpless fugitive with a deserter on whose head it would be put a price? No, it was safer to stay."

"You were very sensible. And he... didn't try anything more with you? Didn't he overstep the bounds?" Tyrion asked, and Sansa noticed a hint of jealousy he was trying hard to pass off as a casual tone, but she knew that it turned him jealous to think that the Hound might have touched her. Sansa grinned, feeling the tingle of her satisfied vanity. Now it was his turn to be a little jealous, she thought mischievously.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
"He didn't even touch me. He felt disappointed when I rejected his offer, but he promised he
wouldn't hurt me, and left. He was terrified, you know? The wildfire. I think it was too much for
him and he must come to the conclusion that it wasn't worth to risk himself to die burning for a
snot craven king."

"Out there it was raining, but the wildfire is very difficult to extinguish. After the great explosion
which destroyed a part of Stannis's fleet (and despite many ships disintegrated in fire, there were
many more behind), the soldiers started to disembark and we received them with flaming arrows,
rocks and hot pitch. When a lot of them reached the ramparts and began to climb and hit the gates
with the ram, I prepared the men for the attack. The Hound was one of them, and I sent him to the
beach with a detachment under his command. A while later, he drew back within the walls, began
to drink wine and no matter how much I tried to rally him to go back to the battle, he told me to eat
shit and he also told Joff to fuck himself. This one was by my side, and he didn't know what to do.
His pet's desertion shattered the scant bravery Joff might still harbour and he hastily ran to hide
under his mother's skirts, while the men outside were giving their lives for him. I decided to take
the lead before there was a general retreat and I encouraged the men to fight, not for their king, nor
for gold or glory. They had to do it for their city, for their home, for their women and children.
They listened to me, they listened to the Halfman who was half their size because if someone like
me, a dwarf, was willing to march out to defend the city, how bad would that make them look if
they cowered? And they followed me. I never thought I'd come to lead an army, but certainly in
this life one doesn't know what is capable of. As a soldier I'm terrible, but I don't flee from the
battlefield, no one can blame me for that at least."

"I'd have liked to see you. I'm sure you were amazing."

"I wasn't a very dashing vision, but I had certain advantages. The enemy usually doesn't look down.
And with the axe and the shield I'm quite deadly." He kissed the top of Sansa's head. "But as I told
you, I'm a terrible soldier. I made the mistake of removing my helmet. I've never liked to wear
those things on my big head. And that stupid negligence of mine cost me my pretty face wound
when Ser Mandon Moore, sent by Joff or by Cersei or both, nearly split it in two. Pod reacted
quickly and pierced him with his spear, and he came to my aid. I owe my life to that lad. I have
with him a debt that not even all the Lannister gold might pay. And while I was almost dying, my
father had just arrived with the Lannister and Tyrell armies and crushed the rest of Stannis's forces.
And just then finished my glorious career as Hand of the King and protector of the city, and I was
thrown like an old sack."

Sansa embraced him.

"When I heard that you were badly injured, I went to see you. Joffrey already had annulled our
engagement and, though I continued to be a prisoner, since he accepted Margaery's hand I felt
much more relieved. I had my own debt with you, for having protected me in your own way, both
from Joffrey and from the horrors of war. I was glad that you had survived, and I thought that I
might give you back what you had made for me. I took turns with Pod to sit by your headboard and
tend to your needs while you were unconscious."

"I sensed your presence, Sansa. I felt the brush of your hands, I heard your voice singing to me, I
felt on my tongue the fresh water and the hot broth you made me swallow. Did you change as well
my clothes and the sheets I dirtied?,” he asked suddenly, embarrassed.

"Pod helped me with those tasks, and when it was necessary to wash and dress you, he did it. I... never had seen a naked man, and moreover it wasn't proper that a virgin lady like me carried out those tasks...,” Sansa justified herself, also embarrassed.

"I'm glad you didn't do it. If there was still some dignity left in me, I certainly wanted to keep it in front of such a beautiful young woman like you, though my dignity was quite damaged already, to tell the truth," he said, with that ability he had to praise her while mocking himself.

"I respected your... privacy. And when Pod told me you had awoken, I decided you were well enough and wouldn't need me any more. And besides, I was ashamed that you knew that I... had been tending to you. I asked Pod not to tell you anything, but it seems that he finally couldn't resist," Sansa said, smiling.

"No, he couldn't. And I'm very grateful to him for having snitched. It makes me very happy to know that you were at my side during my worst moments, honey." Tyrion caressed her cheek and she positioned herself onto him.

"And now I'm glad to be at your side during your best moments, my love. Which are the best for me too."

They made love and afterwards they fell asleep immediately, sated with chat and sex.
Asha observed once more her brother stealthily, without him noticing. Her heart broke when she saw the wreck into which Theon had turned. Even so, he had improved noticeably since he had escaped from Ramsay Bolton's clutches. For Asha he never stopped being her dearly little brother, who had smiled at her for the first time when he was a baby and it was in that precise moment when Asha started to feel love for that weepy polliwog who later became a boastful and loud-mouthed boy with a perpetual grin on his lips, but who sometimes, in the middle of the night, went to his sister's room and got into her bed whenever he had nightmares that did not let him sleep. It was the little secret they both kept at all cost, because if their father had found out about that weakness of his youngest son, doubtlessly he would have punished him to sleep in the underground rooms, without windows, without any light and with the door locked to prevent him from running to hide in his sister's arms like a chicken. A Greyjoy could not show fear or cowardice or otherwise the authority of his house in the Iron Islands would begin to be questioned by the rest of the noble houses. That was what Balon never got tired of reminding his children.

But he himself bent the knee before Eddard Stark and Theon was separated from Asha and taken as a hostage to Winterfell. Eleven years later, he had returned like a specter, barely a shadow of the boy he had been.

Asha was surprised to see him appear at Pyke after she had disobeyed their father to go to Dreadfort in rescue of her brother, and after a rough fight against some guards of the fortress, Theon, who was rotting behind the bars of the kennels, had refused to leave with her. Asha had no other choice but abandoning him and escaping with the rest of her men to survive. She was as angry as she was saddened for him. She saw clearly with her own eyes what that beast of Ramsay had done to him and she was overwhelmed with pain, but she was also annoyed against Theon for having being stupid and having insisted on staying as the lord of Winterfell, forgetting the Old Way of the ironmen. *We don't sow. We plunder, we take by force all we claim as ours and return to our islands with the booty. We pay the iron price. We are not peasants, we are not sheep. Our life is the sea, the smoke at the burnt ports we leave behind while we move ahead to the next fishermen's village, to the next city, or home.*

Theon was too much blinded by his conceit and, moreover, he made the mistake of trying to occupy the place of his Stark captors. Asha could understand him. She sensed his inner conflict, his split soul. He had lived with them for more than a decade, and it seemed that they had treated him well. Eddard Stark was a good ward, Asha could not deny it. But he had trained Theon as a weak man, as one of those useless men from the continent dressed almost like women, and the only thing they could do was playing with swords. She on her own would defeat easily many of them in a hand-to-hand fight. Her axes were another part of her, and her dagger turned practically invisible and came to life when she handled it. Many had challenged her to play the finger dance and everyone had lost at least one finger, whereas Asha still kept her ten fingers.

Those continental lords and knights were weepy snotties. They ignored the roughness of winter in the sea, the storms that battered Pyke, the toughness of growing up in the longboats side by side with sailors for whom murdering, plundering and raping were their daily bread and butter. She had grown mature among men like those and each one of them respected her. Not a single woman from the Iron Islands was so respected as her. A great part of that bunch of brutes, rough like the rocks of the cliffs for whom their wives only were tummies to give birth and the rest of the women were cunts where plunging their cocks, obeyed her without a word of complaint and would have sailed
with her to the other end of the world. And that was something Asha was very proud of. Something she had achieved by herself and which no woman from the Islands had achieved before.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 449

The Sunset Sea

And she had to be grateful to her father for that. When his two eldest sons died during the rebellion and he gave Theon to Eddard Stark, he prepared Asha to be his heiress. Seeing in her fierceness a reflection of what he himself would have wanted to be and could not be, he did not mind that she was a girl and educated her as a man. Asha was overjoyed with that, as it was what she wanted. She'd rather throwing herself into the waters from one of the towers of Pyke than becoming an iron woman like the others. In her world, men were the ones who took all the fun, whereas women vegetated in the strongholds. Their lives only consisted in awaiting the return of their men and in breeding sons who abandoned them for a life in the sea and daughters sentenced to lead the same lives than their mothers.

All the men she gave orders to respected and feared her, and several of them were besotted with her, Asha knew it and smiled with disdain. They were the boys she had bedded in some occasion. She had done it more to enjoy sex itself during periods where she did not have at her disposal anyone more appealing, than because she really liked them very much. For her they were men like any other, a bit more attractive than the rest, but nothing more. Asha preferred women's bodies. With them she truly enjoyed herself and reached summits toward which men did not take her. At least, the good thing of having that handful of lambs crazy about her was that they were totally devoted to her, and that had its advantages. These surpassed the problem which meant the nuisance of being the aim of their attempts to seduce her and take her to their beds again. Sometimes she entertained herself watching them compete and, when she felt in the mood and generous enough, she gifted them some night of sex in which she lied to them assuring that she liked each one of them more than anyone else. That was the best way to keep them happy and hopeful and, moreover, she had to admit that all that was funny. As long as they did not become very much tiresome, she did not dislike that game.

But her life had just taken a brutal turn. Her uncle Euron, her father's murderer, was sitting now on the Seastone Chair. That was so unfair. He had had the nerve to confess his crime without the slightest qualm in front of the whole kingsmoot, and after her efforts to win the highest number of supporters who would vote her as the queen of the islands, that scumbag killer of his own blood had convinced easily those idiots by promising them an alliance with Daenerys Targaryen and her dragons. He was so conceited as to taking for granted that she would accept him as a husband. Asha had thought that it was ridiculous, but apparently a great part of the kingsmoot believed that nonsense. The ironmen were not popular or appreciated at all beyond their own islands. What made Euron suppose that the dragon queen would agree to an engagement with him just like that? For a handful of longboats? Well, Asha had to admit that they were more than a handful. The iron fleet consisted of more than one hundred ships, and Euron had declared that he had the intention to make loads more. Perhaps that would be enough to rouse Daenerys's interest. But Asha, for some reason, told herself that the young exiled queen would not let anyone buy her so easily. She had launched a war against slavery after having been bought by a dothraki khal. She seemed to be a hard nut to crack. And Asha liked strong and willful women like herself. Deep down she did not want to see the queen of Meereen, whom she admired, married to a filthy bastard like her uncle Euron.

It had been a desperate situation for Asha. She could not stay in the islands, as her uncle was at the top of power and she was in danger, either if he decided to eliminate her or if he was feeding other sadistic plans about her. She had to come to action, and quickly.
It was then when Theon returned from his captivity in Winterfell. He was so broken that the terrible cold of the North could not harm him more than he already had been. The Bolton bastard had cut several of his fingers and toes and had flayed the others, along with hacking off his genitals, and had turned him into a heap with no will of his own, or nearly. What could the icy weather remove from him that Ramsay's monstrosity had not removed already, apart from his life?

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
The Sunset Sea

He had walked almost without a break through the woods in a southwesterly direction. He barely slept since a long time ago, so he took every waking hour to move forward. He traveled downriver from Torrhen's Square and that way he sped up the journey, until he arrived at Blazewater Bay, where he managed to find a ship which took him to Pyke.

Even though Asha had not forgiven him yet, not entirely, she felt immensely relieved and happy to see him and, after the harsh reproaches she addressed him, she hugged him, verifying that he was nothing but skin and bone, and she swallowed a knot she had in her throat to tell him how Euron had assassinated their father and had sat on the Salt Throne. She explained him that they had to depart in all haste before the usurper killed them both too, now he relied on many allies who would not hesitate to sneak into their bedrooms at night and cut their throats. But they would not leave with the tail between their legs. They would deliver a deadly blow to him. If they took the fleet with them, they would leave him with nothing to offer Daenerys Targaryen. And moreover, it would be themselves, Asha and Theon, who would go to Meereen to join the cause of the dragon queen, and that way they would take revenge on Euron. And on Ramsay Bolton. Theon had looked at her full of fear mixed with pride, and nodded. He had just become his sister's shadow, her most loyal supporter. She was all he had left. And he was all she had left. He, the hundred boats if they acted fast, and the hope of an alliance with Daenerys. Asha still counted on many stalwarts who were willing to sail with her. They acted with full secrecy and as soon as everything was ready, in the early morning the hundred longboats weighed anchor. All of them knew those waters so well that they could sail without trouble even in the darkness of the night, with the only guidance of the stars.

From the deck, Asha had listened to the Dragon Horn that a furious Euron blew as soon as he realized his niece and nephew had just slipped past him before his very nose. But it was already late for him, and his henchmen did not have a single boat to chase them. If from that distance Asha could have seen her father's killer, she would have addressed him a rude gesture with her hands, would have shouted what she thought of him and would have laughed very hard simply when she saw his gobsmacked and furious face.

The coast of the Westerlands could be distinguished with the first light of dawn. It was strange that that time they were limiting to pass by instead of attacking, as each time a fleet from the Iron Islands had sailed over there in the past. The most probable was that the towns and the castles from which the sea could be seen were raising the alarm in that very moment, thinking that a new attack was hovering over them. More than a hundred ships coming from the islands used to have that meaning. Asha believed she had heard bells in the middle of the silence. But in that occasion the Lannisters, their vassals and the smallfolk could breath easily, because Asha Greyjoy was not interested in their precious treasures.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
The Sunset Sea

Tyrion Lannister the Imp was in Meereen with his wife, Sansa Stark, and according to gossip he kept a close relationship with Daenerys. He had fled as a suspect for the death of his nephew Joffrey and he apparently had disowned his own house to go over to the side of the Breaker of Chains. He had taken his young wife with him and some rumours said that he kept her locked by force and subjected to his perversions, and other rumours affirmed that they were a happy married couple. Either way, both came from houses that were Greyjoys’ relentless enemies. The Lannisters had had to suffer the ironmen’s attacks on their coasts and on their most important city, Lannisport, for centuries. And Balon Greyjoy had to surrender to Eddard Stark and give him his youngest son when the last rebellion of the Iron Islands was crushed. By instinct, Asha felt a deep distrust and dislike toward anyone whose surname was Lannister or Stark, and in Meereen she would meet face to face two people very close to the queen who had both surnames. She had no idea how the meeting might end up, especially when Lady Sansa knew that Theon was there. He had burnt two boys, passing them off as the Stark kids, had executed the master-at-arms and his men had caused more deaths, like the castle maester's one. It was him who betrayed the King in the North and provoked the fall and the destruction of Winterfell, which after the failed conquest was taken by Ramsay Bolton. Theon and the men who accompanied him in that stupid and wretched business payed dearly for their mistake. All the men were slaughtered, but a fate worse than death was awaiting Theon. He'd better have died along with the others, better provoking his captors to make them kill him, but he was weak and allowed one of the worst sadistics in Westeros to catch him. Asha had met a few spawns who gave goosebumps, and many who, in case they had payed for their crimes, would have been castrated, mutilated, executed or sent to the Wall. She neither was a paragon of kindness, though she had to admit that it upset her that women were raped during the attacks and plunderings, and she did not enjoy killing children or old people, nor she found a great delight in stabbing her axes or her dagger into simple fishermen. Except for raping (something that was difficult for her due to anatomical reasons), Asha had committed other crimes. But she was close to an innocent flower when compared to the Bolton’s bastard. What he had done to Theon was beyond all belief. She wondered what had pushed her brother to overcome his terror and escape, but she did not dare to ask him. She feared that he would collapse in front of her and she needed him whole, well, as much whole a destroyed man like him could be. He would never be a whole man again.

In Meereen he would reunite with the daughter of his former ward, under whose roof he had lived for ten years, the same roof that had taken him in and which he had besmirched with his betrayal. Although it was the enemy's house, it had been his house. The hell to which he was sentenced was his punishment. Asha was not blind and, no matter how much she despised the Starks, she admitted that her brother had been a complete fool. He should have limited to sack the castle and should have known that the people would stand up to him and that the little lords relied on stalwarts who surely helped them to escape and protected them. Killing the peasant kids to pass them off as Bran and Rickon had been his greatest crazy idea.

The mere presence of Sansa Stark in Meereen would remind him acutely of all he had destroyed, and guilt would hit him. But there would be no other choice but finding a way of living on the same side. All of them had something on which they agreed: they were exiles who were making common cause with Daenerys to help her to take the Iron Throne. Flight, revenge, deportation, disappointment, guilt... The reason why all went to support the dragon queen did not matter a lot really. The important point was that she gave everybody a cause to fight for. The promise of a new start.
The Sunset Sea

And the truth was that Asha, in spite of her hatred against Euron and her fury for having had to leave her home behind, felt excited for that new life the Mother of Dragons promised. Asha carried adventure, risk, fighting, betting and gambling in her blood. That adventure filled her with renewed energy. Besides, she did not delude herself about her other hidden reasons. People said that Daenerys Targaryen was one of the most beautiful women in the world, and Asha felt strongly curious to verify it by herself. The girls she had bedded used to be brunettes or had golden blond hair at most, and some of them dyed their hair platinum blond, but she did not remember to have seen any with that natural color, so fair that it was almost white. Moreover, those who described Daenerys did not deprive themselves of adding that she was very slender, with a goddess' body. Asha was hopeful to be able to confirm it.

The Black Wind, where Theon and she were sailing East, was Asha's pride. She was like an old friend who knew exactly what Asha needed. She was light and strong, traveled as fast as the wind in her name and obeyed the helm as if she knew by instinct the direction she must take. She had made it out unscathed from several storms and she never failed to bring her owner where this one wanted to go. That was Asha's element. Land did not mean anything to her. The firm ground made her feel insecure. Woods oppressed her, because she felt like imprisoned. And cities were even worse. No, she was unsuited for taking root in the earth. Her roots grew directly in the water, like those of a certain exotic ornamental plant she had seen in glass jars and whose name she ignored. She was like that plant, but she fed on salt water and she lived freely.

Meereen was a large city, unluckily, and moreover it took in thousands of refugees. That was what she liked least of her adventure. Once there, she hoped to be useful to the queen with her experience as a ship captain and her warrior skills, and even carry out missions by sea that were entrusted to her. Asha would not mind either going on staying in the Black Wind. She could live in the Ghiscari pyramid or in other sort of house, or in the camps outside the city, if necessary. But she preferred to come back to her boat to rest, perhaps not every day, but sometimes. She was accustomed to living austerely and preferred the discomfort of a straw pallet or the wooden floor. She did not carry many things, like women used to do. She had scarce clothes and no gowns, and she took with herself very few articles for personal use. Among those articles, there was a sea shell Theon had gifted her many years ago. That day they were on a visit with their father at Lordsport's beach, and she and her brother had started to play in the sand. The little boy felt drawn to a shining and iridescent thing he made out on the shore. It was a white mother-of-pearl shell that reflected the colours of the rainbow when it was looked from different angles. Asha never had seen anything so beautiful, and Theon, who caught in her expression that she had been captivated by the shell, gave it to her. She took him in her arms and kissed his face dozens of times while the boy laughed endlessly, with that singsong and insolent laughter that would be the feature she would always remember most. She put the treasure in her pocket and from that day she kept it very carefully among her most valued things, wrapped in a clean cloth, to prevent it from becoming deteriorated by rubbing or moisture. During the first years Theon was absent, Asha took the shell out every night, put it on her nightstand and fell asleep staring at it. Later, when she was too old for all those childish dreams, she held it whenever she felt nostalgic, worried or sad. The softness and the whiteness of the nacre in her hand calmed her down and reminded her of her childhood. Though Balon had not behaved as the best of fathers, Asha had been happy until Theon was snatched from her. After his departure, she consoled herself thanks to her tough training as an ironwoman whom her father was educating as a man because he intended to make her the heiress.
In those moments, in the *Black Wind*, she again had the shell in her pocket and pulled it out to show it to Theon. He blinked, until a light in his subdued eyes indicated to Asha that he remembered.

"I thought you probably had lost it, or thrown it away," he murmured, with emotion in his cracked voice that sounded so like that of an old man.

"Never, little brother. I'd rather having died grasping this shell than losing it. I already lost you once. Not for all the world would I have lost the only thing I was left of you."

Theon looked at her as if he were in the verge of tears, with those blue eyes which never would sparkle like they did before. But for a moment she saw in them a reflection of the former Theon, and she felt hope.

*Maybe some day he'll find the way of bearing his terrible burden. And I'll help him to carry it until the day the Drowned God claims me.*
Meereen: Month 3. Day 23

The audience hall was packed, and the soldiers had formed a tight circle around the whole perimeter out of caution. The tension, hatred and fear that floated in the atmosphere might be cut with a knife, and Tyrion and the rest of the royal counselors had decided that no one else apart from the present ones should be in the hall, at the risk of chaos that might be unleashed even though they relied on the guards. Anyway, in spite of the spaciousness, there were enough people already, probably more than there had ever been in that hall. The counselors were face to face with hundreds of chained people who looked contemptuously at the dwarf and at the other friends of the false queen.

But there was someone else there who had requested expressly to be present and Tyrion had not been able to deny her of that. She stood tall with evident delight and had spat at the feet of the convicts, and the loathe in her eyes shone with a wild gleam. She seemed to be much taller than she was, standing with her head high in front of the rows of chained people. The woman turned to look at Tyrion.

"I promised you that in less than a month I'd put the Sons of the Harpy at your feet, and here you are."

The woman had appeared at the pyramid a week ago with the names of about fifty members of the organization, who added to the ones Tyrion had already discovered thanks to the spy net, they totaled three hundred seventy. There were twelve noble families involved, and only three had remained clear of suspicion: The Loraqs, the Galares (the Green Grace's relatives), and the Hazkars. What regarded to the rest of the members who were not noblepeople, there were more than two hundred merchants involved.

Tyrion had held a Council, where Oberyn had taken his seat for the first time, to discuss about the raid they would have to carry out to catch all the culprits. It was a major operation that required many soldiers to fulfil it. And it also required great stealth to catch people off guard. The soldiers penetrated in the dead of night in the pyramids (fortunately all of them were much smaller and accessible than the Great Pyramid) and in the houses while their occupants were sleeping, and they put a dagger on the sleepers' throats, threatening to kill the entire family if the active members of the Sons of the Harpy did not surrender. Of course, that threat took effect and the one or ones involved did not last to give themselves away, or some relative who evacuated his or her bowels on himself or herself snitched promptly, not very willing to die in another's stead, even if that so called another was his or her same blood. The Council had agreed to use that threat, considering it the most effective. If you're a coward and value your own neck more than anything in the world, then you don't last to betray the responsible one if your neck is at steak. And if you really care for the people you live together with, then you don't permit them to pay for your deeds. Tyrion recalled one of the most accurate maxims he had heard, and that maxim had been uttered by his father. Tywin was an inveterate son of a bitch, but that did not erase the truth of many of his speeches. When we face death, what we truly are comes out. Until now my experience in that field has taught me that there are very scant valiants and altruists, and that guilt outweighs pride. Fear of death leaves us naked.

Tyrion had listened to those sentences lots of years ago with his usual mask of disdain and the perennial cup of wine in his hands, because he found pleasure in annoying his father with any of his gestures. But Tywin's words had made an impression on his brain, as always Tyrion was not as
much drunk as to forget them.

In the latest Council meeting those words had returned to his conscious thought and he had to admit grudgingly the truth residing in them. It was that memory what made him propose the strategy to catch the Sons of the Harpy minimizing the collateral damage. Tyrion did not want innocents to pay or fatal mistakes to be made. Even so, the operation had not been fully clean. Several soldiers had been injured and their attackers were arrested too for insubordination and for assaulting authorized officers.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 3. Day 23

At dawn, all the active members of the Sons of the Harpy were taken to the Great Pyramid, heavily guarded, and they waited for the royal counselors to come to the audience hall to hold the trial. Tyrion had not slept at all that night, staying in a tense wait, and he tried to calm Sansa down once more, though he knew she barely had slept a wink. Sansa would be in the trial, but Tyrion did not want her, for anything in the world, to attend the public execution in the Square of Graces. Once the sentence was pronounced, the convicts would be led to the square without delay. The cells of the great Pyramid could not be taken up with nearly four hundred prisoners, neither could so many of them be fed at the expense of the royal coffers. Since they were going to die anyway, it was absurd to delay their fate and waste uselessly the gold reserves.

Tyrion, as well as Sansa, Ser Barristan, Missandei and Kerro had rejected in the Council Oberyn's proposal to do with the assassins the same Daenerys had done with the one hundred and sixty three Great Masters who had crucified the slave children. The Dornish prince had a bloodthirsty streak that gave Tyrion goosebumps. Tyrion himself, Missandei and Ser Barristan had been quite successful softening that same bloodthirsty side that ran through the khaleesi's veins, and they would not throw away everything in an instant. Thenceforth Tyrion would have to redouble his efforts with Daenerys, since the moment she became the Viper's wife. He feared the influence he might exert on her in that sense, though in others their match would produce many advantages.

Tyrion was not in favour of torture if it could be avoided, and he thought that a public torture of the Sons of the Harpy was the last thing Meereen needed. The least risky and messy action would be a quick death sentence. He proposed all the condemned to be beheaded at the same time and with well sharpened swords, so the operation could be carried out in a single stroke, and the families would be allowed to pick up the corpses of their dead relatives and take them away. That way the entire city would be offered the promised exemplary punishment, without letting anyone take too much pleasure in that horror. And the families might bury their executed relatives. It was a sign of good will and a hand lent to the beginning of peace, though Tyrion doubted that a true peace could exist. With that gesture, they intended to make the relatives see that they were not blamed for others' actions, although they had been very close to them. As long as it was not proved that they had had something to do with it directly, they would be left alone.

Tyrion also had prepared a brief speech for the execution ceremony in the square, to leave everything properly tied up. He would try to be exposed the shortest time possible, as the scene of a public execution in the open air was not the safest place for the one who passed sentence. He would have a heavy escort around him and all the soldiers would take with them their shields along with their weapons. It might occur to someone to throw stones or other things.

Recently Tyrion had received the response of the Astapori king, Imarion the Clement, to the message he had sent to him reporting that some of the wine merchants of his city were part of the Sons of the Harpy and had plotted to assassinate the queen. Imarion's succinct phrases were cold and evasive, like Daenerys had been with the marriage proposal. It seemed that the petty king had not liked very much the Mother of Dragons not taking seriously his engagement offer. He said very pompously that he expected the glorious queen of his heart to return soon and that he would deal with the culprits who had made the attempt to snatch her life from her. Empty words that actually were a very polite way of saying "fuck you". Tyrion thought that the nickname The Pouty would fit him better. Evidently it did not suit Imarion to sever himself from his neighbours, or otherwise he probably would not have been so soft in his letter. He had no other choice but accepting to be
snubbed by Daenerys and continuing with the neighbourly relations as before. Tyrion wondered if that conceited dude would last much more on the throne before someone strangled him. It was very likely that he followed the same path than the kinglets who had preceded him.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 3. Day 23

Hizdhar's mother took charge on her own of paying off the debt with the Astapori assassins. According to what she reported to Tyrion, their bodies were found carved up. He interrupted her before she gave more lurid details and thanked her for her collaboration in having caught them and in having informed against the rest of the Sons of the Harpy who had been unidentified. The woman's withered eyes were really scary.

The three hundred and eighty chained people were waiting in various states of defiance, resignation, terror or catatonia. Some of them remained standing proudly and others hardly seemed able to lift off the floor. A certain stench also indicated that several of them had urinated or had moved their bowels on themselves. Tyrion glanced at Sansa, fearing that she would be noticing those odours increased tenfold, and that would not manage precisely to alleviate her morning queasiness. She indeed looked pale, but she resisted bravely, with her impassive mask. Tyrion whispered to her if it would not be better for her not to be there enduring a crowd of stinking criminals, but she shook her head determinedly, and he did not insist. He was eager to put an end to that unpleasant task as soon as possible, so he started to speak loudly and clearly in order to be heard throughout the hall.

"You've been arrested for belonging to the criminal organization called the Sons of the Harpy. Your participation in the criminal acts has been confirmed by hundreds of witnesses and you on your own have admitted before the soldiers who have detained you that you have collaborated actively. You have been charged for the murder of a total of eighty-two innocent people in the fire at the market and in a street attack, also for having caused the misfortune and the pain of many other people, as well as for some attempt to sabotage the street furniture. This will be a very short trial, because you have lost all your rights to your defense, as there are no doubts about your guilt. It's beside the point to bring here, in order to state, the many witnesses who have observed you along the weeks, as them all will repeat similar testimonies and we don't have so much time. I've gathered you here so that you will listen in short to the sentence of all the judges, a superficial formality in this case but that must be carried out like in any trial."

The convicts remained quiet. Some cried, others prayed, others nearly were raving and others stared straight ahead doggedly. But none of them opened their mouths. The veiled threat that was hanging over their families if they worsened the situation was what refrained them.

Just then, Tyrion, before addressing one by one the other counselors, looked at Sansa with concern and spoke to her in a low voice. She paled even more.

"Sansa, you can refuse to do this if you don't feel ready for the verdict. It's very hard to condemn to death, no matter how much the culprit deserves it. You don't have to do it if you don't want to. You don't look good, my love. Why don't you go back to our rooms? You have to rest. Send word to Leena so she stays with you, if you don't want to be alone."

She was breathing quickly and nodded. She seemed about to vomit. Tyrion would have sent the trial to hell and would have taken her away from there hastily, but he could not do that. He called one of the guards and asked him to escort her, as it was evident that she was not feeling well. She resisted the nausea and was guided to the corridors, addressing a last sad glance at Tyrion. He gave her the hint of an encouraging smile. He would have given anything to follow her and take care of her. Cursing the human cruelty he had to face that day, he sighed and named the judges one after
another. All of them found the accused guilty, and at last Tyrion himself corroborated the sentence. As every time he acted as a judge, a burden placed in his stomach.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 456

Meereen: Month 3. Day 23

"Well, all the judges present here find you guilty of high treason for having conspired to commit regicide; for having committed murder; for having committed an outrage against the physical and mental integrity of the surviving victims of the criminal acts perpetrated by your organization; and for the breach of the peace. You are sentenced to die by decapitation."

Such as Tyrion expected, when he finished his speech there were bursts of hysteria among some of the condemned. Most of them seemed to have resigned to their fate already, and others were simply in a state of stupor that prevented them from reacting.

"Now you'll be led to the Square of Graces to implement the judgment as soon as possible. Guards, if you're so kind to escort these lords," Tyrion ended, adding a touch of irony when he pronounced the word lords. Though he doubted that someone apart from Oberyn caught the irony in those moments.

The way to the square became very long for him, and while he walked he thought about other matters that worried him.

Littlefinger had escaped from his cell in the Gates of the Moon. Even Varys was stunned. They had underestimated the former procurer once more. He must have gained some ally during his imprisonment, as it was obvious that someone helped him to flee. It must be taken into account that his influence in the Vale had been great and it was normal that he had some stalwarts. He knew very well how to earn loyalties. Did Lady Olenna have something to do with his escape? Would she have paid her debt to him? The Tyrells were characterized by picking the winner horse and, as soon as they had the feeling that the horse was about to lose, they changed the bet. For the moment at least, Littlefinger was not a winner horse. He was a fugitive of justice who could not return to the Vale without risking his neck. He still was the owner of the lordship of Harrenhal, which Joffrey gave him for having carried out successfully the alliance between the Lannisters and the Tyrells. But it was a phantom lordship. What did it serve him for now? Tyrion was sure that the elusive snake would find the way back to the arena. He was still very rich. Surely he had great amounts of gold in a safe place. That fact in a man like him was far from negligible. A deceitful mind like his in combination with gold could work wonders.

Well, they had to admit their defeat. When he admitted in front of Sansa that her worst enemy had vanished into thin air as if by magic, she said that it did not surprise her, and she spent the rest of the day very quiet, shut herself in the private space where she evaded sometimes. At night, they talked about the issue and speculated about what might have happened, but they did not come to any conclusion. Baelish was a man too much enigmatic and unpredictable to guess his movements. It was as likely that he had bribed the jailers, as that he might have received outside help. Even being locked in a cell, he was a dangerous man and slippery as an eel, such as he had just proved.

On the other hand, little Menelan had worsened again, and that was the reason why Missandei was excused from attending to her duties as counselor and judge. She was taking turns with Sansa, Leena and other children to take care of the boy. Each time Sansa came back from Missandei's rooms, her eyes were weepy and at night she fell asleep with tears on her cheeks. Tyrion felt the dampness of her crying on his own chest and caressed her back sweetly until her breath turned deep and regular. Maester Maero had told them the truth, far from the kid's ears. His lungs were wholly damaged, he constantly expelled blood out of his mouth when he coughed and breathing had
become a struggle he could not win. Not that time. Maero did not want to give them false hope. The only thing the women could do was to pretend before Menelan, tell him tales to distract him, freshen his skin to fight the burning sensation of fever, get close to him the bowl where he spat the blood and make him swallow the broths mixed with milk of the poppy to make him suffer less.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 457

Meereen: Month 3. Day 23

The morning outside the pyramid was foggy, without a breath of wind. A crowd was awaiting in the streets, and Tyrion got nervous in an instant. He feared the mob's reactions in situations like that, in which a long line of convicts sentenced to death moved forward to the scene of their execution. There could be heard yells, weepings, rebukes and insults. The large escort of soldiers closed ranks tightly, with their spears and shields ready. Tyrion touched his dagger instinctively. It was a gesture that helped him to feel a little less vulnerable, though he knew it would not be much useful if the crowd went wild and the soldiers were not able to control it.

Tyrion observed his surroundings and he felt calmer when he verified that, according to what they had agreed with Grey Worm, that day, apart from the escort of the counselors and of the condemned, there would be in the city a deployment of soldiers larger than ever before, scattered along all the way between the Great Pyramid and the Square of Graces and around those places, to hold back any turmoil that could be caused.

They managed to arrive at the square without relevant incidents apart from the uproar. In the open-air venue there were lots of rows of soldiers perfectly spread out, each one of them with a sword in his hand. Then there was confusion and hysteria for a while as the condemned were guided to their executioners. Some of them were putting a fight and had to be dragged by force. Others asked for mercy. Many of them had dirtied themselves several times and they did not offer a very dignified appearance at the hour of their death. Tyrion was forcing himself to keep his eyes wide open, watching everything that was happening very carefully, because in that situation he could not get distracted even for a second, but what he wished most was to be able to escape from all that. The sight of all those people who were about to die was very pitiful and horrific, even though they deserved their punishment. That was the part he liked less of ruling.

Then came the moment when he had to utter his speech. He cleared his throat and proclaimed:

"Citizens of Meereen. These people had been tried for committing an outrage against the peace of our city and for having caused with premeditation the pain and the misfortune of many among the ones who live here. Due to that, they have been sentenced to death by beheading. Their death will be quick and they will feel as little pain as possible, as we don't wish to prolong their sufferings. The families will be allowed to take the remains of their relatives if they wish so, in order to bury them, and the Graces will pray for them in the temple for the next days." Tyrion did a pause. Thousands of faces were staring at him. "We hope that from now on we all commit ourselves to keep the peace and that no one else gets involved in criminal activities or organizations, at the risk of suffering the same fate that these people who are waiting for the sword. The families of these condemned have been exculpated, as it hasn't been proved that anybody else among their members has participated in the Sons of the Harpy, so they are free from all suspicion. But if it comes to our ears that that criminal organization, or any other, has the intention to act again, the measures will be the same that currently. And if anybody creates any other sort of trouble against the public peace or shows signs of rebellion or disobedience against the authority reiteratedly, that person will be expelled from the city, and will be deprived of all his or her possessions, which will become part of the relatives, or of the Crown in case that there are no relatives who have a right on them, and death penalty will weigh over the exiled if he or she returns. With these measures we intend to look after a peaceful coexistence. We hope not to come to make use of them." Tyrion then addressed Grey Worm a nod.
The captain of the Unsullied positioned himself in front of the rows and all the executioners waited for his signal, still as statues, with the condemned kneeling before them. Some of them fell to the ground, squirming in their hysteria or trying to rebel, but Grey Worm made them quieten down quickly, proclaiming aloud that if someone put a fight his death would not be quick like the others’. That threat was enough to bid them stay motionless.

The majority of the audience was awaiting in an expectant silence, only broken by some cryings and shouts.

Grey Worm gave the signal and, all together, all the swords danced in the air.

The sound of the cut off flesh and bones in hundreds of necks was something horrible to hear, and Tyrion was in the verge of looking aside.

All the heads rolled and the bodies dropped. In that moment, the soldiers’ containment work was more crucial than ever. The crowd looked like possessed before the sight and the smell of pain and death, but the guards prevented chaos from spreading and the fallen bodies from being defiled. Only the dead’s families could move close to them to pick them up. The Green Grace and her priestesses wandered between the rows of remains, blessing them and singing prayers that sounded strangely consoling in the middle of that terrifying sight. The red priestess from Yi Ti was murmuring in her strange language and the ruby on her neck was shining as if it had inner light.

Tyrion considered that it was time to go back and got out of there as fast as he could, walking far from that horror, from the revolting stench of blood and the piercing screams of the mothers and widows who were hugging those pathetic mutilated remains that some minutes ago were still human beings.
Chapter 458

Meereen: Month 3. Day 25

Two days after the public execution, Menelan died.

He faded slowly, wasting away like a candle until there was not left any wick to burn. His lungs had burnt down like that wick and the poor boy gave up, worn out by so much struggle. The milk of the poppy softened his torments and at last he nearly looked like asleep, as if in his last moments he had known finally a little peace.

Missandei, Sansa, Leena, Cloe and the children who were in the bedroom cried with absolute anguish around the youngster's bed. Grey Worm, Tyrion and Pod were staring at the scene quietly. The captain of the Unsullied, who had been the boy's foster father, had tears on his cheeks. After all, the Good Masters couldn't remove his heart.

Tyrion had felt a high appreciation for Menelan, but he had not interacted with him with so much regularity as Sansa, and even so he was feeling very sorry about his loss. He had been a sweet and intelligent boy only heartless people were unable to love. Sansa was devastated, and Tyrion, in addition to the pain for the kid's sad end, was suffering for his wife. She should not have to go through such difficult periods. She was too young and still innocent, and life already had inflicted terrible blows on her in her fifteen years. Once more, Tyrion cursed the gods or providence or damned fate that insisted on making her suffer, on snatching her beloved from her. Sansa was a too much beautiful creature and it hurt a lot to see how the cruelties of the world were determined to try to wither her. Tyrion had an irrepressible desire to yell at fate to leave her alone and to stop treating her brutally at once. It could beat him instead of her, throw the burden on him, and leave her aside. He was used to feel cursed since his birth, he could bear it. Sansa was very strong too, probably even more than him, but she did not carry the stigma of a curse reflected on her body, as he did. A stigma that had been about to swallow his whole soul until she entered his life to save him from himself. She was pure, and she would always be. Because of that Tyrion was squirming inwardly for the injustice of fate. He could withstand everything, except for seeing her suffer the slightest damage.

But neither in that occasion could he do anything save remaining by her side. Like other times, he felt powerless. Once more, his oath to care for her and protect her was laughing at him. He knew that Sansa would not want at all to hear about his guilt feelings, as he could not have prevented Menelan's death from happening. She would be right, of course, but that would not console a lot his heart. When one got married, no one showed him the small print of the oath which told that actually there were so many things against which nothing could be done. That it was very little from what one could protect the beloved, and there were so many threats among which the worst ones were those that shattered the soul, and against which there was no possible shield. What could he do in the face of death, wickedness, injustice and the horror of a world determined to devour itself?

The women managed to regain their composure sufficiently to ask the men and the other children to go out of the room, as they were going to get Menelan ready for his funeral and they needed privacy. They would have to undress, wash and dress again the body, and they wished to preserve the kid's dignity. Missandei requested them to send word to the Green Grace to ask her or one of her priestesses to lead a procession first thing in the next morning toward the consecrated lands at the outskirts, where Menelan would be buried after a farewell ceremony. There were crypts in the lowest underground levels of the pyramid, where countless generations of Meereenese noble
people were lying, but Missandei refused her son's final resting place to be that gloomy network of tunnels beneath thousands of tons of stone and earth, immersed in a perpetual darkness. Menelan had been a slave during almost all his short life and he deserved to be buried directly under the sky, because he liked feeling the fresh air on his skin and watching the sunsets and the stars.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 3. Day 25

Grey Worm left to fulfil Missandei's wishes, and Tyrion and Pod took a stroll along the corridor. They walked in silence for a while, downcast.

"Do you think there's something beyond death, Pod?" Tyrion asked suddenly. "I don't even know if you believe in gods. We've never talked about these things. Well, actually we've never talked about lots of things. But now I need to speak about something, whatever the topic, or when Sansa gets out of that room I'll burst into tears and I must be strong in front of her."

Pod looked at him, moved.

"I understand you, my lord. I feel the same. Leena and I also loved Menelan. I suppose that a pair of weepy husbands don't suit Lady Sansa or my wife right now. They're suffering a lot already."

"The dude who said that men don't cry either lied blatantly or had stones instead of eyes and another one in the heart's place. They say that my father, since he stopped being a baby at the breast, only cried twice. The first time, when his father died. The second, when my mother died. Even Tywin Lannister spilled tears. Though honestly, I doubt that for example someone like the Mountain ever knew what that is. Probably as a child he enjoyed himself biting his mother's tits to make her bleed while he was nursing. Well, returning to my first question... You believe in an afterlife, Pod?"

The young man remained thoughtful.

"I don't know, my lord," he answered sincerely, and as plainly as usual.

"You'd like it to exist?", Tyrion inquired.

Again Pod reflected on his response. "Only if it wasn't worse than this life."

"Well thought. Who wants to start again in a shitty life? We already have this world for that," Tyrion agreed with sarcasm. "The truth is that I neither know what to believe, but I do have one thing clear. I don't want to go to another life where Sansa isn't with me, or where there aren't such loyal friends as you. If I have to go to that place alone, then I prefer that there's nothing waiting for me. I know too well how it is to be alone. And you know it too, don't you?"

"Yes, my lord. I was very lonely when my mother abandoned me. No one cared really about me after she left. She hadn't been a bad mother to me, I remember her vaguely and I know she loved me, or at least she didn't hate me. People said she abandoned me to flee with her lover, but I don't judge her. Perhaps she had to do what she did because she had no other way out. Maybe she was desperate. I suppose I'll never know."

Tyrion looked at the teen with pity and admiration. His mother had buggered off leaving her four-year-old son in the lurch and he did not hold any grudge against her.

"You're an excellent boy, but I've told you that many times. I must have done something very good in a former life to deserve a squire like you," Tyrion praised.

"But yourself doubt that there is another life, my lord," the lad dared to say, joking. That would be good for them if they did not want to end up weeping onto each other's shoulder. Certainly they
would not display a very fine-looking or dignified view in front of the girls.

"It's true. But just in case." They smiled at each other and went on walking slowly. "Was there a
girl you liked much before meeting Leena? And I don't refer to the brothel girls." Tyrion observed
him sideways to see how he blushed. Was there something that did not make him redden? And yet,
is his legendary experience with Littlefinger's whores implied that he must not be precisely timid and
prudish in some specific intimate situations.

"Eh... Well, yes. There was one. She was my cousin, and my uncle Ser Cedric's niece."

"Wait, let me guess. Your uncle Cedric had a sister, didn't he? Lady Lessa, who married to... a
Peckledon, if my memory isn't wrong. Ser Lindon Peckledon. They had a daughter, called... Selina.
Selina Peckledon."

"Exactly, my lord," Pod confirmed. And he got even redder.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Today my Internet connection hasn't worked for several hours and I thought I wouldn't be able to update tonight and that I'd have to wait until tomorrow at least, but fortunately it's been repaired by the telemaintenance of the technical service of my Internet provider. So I'm happy to update as punctually as usual. :-) 

Meereen: Month 3. Day 25

"Dear me, she was pretty, from what I can see, or you wouldn't have turned as red as the crimson half of the banner in my adjacent hall, which you helped me to hang there. Wasn't there anything between you both, not even a romantic fling, some secret kiss?"

"Eh... No. She was shy too, my lord. And her mother reprimanded her each time she saw us talking. She said I wasn't much for her."

"What a bitch. Sure that girl liked you. Probably her mother have searched a husband for her by now," Tyrion commented.

"I don't know if Selina liked me that way, but it was pleasant to chat with her. She didn't despise me for being a simple squire from a minor branch of House Payne. I hope she's happy," Pod wished.

"Yes, let's hope that her mother hasn't married her to a son-of-a-bitch. And in King's Landing... Wasn't there anyone who made you sigh?"

Pod stared at the floor and he looked like he wanted to shrink.

"Ummm, well. I imagine that she wasn't a sassy kitchen wench or any of the other servants, or else I doubt you were a virgin when I offered you the gift in Littlefinger's brothel, and that day you told me that you hadn't been with any woman."

The lad did not answer, nor he dared to look at him. Tyrion was almost amused by his embarrassment. He needed that little distraction to ease a bit the tension of his oppressed heart. He would have to be as serene as he could to console Sansa later.

"Then she was not part of the servants of the castle. Was she a lady? The Keep was full of ladies and some of them, not many, were worth it. Did she belong to a minor house?"

"No, my lord," the squire denied, uncomfortably. Tyrion pitied him a little and stopped asking him questions, but it intrigued him that Pod had set his eyes on a lady from an important house. The boy knew that he had nothing to do in that regard, but even so he had felt captivated by the mysterious woman in question. She must be beautiful, but she surely was also more than a pretty face. Tyrion, by observing him in those times, thought he knew a little his squire's sentimental inclinations and sensed that, in order that he liked a girl truly, looks were not the only feature that counted. Figure was simply for delighting oneself's eyes and having a good time in bed, if that chance arose. On the other hand, Pod was afraid of manipulative and demanding women, who
made him feel even more insignificant than he already felt. He surely preferred the modest and kind ones. Which ones satisfied those conditions? Only a few. Tyrion had not seen him taking any interest in anyone of the Tyrell's entourage, for example. Not even in the beautiful, intelligent and charming Margaery, neither in her cousins, although to be honest none of those cousins seemed to have much inside of their heads.

A light turned on in Tyrion's brain. Sansa! Of course. How had not he paid attention to that before? Pod had been a bit besotted with Sansa. That was the reason why he looked at her even less than he looked at the other girls, he flushed more than usual and tripped over his own feet more than ever each time she was present. That had happened above all during the period when Tyrion was Hand of the King and they crossed paths often with Sansa through the Red Keep. Later, since Tyrion was pushed into the background and betrothed to her, the boy seemed to do a great effort to try to get her out of his head, as he was too much honest to desire his lord's future wife. Tyron ignored if the teen had been really successful with his effort, but that was difficult to discern. Pod got along clumsily with almost everything that was not fighting or sex, so in front of Tyrion he had not shown himself more awkward than other times, either if Sansa was there or not. She had not even noticed anything, or otherwise she would have commented it with Tyrion in some of their bedroom chats.

But if in other time Pod had felt a secret inclination toward her, it was a long time now since he had got over it, doubtlessly. And Leena had much to do with that.

That discovery surprised Tyrion slightly, but not why he was puzzled that Sansa had awoken an unmentionable passion in his squire. Only idiots like Joffrey and his gang of cheap thugs were unable to love someone or appreciate true beauty. What surprised Tyrion was that he had not realized that until that moment. That was a proof of the extreme discretion and honesty of the young squire, who was loyal to him and had not failed him a single time even though some time ago he had harboured feelings for Sansa.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 461

Meereen: Month 3. Day 25

Tyrion did not make any comment about his discovery, as it would be too much embarrassing for poor Pod, and he limited to hint a small smile quietly. He did not feel jealous of the teen, not at all. Nearly any other handsome man would cause him a slight burning sensation of mistrust, because he did not miss how they looked at Sansa. Whenever he saw them looking at her like that, he automatically considered them rivals, and he got on his guard, he could not help it. On the other hand, Pod was different. He did not pose any threat, not because he was not a good-looking lad or because he came from a minor house (the heart knew no social classes or other frivolous barriers, Tyrion thought feeling a stabbing pain, recalling Tysha), but because of the fact that he would never flirt with his lord's wife. He was one of the scant men, along with the Unsullied, he could trust in that regard.

The truth was that Sansa had not lacked admirers in the Red Keep. The Hound Clegane, in his rough and fatherly way, Pod in his shy, quiet and unnoticed way. Tyrion himself, who from the beginning of his return to the Red Keep had felt and tried to repulse with all his might the attraction she wielded on him. He wondered if there had been other admirers he ignored.

Pod looked relieved because of the fact that Tyrion had stopped insisting on finding out who the secret lady was, but on the other hand he was a perceptive boy and he might have guessed why his lord was smiling slightly in those moments. If he knew that Tyrion knew, he would not reveal it for anything in the world. Pod would not do it out of respect for his masters.

The stroll had taken them to other corridor and they went back close to the rooms of Missandei and of her deceased son. The ritual to prepare Menelan's body could finish any moment and Tyrion and Pod wanted to be there when their wives got out.

"Leena must be around two months pregnant by now, doesn't she? She's not showing it yet."

"No, not yet. But she's starting to readjust some of her gowns."

"Sansa too. Soon their clothes will be tight on them." Tyrion glanced at the door of the rooms that had been Menelan's last home, which he had shared with his new mother. The child had been very happy during the latest weeks while he was wasting away step by step.

Right then the door opened and the girls, except for Missandei who must be keeping vigil over the small corpse, got out and threw themselves in their husbands' arms. Tyrion would have given anything to have a normal stature, even if it was just to spare Sansa having to kneel on the hard floor to embrace him. When her belly grew, it would be very uncomfortable for her to kneel and Tyrion did not want her to suffer more discomforts than necessary.

She cried on his shoulder and neck and he caressed her hair and back silently. In that moment words were useless. Near them, Pod and Leena were in a similar position, but with no need for her to kneel, of course.

After a while Sansa quieted down a bit and was able to stand up. Tyrion encircled her waist with an arm and she rested on his shoulder, and they walked slowly back to their chambers. Sansa would need rest that night to attend the funeral in the early morning. Tyrion did not want to hear of her taking turns with Missandei in the task of keeping vigil over the kid's body. The boy's foster
mother, who did not have a pregnancy in tow, and Grey Worm, who was more than used to spend sleepless nights, were enough for that.

When they arrived at their rooms, Tyrion helped her to don her nightgown and tucked her in the blankets. He had accounts to balance and budgets to calculate in his ledgers, but he decided that that afternoon his wife needed him much more than state finances and climbed into bed with her.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 462

Meereen: Month 3. Day 25

"He seemed to have improved a lot and he was fighting against his disease. He was so young...," Sansa sobbed on his chest.

"His lungs were very damaged, darling. He could no longer breathe. At least now he's at peace. He doesn't have to struggle more or suffer an unbearable pain for a breath of air."

"The dude who caused him that disease was a monster. Only monsters can do that to a child," Sansa hissed with her voice hoarse and loaded with hatred.

"He probably is dead by now. Surely the ex-slaves killed him in the riot of Yunkai, or he has perished of hunger and thirst in the wastelands. I doubt he'll hurt other children again." Tyrion kissed her hair, which had its touch of lemon scent. "Now try to sleep, beauty. I'll wake you up when it's time to have dinner. Rest well." He went on stroking her softly until he felt that her breath was deep and regular. His own eyelids were closing as well. He had not slept well the latest nights and he was starting to show signs of his accumulated fatigue.

Tyrion was coming back to the rooms of the Red Keep he shared with Sansa. That day he hoped to cheer her up with a gift he had ordered to the best silversmiths of the city. It was a silver brooch shaped as a direwolf perfectly worked, sitting on his haunches and staring directly forward. Its eyes were two small diamonds and its expression, very well made, conveyed fierceness and dignity. Tyrion wondered if Sansa would limit to thank him coldly and to put the brooch away in a drawer or in a chest to forget about it, or if at last a crack would appear on her armour of courtesy and she would let some of her emotions escape to the surface. Perhaps that small wolf would give back for an instant their shine to her gorgeous blue eyes encircled by melancholy, or it would curve her rosy lips into a very light smile that would not be addressed to Tyrion, but to the memories of all she had lost. Like a fool, he hoped that she would smile at him, a sincere smile in which he could see a trace of her inner world. It was another of his ridiculous dreams, but he did not lose anything by trying. He had decided that from then on he would present small gestures to her, not necessarily gifts like that, but every day he would have some sort of kindness toward her, though Sansa did not ask for it, because she would not do it, not ever. But he did not care about that. She deserved to be treated like a princess, and moreover that gallant plan helped Tyrion to feel a bit better. As if showing gallantry to her could erase everything his family had done to her, what himself had done to her by marrying her, all the sufferings she endured daily. Even though Sansa did not want his attention, he would give it to her. After all, she was a lady who had grown up dreaming of romantic love, and she was barely more than a child, so Tyrion had faith that his gallant gestures would make a dent on her armour slowly, subtly. And he was honest. Tyrion really wanted to please her, lavish her, pamper her as long as she allowed him to. He did not want to do it only for the hope to earn her trust gradually, and even, maybe, a little affection. He wanted to do it because at bottom he also was a romantic who needed to express his longings to a woman who awoke them. And Sansa awoke them, strongly. Not even Shae had made him feel such wishes to flip on her.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
In his childhood and puberty he spent hours recreating in his mind the woman he would love one day and who would love him back. In his imagination, the woman's appearance was barely defined, imprecise. He only knew she would be beautiful in a way that would take his breath away each time he stared at her. He did not care really about the colour of her hair, of her eyes, or of her skin, or if she would be tall or short, thin or voluptuous, but when he looked at her he would feel happy to be alive. What he recreated clearly in those daydreams was the way how he would love her, and how she would love him. He would say affectionate sentences and words to her, of those that he knew lovers told by each other's ear. Sometimes he had caught, spying stealthily, a stable boy whispering to a maidservant, kitchen wench or laundress in Casterly Rock and she had flushed as a tomato and had thrown glances at the lad or had kissed him on the lips in a way that caused a tingle in Tyrion's small body and an erection on his crotch. He was sure that the teen's amorous compliments were not precisely very refined, and Tyrion had read in books of chivalry gallant expressions that the heroes said to the ladies they were in love with, but what he did not doubt was that all girls, no matter their condition, loved to be lavished, and Tyrion was dying to have a girl whom expressing his feelings to and showering with attention. He was dying to be kissed like that stable boy had been kissed, and much more than that. Since he was nine, Tyrion knew exactly (or at least as exactly as he could perceive that at that age) how a man and a woman joined, not simply by having read it in anatomy books and having seen the vague illustrations that described copulation. Once he had seen Jaime and Cersei doing it. He had never told anyone, not even Jaime. He remained hidden, without emitting a single sound, fearing to be caught. Cersei's reaction if she came to find out that he had been spying on them in their intimate and forbidden activities terrorized him. Tyrion knew that what his siblings did would appal the adults, and especially their father, and Tyrion himself felt a mix of rejection and curiosity. In that occasion he did not go away from the place where they were lying down naked, but he stayed there, observing them in the darkness, with his heart pounding. The truth was that the chamber was dim and it was not much what Tyrion could see. Despite the veil of shadows he made out their back and forth motions and their muffled groans until them both finished, and even after they had got dressed and were gone, Tyrion remained there a while longer, shaking in fear and in something else he could not identify.

Though he did not spy his siblings ever more, feeling mean and uncomfortable, since that day Tyrion also dreamed of lying that way with a woman he loved. Cersei seemed to like what Jaime did to her, so Tyrion would do the same to his lady. If he managed to make her love him, she would forget that he was a dwarf and she would never want to grow apart from him.

Those naïve but not innocent memories of his childhood were trying to warn him that he should not be carried away by his fantasies once more, but he shook his head, feeling on his fingers the texture of the brooch while he was walking to his bedrooms, willing to lavish his lady. But when he arrived at the door, he promptly noticed that something was wrong. It was half-shut instead of being closed. Sansa would never stay inside leaving the door open, neither would she get out without closing it. She was fully aware of the dangers that stalked in the Red Keep, and Tyrion had not needed to remind her of it. That alarmed him. He put his ear closer to the door carefully and heard voices.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 464

Meereen: Month 3. Day 25

Joffrey! The filthy bastard was in the bedroom. With Sansa.

No!

He was threatening her, and Sansa was sobbing.

Tyrion felt a hatred like he never had felt bubbling up within him. The snot must be accompanied by his girl-beater henchmen, and if Tyrion entered disarmed he would have no chance to rescue Sansa. But on the other hand, if he lasted too much to face them, Joffrey would achieve what undoubtedly he had resolved to get by going there. Raping her.

What should he do? He had no time to go in search for Bronn or Pod.

He touched his belt and pulled the dagger out of its sheath. But, what could a dwarf do with a dagger against at least two men with armours and swords? Because Joff never went anywhere without taking with him two of his thugs at the lowest. Tyrion knew that in short distances the dagger was much more practical than the sword, but two opponents were an almost impossible challenge. Even so, he must try it the best he could. He had to save Sansa. He could not let those savages violate her.

He opened the door slightly, slowly, and looked at the scene, to check if the assailants were turning his backs on him and that way he could get close stealthily, taking advantage of his short height, and attack them. He might stab his dagger into one of the gaps between the sections of the armour. The armpit was a vulnerable spot. Luckily, they were not looking at the door. Joffrey was on the bed, straddling Sansa and ripping her dress, and she was crying to him to stop. Tyrion started to see everything red and forced himself to keep control, walking closer step by step. He plunged the dagger deeply into Ser Meryn's underarm and after doing it he felt such a great satisfaction and the thirst to kill those bastards flooded him in such a way that he suddenly turned into a beast. Ser Meryn screamed and fell down, holding his bleeding wound, and his fall alerted Ser Boros, Joff's and Cersei's other puppet, but before he had time to react, Tyrion laid hands on the sword hanging on the knight's belt and snatched it from him. He gripped it in his right hand and uttered a sound very much like a howl.

"Release her right now, you piece of junk! Or you'll end up skewered like a pig roasting over a fire."

Joffrey let Sansa loose, petrified, and she, trembling violently, hastened to cover herself the best she could with the remnants of her torn gown. Tyrion shot her a quick reassuring glance and faced the intruders again. Ser Meryn was dying on the floor.

"And now, scumbags, you're going to move your asses out of my rooms and you, shoddy knight, will be smart to bugger off from this castle before my bodyguard Bronn slices you from head to foot. I don't care you are a sworn kingsguard. If you stay here for another hour, I'll kill you. You understand?"

The cowed knight nodded, wide-eyed, and he ran out of the room.

Now only the snot was left.
"And you, coward rat, don't think you're going to get off scot-free after what you've done to my wife. I don't care a shit that you're the king and that your mother is my whore sister. You can run now to hide under her skirts, I don't care. You're going to pay anyway."

Just in that moment something lacerating pierced Tyrion and everything turned into sheer pain.

No! Not now. I have to save her! Let me save her! No! No!

Joffrey was laughing again right to his face and he pinned Sansa again on the bed, stripping off what was left of her clothes while Tyrion was dying on the floor next to Ser Meryn...

Tyrion woke up all of a sudden, sweating. He ignored what time it was, but it must be nearly dinner time. Night had fallen outside already and the bedroom was dark. Still panting, Tyrion got up carefully in order not to awake Sansa and went to light the candles. He was recalling the nightmare quite clearly. It had been spine-chilling. Everything had looked so real... He still felt hatred boiling through his veins, the feeling of helplessness, the final anguish for having been a complete good-for-nothing, for having abandoned Sansa to horror and to a terrible fate, for not having been able to protect her...

He made an effort to calm down, telling himself that it had only happened in his head and that Sansa was alright. He watched her in her sleep and noticed that she was having nightmares too, as she was quivering restlessly. When he finished lighting the candles, he went back to the bed and embraced her, comforting her to free her from her bad dreams.

"Shhh, my love, easy, it's only a dream, I'm here, I'll protect you..." But he could not help feeling unease in the pit of his stomach. He felt that deep down his words were a lie.

He could not have protected her from Joffrey if he had decided to carry out the misdeed of the nightmare.

And now he neither could protect her from her own nightmares.
Chapter 465

Astapor

Brienne still could not believe she had been so lucky. She and Larko were at the port of Astapar after the long journey around Valyria and its cursed aura. In Volantis she had got used to the idea that they would not find any ship to take them directly to Slaver's Bay, but it turned out that she was wrong. Some intrepid captains saw a gold mine in the cities the Mother of Dragons had turned upside down, and they defied the blockade that the slaver states had tried to impose with less success than they expected. Meereen's fleet kept the pirates at bay and had established a protective barrier for the vessels that headed in peace for the lands conquered by Daenerys Targaryen. Moreover, it was rumoured that another hundred boats coming from Pentos were plowing through the waters of the Summer Sea towards Meereen. At that point it was not a secret for anyone that merchant Illyrio Mopatis was an ally of the Silver Queen.

All that implied that the situation was not as bad as Brienne had dreaded, and she had managed to find direct transport to the interior of Slaver's Bay. The captain of the South Wind affirmed that he knew his counterpart in Meereen, a Tolosi who had pledged his services to queen Daenerys and commanded her merchant fleet. Both captains had done business at some harbours and doubtlessly the Mother of Dragons had recruited a good ally who provided his foster city with supplies. Besides the captain commented that since Astapor and Yunkai had also overthrown the Masters and were fighting to consolidate themselves as Meereen's allies, more and more supporters of the queen were traveling to Astapor from places like Volantis, Selhorys, Tolos, Mantarys, Bhorash or New Ghis, and from the Red City all the travelers were guaranteed relatively safe transport, both by land and by sea, towards Daenerys's city. In spite of all, Brienne did not let herself be carried away by euphoria. The route by sea was not free from dangers and the Meereenese fleet was not infallible or large enough yet to cover the whole Slaver's Bay, and if one chose the other alternative, it was only advisable to travel in big groups or caravans through the wastelands that surrounded the three cities. She and Larko had been discussing which was the best option, and they decided that maritime transport, though it would not be much less risky than traveling by solid ground, at least it would be faster. Moreover, as there were not many foreign boats that set a course for Meereen and the only ones to do it came from allied cities, a ship with an Astapori flag would be welcome.

Brienne and Larko observed the city walls and the myriad of buildings and pyramids inside them. The figure of the Harpy Brienne knew that until some months ago had dominated the top of the Great Pyramid was conspicuously absent, knocked down by one of the Astapori kings undoubtedly and melted to swell the royal coffers. When they got close to the gates along with the rest of the passengers of the South Wind, the soldiers who flanked them ordered the newcomers to halt. They asked their names and their places of origin, inspected their weapons, their bundles and handbags and inquired about the reason of their visit to Astapor. Most people went there out of business, to visit relatives or friends or were passing through the city on their way to Yunkai or Meereen, especially the latter, where some of them had the intention to ask the Breaker of Chains for asylum. Or, in her absence, to ask her royal counselors for it. During much of the journey from Volantis, Brienne had heard of her disappearance while riding one of her dragons, and that setback worried the people who wanted to come under her protection. There were not many escaped slaves who could afford taking a boat, and only very few of them were Volantene. The tattoos on their faces gave them away and the majority of the captains who carried out their routes from Braavos to Asshai or even beyond did not commit themselves to carry people who obviously were escaping from their owners, because they might be in trouble. At least those who did not have tattoos could camouflage themselves as common passengers. Anyway, some captains, scant of them, took the
risk knowingly, especially those who had a little conscience or were supporters of the queen and wanted to help her on their own way, or they carried adventure in their blood, or greed, as Brienne knew it used to be the most decisive reason.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Astapor

Brienne had also felt restless when she found out that Daenerys's whereabouts were unknown. Some people said that she had fallen down from the heights and her own dragons had eaten her roasted corpse, others stated that she had gone to the furthest and unexplored Eastern lands never to come back, and others were sure that she had crossed paths with a Dothraki khalasar and they had taken her prisoner. There were as well those who were convinced that she herself had turned into a dragon and she was flying freely with her three mates, and she surely had forgotten her human subjects.

Whatever they said, what seemed to be true was that Meereen was carrying on, waiting for her return, and that the counselors and the army kept order and normality, and they had prevented the Meereenese citizens from tearing each other apart. The Imp, Tyrion Lannister, together with his wife the Lady Sansa, Ser Barristan Selmy (who Brienne admired more than all the other knights, including Jaime, and she was longing for meeting him) and other stalwarts of the queen were the responsible ones for the smooth running of the city. At least that was what the Mother of Dragons' supporters opined. Her slanderers told, as if they had seen them first-hand, the supposed perversions and atrocities she and her henchmen were carrying out and that had led an ancient, venerable and respectable city to its downfall.

For what Brienne knew about Jaime's brother, he was a competent man and she was sure he did not mistreat Sansa. She ignored if the young lady was happy with him (she would verify that when she could observe the lady daily), but she surely did not lack protection. And if Brienne was admitted, Sansa would count on a personal bodyguard willing to give her life on her behalf.

Well thought of, probably the queen's absence would be an advantage, in case that she had not returned yet when Brienne arrived at Meereen, because she could appeal to Lord Tyrion directly and she was sure that he would not skimp on his wife's protection. And once Daenerys came back, if she ever did, she would not call into question a decision adopted by one of the counselors who were her right hand. A decision aimed to enhance her subjects' security. Brienne's perspectives seemed to be improving, but she, as usual, did not want to be carried away. Thousands of things might go wrong and she was not confident. Larko, on the other hand, had spent the whole journey on the *South Wind* brimming over with optimism and good mood and sometimes even she had been infected by it. It was impossible not to succumb to smile when she looked at him.

They had been practising in the ship with their wooden swords. They had purchased them in the market of Volantis and they trained every day. Larko was not a natural-born warrior, but he learnt quickly, had good reflexes and was fast. He resisted stubbornly the blows and the wounds in his pride each time she knocked him down. She was very hard on him, but she did it for his sake, and he accepted the challenge without frightening off. True fighters were knocked cold and bit the dust thousands of times before being able to consider themselves worthy of holding a sword. Moreover, Brienne made him exercise constantly to improve his strength and resistance. In the boat he asked for work even for free, because the hard tasks would keep him fit. The first days the sailors had mocked him, but shortly after they started to treat him with respect and friendliness, as soon as they grew fond of him due to his cheerful character and they picked up on his tenacity. Also Brienne had felt her respect for him grow day after day and currently she not only did not regret having let him keep her company, but she had to admit life was easier and more pleasant with him and the journey was even faster than it would have been if she was alone. With his help everything was lighter and bearable.
Chapter 467

Astapor

She still did not want to analyze what she felt for the young man. She really liked him, she did not doubt it. The sight of his body awoke in her sensations that only Jaime had aroused. He was a stronger man than he looked, and she had come to trust him in a way she had trusted scant people along her life. She sometimes caught him staring at her with longing and melancholy, as if he was waiting for something else, but Larko had accepted her such as she was and he did not hold any grudge against her for what she could not give him.

Once, in Volantis, he had come back to the inn in the middle of the night and Brienne woke up when she heard his steps, but she pretended to be still asleep while he was getting ready to go to bed. She smelled beer in his breath and a diffuse musky scent he seemed to have tried to disguise with a quick wash in a basin. That scent only could mean one thing.

She felt as if she had been stabbed in the heart. He had spent the night with a woman. Brienne told herself that was the most normal thing in the world, he was a young man full of passions and needs, and he owed her nothing. She had made him very clear that in her life there was not room for love. It should not hurt her that he sought relief to his sexual urgencies, but it hurt her. It hurt her so much that she wanted to cry. But she forced herself to do what she always did every time something tormented her. She put into practice her self-discipline and that always worked. That did not manage to erase the pain, but she recovered as much serenity as not to let herself be carried away by the impulse of yelling at him and kicking him out of the room they shared. It would have been absurd and unfair, and Brienne did not want to lose him, neither wanted her to ruin their friendship. So she resigned herself to the fact that he was perfectly free to bed whoever he fancied.

The next morning, there was certain tension between them but neither of them broached the subject, and besides their everyday activities and their training soon distracted Brienne's mind and she managed to return to normality in her behaviour with Larko. He on his part accepted the tacit agreement not to meddle in certain aspects of each other's privacy and to keep a reasonable peace between them both. The only change was that they stopped sleeping in the same bed. Brienne insisted on sleeping on the floor. She arranged a corner of the bedroom, where she put some blankets. She did not give in when he, courteous, offered her the entire bed, but Brienne remained inflexible. She was used to sleeping on surfaces that would be very uncomfortable for him.

Though she made the effort to push that thought to the bottom of her mind, she was glad that one of the advantages of traveling by boat was that it would be very rare that there was a woman on board with whom he could flirt and have intercourse. In that regard Brienne did not have to fear that he arrived pretty late with all the looks of having been in the bed of an unknown woman, what in land was inevitable. And as the cabin was so narrow, they had no other choice but sharing the bed, and that did not bother her so much as when she dreaded that he lied down by her side smelling of sex.

The journey went by without great incidents apart from the stormy weather and the heavy atmosphere they bore along the days they were bordering the foggy coasts of Valyria. Larko worked hard together with the other sailors, trained with her every day and when they reached their destination the captain wanted to pay the young man for the services he had provided aboard, although he had offered to do it for free. He had earned the hard way a reward for his work, and the captain's friendship.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 468

Astapor

The guards of the ramparts of Astapor checked the newcomers. Brienne announced the purpose of her visit. They were passing through the city on their way to Meereen, where they had the intention to ask for asylum, and they needed to stay at an inn while they waited for the first ship that set sail to the queen's city. The guards warned them not to cause trouble or otherwise king Imarion's justice would fall upon them, and they gave free entry to them.

The signs of decline were visible in many streets. Quite a few houses showed serious damages because of the riots, and had not been fully repaired yet. Some areas were nearly impassable, covered with debris and litter, and the swarms of flies were buzzing with disgusting insistence. Moreover, Brienne and Larko crossed paths with beggars and naked and emaciated children. That display of poverty did not surprise Brienne, who had seen similar things everywhere. But among the stories about Meereen, it was told that there were not beggars or untended children in the streets, as Daenerys offered housing and support to all those who asked her for shelter. From what she could see, the Astapori king left a lot to be desired regarding those matters, and probably also regarding others. Brienne wondered how the freedfolk had admitted him as their king. Seemingly the only thing in which he stood out was oratory. But that was not so strange. Throughout history lots of idiots with loquacity had sat on the thrones. Imarion the Clement was not an exception.

They walked away from the slums and headed for the city centre, searching for a more presentable area where there were stores and inns. Finally they found one that did not looked as if it was going to fall to bits any moment and they rented a small room almost bare except for the bed and little more, but at least it looked clean.

While they placed their baggage and Larko used the occasion to freshen up in the basin, Brienne sighed inwardly thinking that a large city like that offered too much temptations to a young foreigner. In addition to the fact that she detested the idea of him seeking female company, she feared that something could happen to him, alone in the streets, in the darkness of the night. He might be assaulted by thieves or simply by thugs who enjoyed torturing helpless people. Obviously citizen security was not the main priority in Astapor and Brienne felt concerned for Larko, if he fancied taking a stroll over there. But she did not allow her face to show what she felt. He was old enough to do whatever he wanted. On the other hand, she neither wanted to offer herself to accompany him in his night escapades. Her self-esteem prevented her from it. Unless he asked her expressly to go out together, like in the couple of times he had proposed it to her in Volantis, she did not broach the subject. She might get in his way if he had other plans, and she refused to be a nuisance.

As if he had read her mind, Larko asked her if she felt like going for a walk through the city, in order to know it better. After what she had seen in the slums and the effects of battle that were clearly visible even in the less damaged areas, Brienne did not feel much seduced by the idea of walking along those streets, but it even seduced her less that he went out alone. And it had been him who had asked her, so she accepted. She wondered if at nightfall he would be craving for her to leave his way open in his search for bed partners. Well, she would not give him the chance to crave for it, and she would make sure to get out of the way at the right moment.

Brienne, as usual, wore her whole armour, Oathkeeper and her two daggers, and Larko had purchased a thick but flexible leather doublet that provided protection to the trunk and the back in case of an attack. Besides, he had bought a dagger he carried on his belt. And when he had
improved his skill with the sword, he would get one. He knew he never would be worthy of owning a sword like *Oathkeeper*, and he was alright with a much more modest one.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Astapor

The activity at that hour of the afternoon had decreased considerably, but in many houses scaffolds could be seen and the bricks and other materials that had not been left unusable had been piled to be used in the repairs, what indicated that the new population composed in its majority of freedfolk were working hard to rebuild their devastated city.

"Barely a few months ago, destruction and death were brutal here. Tens of thousands of people died. But people usually don't learn from their past mistakes. Everything is forgotten soon. Even the worst things are forgotten in the course of time," Brienne commented, remembering Galladon, and she felt the guilt that invaded her automatically because of her brother's death. Even if she had made the effort to keep his lovely features in her memory, they were fading away more and more. She was not already sure about the exact shape of his small nose, she doubted if the cowlick that disheveled his hair on his forehead approached the right side or the left side, if his lips were plump like hers or a little thinner, she had lost the precise timbre of his laughter, and she neither would have been able to tell how tall he was exactly in the moment of his death. He was shorter than her, but he surely would have been a tall man and his training as a knight would have sculpted his body and he would have become a hefty and handsome lad. Each time she thought about what he might have been, she felt weighed down and she had to shake her head not to permit the pain to spread throughout her being. Galladon would not want her to break down.

She felt saddened by the certainty that even the pain for Galladon's absence had ended up being bearable over the years. Oblivion erased everything slowly, for good or ill. Such as the citizens of Astapor would not last to begin to forget.

"Most people want to start all over again. Life goes on," Larko pointed.

"Yes. And all of us build our lives over others' corpses."

Larko did not argue. His whole family was dead and he had outlived them.

"Do you think that the dragon queen will return to Meereen, Brienne? What will happen if she doesn't?," he asked, to change topic. Recalling their dead relatives was not the merriest activity in an afternoon like that, and anyway they could not do anything to change the past and bring them back to life.

"I think that, if she's alive, she'll do whatever she can to come back. She's not helpless. She has three dragons. And someone must be searching for her. I'd be puzzled that his counselors had remained idle doing nothing to find her. And in case she didn't come back... Meereen hardly would hold up without her. But, one way or another, either if Meereen collapses or not, I owe myself to Lady Sansa. If I have to drag her off from there to save her life, I'll do it," Brienne asseverated, with the determination to which she had always clung to keep on.

"When we arrive there, I'd like to learn a profession. I'm afraid that I'm not a prodigy as a squire, and you won't want to have me stuck to your ass day and night. I'll have to devote myself to something, but the trouble is that I don't know yet what my true skills are, if I have any. I don't mind working hard when it's necessary, but it doesn't thrill me to spend my life breaking my back loading sacks and bundles like a simple labourer. Perhaps my thing is manual skills. As a boy I was good at drawing. You think that will be useful to me?," Larko asked, with a slight hint of irony.
"There are many guilds of freedfolk in Meereen. The queen has established a system in which each one chooses the profession most in accordance with his or her tastes and flairs. You'll find yours, I don't doubt it," Brienne said. Larko would fit there perfectly, she was sure. As for her... She only had an alternative, and she could not fail again.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 470

Astapor

They arrived at the Square of Pride, that formerly was the main slave market in the city, and had been reconverted to the nerve centre of the new Astapori society. Around its perimeter stood shops and taverns newly built, and Brienne and Larko sat down by one of the outdoor tables, from where they could look out over the whole square and the adjoining buildings. Brienne always liked to have a good view of their surroundings, to watch people's circulation.

A swarthy, very short and slender girl walked out of the establishment to tend to them. There were scant clients at that hour and she could allow herself a rest and serve the tables without the haste of the rush hours. She smiled at Larko, attentive and suggestive, and he returned the smile. Brienne averted her eyes. She did not want to see how he engaged himself in a flirtation game with the waitress through a play of glances. They ordered some beer and the wench headed again for the inside to prepare their drinks.

"I'm able to draw things almost exactly as I imagine them," he said, resuming the topic of the conversation that had been interrupted. "That can be useful to me. I might draw or paint designs, or decorate walls or figures... Maybe they need artists in Meereen. Esthetics is important too."

The waitress came back with their beers and left them on the table, addressing a wink at Larko, and she moved away to other table. Brienne, trying to ignore the flirting scene, drank a gulp and looked at her mate. When they arrived at Meereen, she would become Sansa's bodyguard and he would settle in another place, where she could not see him everyday, or sleep beside him, or speak with him. He would look for a girl to marry and to start a family, and would forget her. Brienne did not want to think about that for now.

"You'll fit there, you'll see," she said, trying to smile to hide her sadness. But she must not disguise it very well, because he sensed her mood, as usual. Sometimes she felt irritated that he could read her expression so easily.

"Brienne, whatever happens... You're my friend. You saved me. You've given me the opportunity to begin a new life. I'll never forget that."

The beer was not of much use to push down the knot she had in her throat.

"Thanks. I know you won't. But when we reach Meereen, our lives will take very different directions, and I'll understand that for you it's not very funny to visit from time to time a sworn sword who will spend a great part of the day protecting her lady." Brienne made the attempt to bring a little humour to her words, but she had never been good at joking and that surely sounded more like a gloomy sentence.

"It'll be an honour to visit the best warrior woman I've met," he said, faking a vow, smiling.

"I have the impression that you haven't met many warrior women in your life, Larko. You have no one to compare me to." She smiled as well.

"You fight better than all the men I've met. I suppose I do have a few dudes to compare you to," he opposed. "You're lucky, you know? Lucky to have found something to devote to in body and soul. Something for which you have a gift. I, on the contrary, don't even know yet what I'm really destined to do. Certainly not to be a squire."
"And I thought you were beginning to be fond of being my squire," she scolded with a false reproachful tone.

"Oh, of course. Any boy's dream is to be beaten with a wooden sword every day and work like a slave," he complained comically.

"Well, admit that you've become stronger and more agile. And learning to use the sword properly requires lots of sacrifices. You yourself wanted to learn."

"Yes. Precisely that is what has prevented me from throwing the damned sword to the bottom of the sea." Both of them chuckled. "Thanks for training me. You really are patient with me."

"Well, you're not the worst guy I've fought with."

"Oh, indeed I'm not. The kids you fought as a little girl were worse than me, that's for sure," he joked.

"I've met several would-be knights, much older than the kids I fought as a little girl, that you would defeat easily, I assure you."

"Oh. Then after all I'm not as hopeless as I believed with a sword in my hand."

They both chuckled again, tipsy by the beer.

"You know what, Brienne? It'd be very possible that Queen Daenerys appoints you as a knight one day. You remember that story we were told that the Meereenese freed girls are receiving military training along with the boys? The Mother of Dragons wants women in her army. She's changing loads of rules. Why wouldn't she appoint you as a knight? In Westeros that wouldn't be likely, but Meereen isn't Westeros, neither Daenerys is a Westerosi queen. Maybe she later on will sit on the Iron Throne, but she'll do things her own way, because her heart isn't from there, or from here, it's only her own's."

Brienne's eyes sparkled. "It'd be the dream of my lifetime."

"I know. And no one deserves to reach it more than you."
Tyrion had everything ready and now the only thing left was to surprise Sansa. He wished to raise her spirits, because Menelan's death had affected her profoundly. She had insisted on going on with her daily tasks as normal, claiming that they helped her to keep her mind busy for most of the day, and Tyrion did not oppose to that when he saw that her work made her feel better. When night fell she went to bed early, shortly after dining, and generally she wasn't very much in the mood for talking. During daytime she tried to keep active as long as possible so when night came tiredness prevented her from thinking too much about Menelan and remaining awake until late due to insomnia, that she attempted to hide when it struck her, but in front of Tyrion it was impossible to fake sleep. He noticed it and caressed her softly to calm her down, and he stayed awake beside her until at last the sedative touch of his hands managed to achieve the desired effect and only then he allowed himself his own rest. He understood that sleep was the best way she had to escape from reality, forget about everything for several hours and heal progressively the wounds of her soul, and he was careful not to wake her up. Sometimes, when he could not sleep, he stayed staring at her in the darkness, trying to imagine what dreams would be passing through her mind at those moments and wishing that, for once, they were not nightmares. Tyrion was glad to have spared her the sight of the public execution of the Sons of the Harpy. If she had witnessed that, those images would have joined the horrors that assaulted her those late nights and that Tyrion perceived in her restless movements, in the sweat that formed little droplets on her forehead and in her incoherent groans.

Her quiet pain caused him a deep worry, because it brought him memories of King's Landing, of that cruel period when he saw her suffer in silence. Sansa used to sit down on the windowsill and she probably stared without seeing the beautiful landscape of Blackwater Bay, where was still visible the wreckage of the ships destroyed by wildfire. Tyrion in that time wondered if she regretted that he had put up a fight against Stannis to prevent him from taking the city. Of course she regrets it, idiot dwarf. If you hadn't insisted so much on saving this stinking city, and if your father hadn't arrived in time, Sansa probably now would be thousands of miles far away from here and she wouldn't have had to marry you. Her mother and her brother wouldn't have been slaughtered. She'd have come back with them and together they'd comfort each other from their terrible losses. She'd have hope and, though she mourned her father and her missing siblings, she'd recover a little confidence in the future. Her eyes would stop being puffed at all times by weeping ad she'd crave for eating lemon cakes instead of losing her appetite and let the days pass barely touching her meals. He would have given anything so she could see her dream fulfilled. He would have been willing to free her from her marriage vows and allow her to go, if he had been given the chance. He would have done it if Tywin had kicked the bucket opportunely, thus giving him free way to try to right the wrong where his father had tucked them, and if she had had someone waiting for her. Someone who really felt concerned for her and was able to take care of her. Her aunt Lysa was round the bend. Tyrion felt chills only by recalling her. She was not a very reliable alternative, and he was not very sure that she would accept Sansa the way she deserved, but even Lysa and the Vale would have been an improvement for the girl. At least there she would not feel forced to live in the same place as her Lannister enemies.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4. Day 5

Tyrion remembered how the evening sun lit up her hair and her outline, giving her a halo of melancholic beauty. Sometimes, when he entered the rooms and she was turning her back on the door and sitting on the windowsill, he stayed still, staring at her as if enchanted, absorbing in his pupils that lovely image. He contemplated her as much as he wanted for a few seconds, taking advantage of the fact that she was not facing him. He admired her perfect curves and her hair that, lit up by the setting sun, looked like fire. As always, he felt mean for desiring her even in the moments when Sansa was suffering dreadfully. Her extreme vulnerability made him feel more than ever the longing for being the man she was dreaming of. But a sarcastic laughter sounded in his brain and stopped his steps sharply. Cut the crap, Halfman. She doesn't want your solace. She wants nothing from you. With that guffaw sounding in his head, he addressed Sansa a discreet greeting not to disturb her too much and he tried to do anything, or to pretend he was doing anything, always quietly, to grant her her space, and so that she could delude herself believing he was not there. His eyes wandered furtively to the window and he turned from time to time the pages of the book he was pretending to read. But in the rooms, with his young wife languishing in sorrow quietly, it was impossible to him to pretending to read. But in the rooms, with his young wife languishing in sorrow quietly, it was impossible to him to focus on anything. To be able to undertake any worthy task, his solar of Master of Coin was the only place where he managed to tear his mind from Sansa at times.

But now he could do something to cheer her up, and Oberyn, nothing more and nothing less, had helped him to find a way to accomplish it.

"I don't like to see sad beautiful women. I see you're losing your faculties, little lion," the Viper accused him with a sarcasm that stung slightly Tyrion's pride, though this one did not let it show, displaying his ironic expression. "As you're a bit short of ideas to make your wife happy, I'm going to offer you a solution."

Tyrion had felt annoyed to admit that what Oberyn had suggested him was a good idea. In the subsequent days, he made sure to set everything ready with the help of Pod, Mhyraz, Dara, some other children and even a couple of Dornishmen who gave a helping hand. He also asked for the collaboration of some members of the pyramid's staff, to whom he promised a reward. Moreover, he asked Ser Barristan and Oberyn to replace him that day in the government tasks.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 473

Meereen: Month 4. Day 5

The old knight did not approve the life that the prince was leading. Daenerys was to him like the daughter he never had and he did not approve that her betrothed spent his time going around the brothels of Meereen or seducing women and men, but, although the honest knight was a little strained in his presence, the queen herself had chosen the Dornishman as her future husband and Ser Barristan admitted the advantages of their match, so he tried to be as polite to the prince as he could, what must cost him an effort, as Oberyn showed himself as scathing as he usually did. He was trouble maker by nature, but moreover he did not have the Kingsguard in high esteem, and he did not deprive himself of saying it openly. One night, while they were all around the Council table, he and Ser Barristan started an argument and Oberyn reproached with bitterness full of venom that not a single member of the Kingsguard had protected Elia. Jaime Lannister was very busy assassinating the Mad King from behind and the others had followed Rhaegar blindly to war and even three of them, the Lord Commander Gerold Hightower, Ser Arthur Dayne the Sword of the Morning and Ser Oswell Whent had died at the Tower of Joy, fighting to prevent Eddard Stark from taking with him Rhaegar's lover, Lyanna Stark. Tyrion felt bothered by that direct attack at Jaime, no matter how many times he had heard the same along the years, but he restrained himself. He tried to think about how he would feel if someone had raped and killed a sister he loved tenderly, and slaughtered her children. With a sister like Cersei it was difficult for him to put himself in Oberyn's shoes, but in spite of that he understood his feelings. Almost all the Kingsguard had run to the War of the Usurper except for Jaime, and he took the decision of saving King's Landing from wildfire at the expense of earning his bad reputation for posterity and the whole kingdom's contempt. He had no time to defend Elia. And Tyrion was not very sure that he had defended her if he had known that Tywin had sent Ser Gregor and his henchmen to murder Elia's children, and that by the way the huge Clegane monster decided to have fun on his own account turning the princess' last minutes into the worst hell a woman could be through. Would Jaime have taken the trouble on her behalf, facing one of the worst bloodthirsty slaughters in the Seven Kingdoms and his gang of vermins? Would he have intervened, defying openly their father, Tywin? He might have stopped them without unsheathing the sword. If he had interposed between them and Elia and her children, the rabid dogs would not have dared to touch a single hair on the head of Tywin's favourite son or go through him. Though they were beasts, Lord Tywin was their lord and even they were scared of the Lannister lion. To disobey a direct order given by him would have been nothing compared to what would await them if his beloved son ended up wounded or dead because of them. Tyrion wanted to believe that Jaime had not noticed that the beasts had been sent to break through the Red Keep to carry out the carnage. Something told Tyrion that Jaime had not known about that. But, in case he had discovered it in time, what would he have done? That question left a bitter aftertaste in him, like his suspicion that it had been his brother who had pushed Bran, or his certainty about other actions that to Tyrion's eyes had been brutal and unnecessary, as when Jaime beat their cousin Alton to death while he was kept prisoner by Robb Stark. Tyrion loved Jaime with all his flaws, and he on his own did not consider himself fit to judge him harshly, as his own hands were stained with blood too. With a lot of blood. He was not better than Jaime. He had hundreds of deaths in his conscience, perhaps thousands. And where appropriate, he would run over whoever necessary in order to protect Sansa. He was not so different from Jaime. His brother had done the same to come back at Cersei's side.

Well, nothing of that could be fixed now. And the doubt that Jaime might have saved Elia was of no use either, nor would it help to calm the Viper down.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 474

Meereen: Month 4. Day 5

Ser Barristan remained silent after the harsh reproach, and Tyrion as well. There was no possible excuse. The oath of the Kingsguard included protecting not only the king, but his family too. With no doubt Ser Barristan had felt partly responsible for the death of Elia and of the little princess and prince. It did not matter that he told himself that no human being could be in two places at the same time, not even resorting to magic, and Ser Barristan was at the Trident fighting alongside Rhaegar. He could not do anything for Elia, but it did not free him from guilt. And Tyrion on his part for the thousandth time felt ashamed of being a Lannister. Of being Tywin's son. After the argument, Oberyn had raised from his chair and had left the hall. Tyrion was afraid that he could do something crazy, but to his relief the hot-headed Dornishman that night limited to get drunk in a tavern with some of his buddies of the Second Sons, to get into a brawl in which two or three Meereenese citizens ended up hurt, and to visit a couple of brothels. Not much in comparison with what he might have sparked off. On the morrow, he looked calmer and in a better mood, and when he noticed the sadness on Sansa's face, he must feel some compassion, as it was then when he proposed Tyrion his idea to surprise her.

The day of the surprise, when they got up and were about to get dressed, he said to her, feigning his mysterious air:

"Ummm, Sansa. In yor place, I'd don something special."

She turned to him, startled. "Why? Is it that today we have to welcome a prominent dignitary from Astapor or Yunkai? You hadn't told me that we were expecting callers," Sansa said, frowning.

"Eh, no, it's not that. But make yourself very pretty. You're always gorgeous, but today I'd like you to sport one of the gowns you keep in reserve for special occasions. In particular, I love the red and blue one." Sansa had made for herself a gown with the colours of House Tully, in memory of her mother's family.

"Oh. Is it one of your crazy ideas?," she asked, beginning to smile, but her grin faded all of a sudden. "You haven't organized some sort of party with guests, have you? It's very soon to hold feasts and I'm not in the mood, Tyrion," she argued, sighing.

"No, honey, of course it's not that sort of celebration. Trust me, alright? We aren't going to do anything extraordinary, nor anything that might be disrespectful to our period of mourning. It's simply something different from our routine."

The slight smile returned to Sansa's face. That was too much irresistible. And moreover it was true that she needed to have a break in her routine, to distract herself with something that was not the same as everyday.

"And you? Will you don the black doublet matching the trousers and the embroidered white shirt? You're very elegant with that outfit," she suggested, with a flash of desire in her pupils, enough to provoke an erection on him. It was the first time he saw desire in her blue irises since the day of Menelan's death.

"Of course, sweetie. I'll put on whatever you like." It cost him an effort to tear his eyes from hers.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Tyrion donned the suggested outfit while she did the same. After they had breakfast, Mhyraz took Ray with him and Dara styled Sansa's hair with a more elaborate hairstyle, Tyrion adopted again his mysterious air.

"Well, my beautiful lady. Are you ready?"

"Yes, my handsome lord."

"In that case, hold my hand and come with me." He offered her his hand with a bow and she took it, bending too.

"I'm not going to ask you where we're going. I suppose that's part of the surprise," she guessed, while they were walking out of the rooms.

"Effectively. Soon you'll find out." Their usual bodyguards, except for Pod who Tyrion had freed from his functions as a squire for that day (Tyrion tried not to interrupt the lad's trainings with the freed children unless he had to go out of the pyramid for some of his duties that required visits to the city), stuck close to the couple. Sansa realized that they were heading for the outside of the huge building where they lived.

"Are we going to go out? I thought that in Meereen there were no places where spending time innocently," she said, puzzled.

"You'll see soon. You have a husband that doesn't give up when it comes to search for ways to cheer you up."

"I know, my love. You're constantly full of surprises. You don't let me get bored by your side even for a single minute." To her voice had returned the suggestive hint he had missed so much lately.

"A lady like you shouldn't be bored for a single second." He used his naughty tone tentatively, turning to look at her. For more of a week he had not alluded to anything related to sex, out of respect for the mourning she was observing for Menelan.

"I see you're quite willing to accomplish that purpose, my lord." Sansa caressed the back of his hand with the tips of her fingers. That simple brush was enough to shoot up all his desire. He was longing for arriving at the place he had got ready, though as always during her pregnancy, it would be her who would take the lead in any sexual activity, if she fancied. "May I go on foot wherever you have the surprise waiting for me? Today I don't want the palanquin or anyone to carry me no matter how much voluntarily they do it. I want to stretch my legs. The pyramid doesn't give me lots of options to do that, apart from going through the endless corridors. Besides, the city is much safer now." She was more talkative than he had seen her in many days and her sweet voice was music to his ears.

"All right, beauty. But if any moment you feel tired, don't hesitate to tell and I'll give word for the palanquin to be brought to you," he proposed, staring at her amused and aroused, with his heart beating in anticipation, out of emotion. That surprise was not only a gift for her, but for himself too, he thought with a wide smile. He told the soldiers at the gates that the palanquin would not be required and they nodded.
"I'm not even two months pregnant yet, Tyrion. For now I don't have to carry an elephant's belly, and I'm not so old as running out of breath with every step I take," she joked.

He roamed her with his burning and mischievous gaze.

"Indeed, I'd tell that you have still a little while left for you to come to that. And that thing about running out of breath gives me many ideas for the future."

"Oh, insatiable man," she whispered, stroking his hand in a circular motion with her fingertips. She was doing it with all her intention in order to provoke him and she hoped that in the place where they were heading they could have absolute solitude and privacy at their disposal. Her husband was not the only one to miss a proper sex session.

"I always am," he stated. They were walking along the streets of Meereen, and Tyrion made the effort to focus on their surroundings to catch any motion around them. He got tense every time Sansa gout out of the pyramid and all his instincts threw themselves into protecting her, although since the great blow to the Sons of the Harpy they breathed calmer. Anyway, they never should get confident. There could be threats behind any corner. She knew that the prudent thing was not to let the guard down and she did not distract her husband from his watchfulness for the rest of the way to the city gates.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4. Day 5

He would have liked to blindfold her, but they were not in the pyramid and he did not want to deprive her of her vision in the outside. Moreover, it did her good to enjoy the sight a little, though the view of the city streets was not very stimulating. When they reached the gates, the scenery would improve. Skahazadan Bay was beautiful to gaze at in spite of the scarcity of vegetation.

They went out to the outside grounds. The camps remained calm as usual, and they were noticeably larger than when he, Sansa, Pod, Leena, Jorah and Gilean had arrived over three months ago. There were nearly twenty thousand freedfolk, dothraki and soldiers. The number of freedfolk had been doubled in little more than ten weeks.

Kerro had brought a proposal to the Council. The freedfolk were planning to form their own military school to be trained in fighting. Except for some of them who had been slave soldiers, most lacked warrior training. The children were already being taught in the pyramid by the queen's soldiers, but there were many others older than twelve years who were demanding to make a freedfolk army at the Mohter's service. All those who had been soldiers in the houses of their former masters were offering themselves to train the cadets, and that was an excellent opportunity to enlarge Daenerys's armies and strengthen her nation. The Council approved the proposal and the military school was starting to be organized.

Within a few days, that week, the freedfolk that lived at the outskirts would begin to move to the city. The works of many houses were finished and very soon the mass move would be carried out. Because of that Tyrion had not wanted to delay the little surprise he wanted to give Sansa. He wanted to take advantage of the tranquility that still could be breathed and find clear the road to the bay. In three or four days there would be an infernal bustle of people, animals and baggage from the camps to the streets of Meereen and in order to achieve that the special time he wished to offer Sansa was as romantic as possible he preferred that they could have at their disposal the utmost privacy and that she enjoyed the view without a crowd of around ten thousand people carrying their possessions and walking through the grounds.

In addition, the days of the move he would be very busy with its organization and he would have not time for anything else, so he needed that break with his wife before that new series of headaches.

For a moment of puzzlement Sansa had believed that he was taking her to the camps, but he led her towards the harbour. A part of the Dornish fleet remained moored. The rest had weighed anchor in a new supply mission and to keep a large area of the sea cleared of pirates and of other enemy boats.

"The harbour has now a much better appearance than when we arrived here," Sansa remarked, observing it closely.

"Some repairs and enlargements have been made. The brotherhood of carpenters has done a good work," Tyrion praised, smiling. "Do you fancy taking a stroll along the dock?" he offered, adopting his mysterious air again.

"How not, it's a pleasant day and I like staring at the sea. Thanks for bringing me here," she thanked, squeezing his hand.
"You're welcome, gorgeous. I was sure you'd like it. For today I wanted to offer you something more than our four walls in the pyramid." They both were walking with their escorts across the creaking floorboards of the floating dock, which was swaying softly due to the waves.

"This is very beautiful, really, Tyrion. But there was no need to get ourselves elegant to have a walk over here."

"I don't think so. It's glorious to see you so beautiful in the sun," he flattered.

"Oh, you goofy." Sansa gave him a little shove.

They came next to a boat that immediately draw her attention.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4. Day 5

"Oh! This boat is adorned," she said, surprised.

"You want to get on board to have a glance at it?," he offered, with his naughty expression.

Sansa turned to look at him, with her eyes widely open.

"This is the ship where Prince Oberyn traveled. It's gorgeous, Tyrion! Have you both teamed up to give me the surprise? So you've brought me here to seduce me," she concluded, coquettish.

"You've just discovered the plan of this wicked seducer. Yes, the truth is that my purpose was to bring you here to lavish you a little, and I warn you that my intentions aren't totally pure," he admitted, amused and aroused. "But of course I'm entirely at the service of my lady's wishes."

She pulled him toward the gangway, laughing. "You're not bad at being a seducer, my lord."

They climbed to the deck preceded by two soldiers who made sure that there was no danger on board. The other soldiers stayed at the dock, standing guard.

Lanterns and pennants had been hanged on the masts. Tyrion guided her to the inside through one of the trapdoors and took her by the hand along the narrow corridor to the main cabin, that had been decorated with some flowers and candles. In the center, the table was set for two. On it there were several platters covered to protect them from the flies and to prevent the food from getting too cold, and there was too a jug of Dornish red and two cups.

"We might eat on the deck, if you prefer it," Tyrion offered. "I can send word to Green Beetle and White Fly so they move the table and the chairs outside."

"Oh, yes, my love. I'd love to eat staring at the sea." She leaned forward and kissed him vehemently. "This has been an excellent idea."

He smiled at her with his pupils full of longing and he summoned the two Unsullied that had got up with them on the boat to ask them to move the table and the chairs. Tyrion carried the jug of wine and the cups so they did not fall down on the floor.

When everything was placed on the foredeck, pleasantly bathed by the sun, Tyrion thanked the escorts and told them that they could go down to stand guard together with the others. They both nodded and went to the dock again.

The food was the same kind as the country picnics Lady Catelyn sometimes organized in the warm and clear days of summer, that were not many in the North. The servants carried the baskets with pre-cooked meals that were eaten at ambient temperature. And Sansa, how not, loved desserts, which in those occasions always included lemon cakes.

There were lemon cakes in her lunch on board of Oberyn's boat. Sansa felt so happy, and so guilty for being happy, that her eyes filled with tears when she remembered the picnics of her childhood and when she thought about all the pretty things Menelan could not experience ever more. And about the life Robb might have led with Talisa and the children she would have given him. Sansa still did not want to admit that all her younger siblings might be dead, but in spite of her hope, Arya's, Bran's and Rickon's absence hurt her like a burnt in her soul. She struggled against her
tears, closing her eyes tightly, and Tyrion took her hands softly over the table. He understood what she felt. He always did. Sometimes Sansa was convinced that she did not deserve a husband like him, when she felt unworthy of staying alive and being so happy when the rest of her family had disappeared in terrible circumstances, and when a charming seven-year-old boy had been another victim of the injustices of the world.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
"Sansa," he murmured. She opened her eyes and he saw the anguish she was trying to hold back. "I
know you miss all of them. I know that sometimes you blame yourself for still staying here when
they're gone. But perhaps you're here so they can live through you and your child. They would
want you to be happy and pass on their legacy."

Sansa knelt on the floor and draw him to her in a ferocious embrace, crying onto his shoulder until
she calmed down and stood, smiling behind her tears.

"You're right. I do no favours to them by spoiling such a lovely day like this."

Tyrion helped her to sit down again and then he took his chair. They ate placidly, with the warmth
of the sun rays over the skin, the shrieks of the seagulls, the breeze carrying saltpeter and the
rumour of the lazy waves smashing into the dock.

Later they went for a walk holding hands over the deck and Tyrion told her some of the tales he
had heard from the sailors of Lannisport in his youth, that included imaginary romances with
mermaids (he was careful to soften the parts of the tales that in their original version had sounded
much less romantic than the way he was telling them to Sansa).

"Are you tired? You want us to go back to the pyramid?," he asked, attentive.

"No. I want us to do other thing." She preceded him through the trapdoor to the inside and guided
him to the main cabin. Tyrion's heart was beating strongly. They had been ten days with no sex and
for him, ten days without touching her in earnest were an eternity.

Quietly, Sansa started to undress him and he let her do.

"You too can undress me, Tyrion. It's not going to happen anything to the baby because I'm
naked," she commanded, smiling mischievously on his lips.

He obeyed with his hands shaking in eagerness. He felt like a virgin lad in front of his first woman.
Sansa still caused him that effect. Probably she would always do.

When they were naked, they climbed on the bed and fell onto the clean sheets he had asked to be
put there. He kissed and licked Sansa everywhere, greedily, devoting a great part of his caresses to
her breasts, her nipples and her vulva, until he felt her vibrating and yielding beneath him.

"I want to feel you within me. I want you to move inside of me. It won't hurt the child, don't be
afraid," she said, looking him in the eye. "Almost each time we do it, it's me who positions above
and who sets the pace, but now I want you to do it. Please," she pleaded with a batted breath.
That was irresistible.

"As you wish, my love." He placed her legs upon his own shoulders. It was a position with which
he set the pace avoiding the risk to fall onto her and press her tummy. At the same time, it allowed
him to stimulate her clit and increase her feeling of pleasure during penetration.

He introduced his cock slowly and the wet warmth welcomed him joyfully, without offering the
slightest resistance. Sansa moaned and arched, and he squeezed a breast with his other hand. She
fondled her other breast.

Tyrion began to move slowly and deeply. His need was so strong that he feared to ram her roughly and spill himself too soon, so he moderated his impulse, enjoying the glorious friction with no rush. He adjusted the touch of his fingers on her small nub to the rhythm he had imposed.

"You like it like this?," he asked her, without tearing his gaze from hers.

Sansa nodded. "It's incredible, Tyrion. If you could feel like I do, you'd know how incredibly I feel you."

He grinned between thrusts.

"It's a pity I can't know exactly how you feel. I only can try to be close to your sensations through my own. And I assure you that mine aren't less incredible than yours, beauty."

"Well, I suppose we're not going to bet on that, are we?" They both burst in laughter and shortly afterwards their laughs turned into languid moans while he continued to penetrate her with a terribly arousing slowness.

"I'm nearly done, Tyrion. Go on like that with your fingers. Oh, yes. Tyrion!," Sansa cried out, squeezing him with her legs over his shoulders and crushing his cock with her convulsing insides.

That was his perdition.

"Sansa!" He trembled violently against her and released all the desire he had restrained for so many days.

He collapsed at her side and Sansa encircled him with her arm.

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4. Day 5

"I regret having taken so much time to make love with you again, Tyrion."

"Oh, Sansa, you don't have to apologize for anything. It wasn't a favourable time. A mourning period is not the best time. It'd never occur to me to bed you when it's not the moment for it. To tell the truth, neither I desired it as much as other times," he added sincerely, to his own surprise. Admitting that he had not been crazy for fucking her was something new even for himself. But it was not so strange. He had mourned Menelan during all those days and he also was quite saddened for the boy and for his wife to keep thinking selfishly about his own pleasure. Well, he did, a little, in truth, that was something he could not help even for a single minute. But his need was not as pressing as when they were not overwhelmed by sorrow. *I hope that desiring my wife like a possessed man doesn't turn me into a horrible person. Well, that has little remedy. I suppose I'll want her like a madman until the moment I snuff it. I'm certainly horrible,* he thought with ironic resignation.

"I know. But in spite of all you've missed it. I've also missed the warmth of your body on mine. But I wouldn't have been a great bed partner, weeping all the time."

"Sansa, you're free to choose when you want intimacy with me. You never have to do anything you really don't fancy."

"And precisely that is what makes me desire you more, my husband. As right now. I want us to make love again. You've made me become a very lecherous lady and ten days in the dry dock cost me as much as you." She placed herself upon him, and her expression showed clearly that she was speaking very seriously.

"Oh. Then we shouldn't keep waiting the lustful beast within you, my beautiful lady."

She rode him while he sucked and licked her breasts and a little while later both of them reached their second release, panting and moaning.

"Oberyn doesn't dislike us so much, does he? After all, he has lent us his boat for our romantic break," Sansa commented, resting over him.

"Yes, it looks like that. It might have been much worse, as it's the Red Viper we're talking about," Tyrion joked. He had not felt so well for weeks. "But I'm sure he's had this gesture more for you than for me. I think he doesn't find me as attractive as he finds you. I wonder why." He had adopted the tone he used when he mocked himself.

"Oh, come on. He wouldn't have the slightest good taste if he didn't see that, despite your Lannister surname, you're a dream man. I'd have to start feeling a little jealous. Oberyn isn't a fool." She slid her nails playfully over his chest.

"It's me who should feel a little jealous. I don't like a lot the way Oberyn looks at you," he asserted, faking his threatening voice.

She chuckled coquettishly.

"Oh, so you're jealous. Well, you can take comfort from the fact that he's going to marry the queen," she needled. "And I doubt she'd like that her lord husband devotes himself to seduce the
women in her close circle, so I imagine he'll restrain himself."

"Yes, that calms me loads, wicked wife." He began to tickle her and she shrieked and tried to get far from his playful hands, and they both cackled in the bed of that cabin where the same man they were talking about had slept.

(Part 9 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4. Day 5

Sansa was a little amazed when she thought that several months ago she would have felt deeply scandalized if she had imagined herself laughing naked in a strange bed with a lewd husband who loved her with burning passion and immeasurable tenderness, speaking lightly about a promiscuous prince in whose bed she had just lied twice with her so-called husband. Not to add that the prince in question was going to marry a rebel queen that was breaking the mould of many things Sansa had been instilled since her birth. Had she changed so much since she had departed from Winterfell? Where had been left such a naïve little girl as she was? And yet, her roots were still deeply sunk into her. She'd always miss the North. She'd always have Stark blood, though her surname was Lannister now. But more than anything, she felt like herself. She felt that she had followed her heart's path, and she knew she could not have made other decision as right as that.

When they both stopped laughing and relaxed in bed again, she brought up another subject.

"How do you think your uncle Kevan will react when the queen's threat over Westeros stops being something remote to appear at their gates?"

He looked distractedly at her hair, which the midday sun was making shine with some bright red glints.

"I've thought of writing to him when the moment comes, you know? To advise him to surrender the throne and that way he'll save the life of Tommen, his own and the lives of my other Lannister relatives that have had nothing to do with the damned war. And by the way, my uncle would save the entire kingdom. He's a lucid and pragmatic man and he lacks my father's cruelty. He'll stop a massive bloodshed. He knows very well Lore Lannister's story. He was the last king of the Rock who was foolish enough to try to face up to Aegon the Conquerer, in alliance with King Mern Gardener of the Reach. After thousands of men were burnt to cinders, the king of the Reach among them, my ancestor took, in the end, the wise decision of bending the knee, for which he was forgiven. The Gardeners weren't so lucky. Highgarden was given to the family of their former butlers, the Tyrells. Well, my uncle knows that it's prudent not to discard the past mistakes." Tyrion hushed for some moments, and his gaze became cloudy. "I have no idea about what Jaime will do. But I'm afraid he might do something silly for Cersei. She'll never surrender. She hates me too much and I'm a Daenerys's ally. Enough reason for my sister to prefer to die fighting than to live as a vassal of the intruder queen and endure that Casterly Rock is given to me. And I'm frightened that, if Cersei doesn't surrender, and she won't, my brother will remain by her side and that will mean his fall too."

Sansa embraced him tightly.

"I'd feel very sorry for him, Tyrion."

He kissed her head. *If you knew, my love, what he did to Bran, you wouldn't be sorry at all. But he's my brother and I can't help but loving him, no matter how many terrible things he's done. I'll carry his fault silently and, with luck, that secret will go to the grave with us.*

Soon afterwards they got up and got dressed. The sun would not last to start setting and Tyrion did not want darkness to fall during their way back. He asked Sansa if she wanted to return in the palanquin but she refused once more. She was not as tired as not to be able to walk.
"And I have to do exercise. Since Leena and I stopped training with Pod in the use of the dagger, I've moved little. If I go on like this I'll increase my size twice and you'll desire me no more."

"Mmm, it's very tempting to imagine your delicious body occupying double space," he needled, suggestive.

"Oh, shut up, wheedler." She leaned forward and planted a loud kiss on his lips, smiling widely. "This day outside the city has been wonderful, Tyrion. The idea of the ship has been brilliant."

"A pity it hasn't been my idea. I don't like it one bit to be in debt to the Viper," he complained with mockery.

"Yes. A Lannister always pays his debts," she quoted comically.

"Indeed, Lady Lannister."

Both chuckled while walking with their escorts, heading for the city.
Chapter 481

The Summer Isles

Asha was satisfied. The negotiations with the prince of the island of Walano had gone better than she had expected and both had sealed the deal with the offering of a feast in Lotus Port in the style of the islanders, with abundant and delicious sweet amber wine, numerous varieties of fish and tropical fruits piled on huge platters and a tribal dance gifted to the visitors to warm up the atmosphere. Afterwards, it came the best part, when the locals and the guests held the ritual orgy. Those orgies were a sacred tradition and all the visitors who wished company had someone to frolic with for all that night. The islanders said that it brought bad luck and bad omens not to complete the ceremony with the collective act of carnal union, and when Theon, embarrassed, excused himself and made a motion to slip away to the lodgings area, Asha observed behind the fogs of alcohol that some natives were staring at him disapprovingly and shook their heads, as if that escaping gesture was an insult to their hospitality and their deities. Asha in that moment felt uncomfortable and saddened for her eunuch brother (though it was attenuated by the fact of being in good company), but she refused to reveal to those strangers the reason why he turned down taking part in those activities. She was not going to start explaining to them that Ramsay Bolton had castrated him and that her brother had enough with staying alive and sane after having been tortured until nearly losing his mind. If they did not already know beforehand Theon Greyjoy's sad story, it would not be her who would tell them.

She had chosen a young girl with a voluptuous body with whom she had crossed glances during the dance. She liked her very much, and moreover the girl had also shown interest in her instead of paying attention to a man. Soon both of them knew who their sexual partner would be, or at least one of their partners. One could never know how the night might pass or how many people one could fuck in the sacred ceremony, but it seemed that sex honoured the islander gods and the more it was performed, the better. Asha did not have the slightest problem with that, neither any of her fleet's men, who joined the feast enthusiastically. Asha had warned them previously to avoid any brawl or act of provocation, as the inhabitants of Lotus Port had welcomed them friendly and Asha did not have the smallest intention to attack or sack. She had forged a plan during their way to the Summer Isles and she had hoped for it to be successful, though it was difficult to foresee how the natives would react. Asha was received by Prince Jheranos Kha for the welcoming interview and she asked him formally for permission to make a stop at his island. Then, she went straight to the point and explained her plan to him. He stared at her with a pensive air, but Asha saw briefly the sparkle of interest in his black eyes and she hoped that it was a guarantee that her proposal would not fall on deaf ears. If she was successful, her options that Daenerys Targaryen would not raise objections to accept her as an ally would increase. The prince said with his placid voice, in the style of those people who lived with no hurry, that he would consult the matter with his counselors and with the rest of the princes of the islands. Asha knew that the decision might be delayed for weeks and she got ready to wait patiently, what did not fit at all her restless character, but she would do it if with that she could gain allies in that business. Anyway, there was still hope that the native princes decided to make a little more haste to adopt their resolution as long as they got rid of a lot of ironmen who would be eating and drinking at their expense and bedding their women and some of their men. However how much generous they were and how sacred sexual intercourse was for them, everything had a limit. And the promise of the dragon queen's total support to the Summer Isles would probably tilt the balance to the alliance. Asha hoped they would not disdain that opportunity thinking that both Westeros and Meereen were very far and that a foreign queen was not worthy enough to fight for. But she had her dragons. Who could remain indifferent before three dragons? The Targaryen's past talked by itself.
Chapter 482

The Summer Isles

The summer islanders were not conquerers or used to get involved in external wars, but it was worth it to plant the seed of ambition and see what happened. Besides, Asha played the card of the natives' current repudiation of slavery. That, and the ambition that nested in all men to a greater or lesser extent, could predispose them to support the dragon queen. They had a fleet of swan ships that even Asha, an experienced captain who knew everything that could be known about sailing, considered impressive. They were among the best war ships in the world, because their great size, their nimble seaworthiness on the high seas and the considerable height of their figureheads made them very useful in naval battles. If Asha managed to convince the islanders to join the cause of the Mother of Dragons, that ploy not only would help the queen to become stronger, but it would speak in favour of Asha as it would be her who would have contributed to provide Daenerys with more allies and more resources. Daenerys would need all the allies and all the resources she could obtain if she really wanted to conquer the Iron Throne. Asha was no fool in matters of politics and she knew that the queen needed support also inside of the Seven Kingdoms. For what Asha had heard, Daenerys was no fool either, as opposed to her stupid brother Viserys, dead in the most absurd way by his own fault. The young Targaryen woman must be seeking that support, and Asha had a suspicion of who might be those who would help her. The Martells of Dorne. They never had submitted completely to the Iron Throne, remaining in a relative independence and keeping their titles of princes and princesses of Dorne. It was known everywhere that they harboured a great grudge against the Lannisters because of the tragedy of Elia Martell, of her little children, of the Mad King's assassination and of the loss of many good Dornish soldiers in the Battle of the Trident. Prince Doran's diplomacy could not mask the hatred against the Lannisters that many Southerners professed. That hatred could be enough reason to wish to overthrow the lions from power, and an alliance with a conquerer Targaryen queen was a good opportunity.

The islander prince Jheranos Kha, despite his impassive air, was more interested in Asha's plan than he looked. She would have to wait for a few days for him to deliberate with his counselors and to send messages to the princes of the other islands before adopting his decision, and meanwhile she would enjoy the friendly hospitality and the tropical climate. The worst thing that might happen would be that they refused to get involved and that Asha departed with empty hands. But that was how she had gone away from Pyke and it had not stopped her from pursuing her goal, so the islanders' refusal would not be a fatal blow to her business.

Without anything more to do for the moment, Asha got relaxed and got ready for the welcoming feast. A part of her felt guilty for Theon, as he could not enjoy himself like the others. Any activity around him related to sex caused him a great distress and he fled terrified to any place where he did not have to witness how others flirted or fucked. He, who according to the rumours that reached Pyke, when he lived in Winterfell he screwed all the whores in the Winter Town at the foot of the castle.

But in spite of regretting deeply her brother's misfortune, Asha needed desperately to bed someone. Since they had escaped from Pyke at full speed in the longboats, no one had warmed up her bed, and she missed having another body next to hers, preferably a woman's body. That night she would not deprive herself of tasting one, because remaining celibate would not bring back the parts that Ramsay had snatched from Theon. And the dark-skinned islander women were very tempting.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 483

The Summer Isles

After taking at last her first decent bath in many days in the river that flowed next to the settlement, Asha observed the attire that the hosts had left on her sleeping mat, in the collective lodging. The dwelling houses consisted of large buildings made of hemp and palm leaves with no interior walls to divide the spaces, whose denizens lived together nearly ignorant of any sense of privacy. Everything was done in front of everybody without the least shame, though the various clans and families respected certain moments and actions of the others, looking away and immersing themselves in their things when someone needed a little privacy, but that need for privacy was limited to when somebody was sad due to a beloved's illness or death, or to the patriarchs and matriarchs of the clans when they wanted to reflect carefully on something important.

The natives slept on comfortable and springy mats, and the area of the mats was detached from the rest of the common spaces by some semitransparent muslin curtains that served as mosquito nets, in order to keep bugs away and protect the sleepers from the bites. Asha observed the clothes she would wear at the party and that she had accepted as a gift from Prince Jheranos. Of course, they were completely different from the mannish and functional clothes she wore daily, that covered almost all her body. When she donned that... Well, she did not know how to call it, because it was not a gown, indeed. But when she donned it, nearly all her flesh would be exposed, her breasts included. That sort of skirt made of large leaves, feathers and interweaved flowers would only cover her from the hips to the midpoint of her thighs. Moreover, the prince had offered her a magnificent pendant with a big emerald that hanged to the beginning of her breasts. Despite his generous gifts, Jheranos would not be present at the feast, as his high status prevented him from mixing in public with people in all walks and bedding anyone, though in private he did what he pleased.

Asha smiled, thinking about the impact she would have on her men, and enjoying beforehand the expressions of their faces. But they would not be more covered than her and surely a few of them who were not very inclined to show so much skin would have a hard time, but they had no other choice but accepting the presents. As soon as they drank some cups of the delicious islander liquors, they would forget about their attire, or the lack of it. She hoped that the usual admirers she had among the crew left her alone during their stay at Walano. Asha did not have the least desire to waste a single day with them when she could taste the local delicacies. If any of them became insistent, she would tell him clearly to pick an islander girl. Anyway, she was sure they would not resist the native women's charms. They were not precisely faithful wooers and Asha could not care less that they bedded other women and let her alone.

When she was ready, she went to join Theon, knowing that he would still be wearing his usual clothes. He was ashamed of his own mutilated body and he felt terrified of displaying it more than necessary. Asha would have to excuse him with their hosts for not dressing in the attire he had been offered. She knew they would disapprove of him, but there was nothing to do on that account. And faced with defending her brother's battered dignity, Asha fought tooth and nail. And of course she would not reveal to those people anything concerning Theon's sufferings.

The shadow of a surprised smile crossed the young man's emaciated face when he saw his sister appearing without more garments on her than a skirt made of leaves and flowers. The emerald was shining on her chest, lit up by the setting sun that soon would disappear behind the jungle.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
"I still remember how you tried to seduce me, when you came back to Pyke for the first time after so many years. Had I really changed so much that you didn't recognize me?" she asked smiling, trying to make a joke.

He made the effort to return her smile, and he succeeded slightly. *Every little smile of his is a little triumph,* Asha thought.

"As a girl you were all skin and bones. When I came back I still kept that image of you. In my heart you were still that little girl. That's why I didn't recognize you," he admitted, lowering his eyes. It cost him greatly to hold anyone's gaze.

"Well, that flatters me. If you on your own didn't realize it was me, it must be because I'm an impressive woman now," Asha needled, amused. She did not stretch the joke any more, because she knew he felt uncomfortable speaking about women's beauty. It was a good sign that he had not run immediately to withdraw into himself, as he sometimes did. Asha was determined to manage step by step that he could lead a life, if not normal or happy, at least bearable. **"What about going to the area of the feast? There must be people there by now."** She turned to look at him and kissed him on the cheek. **"Try to have a good time, alright? Eat, drink and enjoy the atmosphere. I know you don't like parties, but you can't be isolated all the time. Make the most of the banquet they offer us, and when you feel tired, you may retire. But at least give it a chance tonight. Will you do it for me?"**

He nodded, not very convinced, but that was a yes. Another little progress.

They walked together to the terrace of the settlement, where they had already lit the lanterns and the torches. Many small bright dots were moving through the perimeter of the open venue.

"Look, Theon. They're fireflies. You remember that tale Mother read us? It related the story of some rebel stars that had left the sky to come to live in the earth. Those stars were the fireflies." Asha always felt saddened by the end of the tale. The queen of the horde became ambitious, she wanted to shine more than the others and got close to a flame, thinking that fire would make her more luminous. She burnt and died, but the stars felt pity for her and allowed her spirit to return to the sky. Since then, she was known as Firefly, the Northern star. That way was born the legend about the star that guided travelers and sailors at night.

"Of course I remember. It made me cry," he said, staring at the restless and bright small dots.

"And Mother didn't tell Father, because if she did, he'd have flogged you with his belt and if you spilled a single tear, he'd have kept on with the punishment until you stopped crying or collapsed onto the floor half dead." Asha felt a bitter taste in her mouth, but she swallowed it and seized a pair of glasses someone offered her, handing one to Theon. **"C'mon, let's drink. Ummm, it smells good. We must admit that here they know how to cook fish. And look, Theon, those roasted birds look like chickens, but I'm sure they're some type of delicious tropical birds. Go on, let's eat and join the others. But see how they look!"** Asha exclaimed, laughing, when she saw some members of her crew that seemed a little embarrassed by their unusual attires. They stared at her, astonished and with evident lust, restrained by the respect they professed for her.

"Damn it, captain. It comes you have real boobs," said Gerrick, one of the veterans, who at his
fifty-some had still a muscled and strong body. He kept with Asha a relationship more fatherly than anything else, and he was a steady support on board and his experience had spared them more than one disaster. He also had been one of the best ravagers of the Iron Islands, he had lots of murderings on his list of crimes and he had come to have four salt wives at the same time, two of whom had killed one another, another one had fled and the other had committed suicide. What regarded to his true wife, that there was known as *rock wife*, had died giving birth. Gerrick's sister took charge of his younger children, and his older sons were also sailors in Asha's fleet.

"And you'll have to prove tonight that you have a real prick, Gerrick," Asha replied, and everyone burst in laughter, even Gerrick, who could never resist a good jape.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
The Summer Isles

Everyone started to serve food on their dishes and wine in their cups and they sat down with their hosts to watch the dance show the islanders offered the guests. A group of around fifty men and women completely naked and with their skin smeared with oil performed a tribal dance in the center of the terrace, while the lights of the torches and the lanterns made the dark skin glow. The motions of the dancers were sensual and erotic and after some minutes there was not a single person in the whole terrace that was not aroused. Well, indeed there was one, and he had not stopped stirring up reproveglances and some murmuring. Asha had told the hosts that her brother had suffered a terrible illness as a boy, but she did not gave more explanations or details. That seemed to make them more understanding toward Theon's timid and elusive behaviour and his refusal to wear the local attire.

Asha hardly tore her eyes from the dancer woman who attracted her since the first moment. She was taller than the other women and her body was a little plump but she had a narrow waist, wide hips and big, perfectly round breasts with ebony nipples. Her thighs made Asha yearn for sinking her head between them. She did not stop staring at her as if enchanted, encouraged by alcohol, and the girl returned her stares with no shyness. Though it was evident she was very young, probably sixteen or seventeen years old at most, she must have given birth to some child, as the slight bulging of her tummy and her fully developed teats showed that she had been pregnant and had breastfed some baby, if she was not still doing it at present. In the isles culture, families accepted without any trouble all the children that their women gave birth to, either if they were wives, daughters, nieces or granddaughters, and they did not mind that the children had been conceived out of wedlock, and the older women took charge of their care so that the young women could enjoy life and sexuality fully. The babies were named with the patriarch's surname and were brought up all together with great affection and they regarded themselves as siblings. The matriach, who was the oldest and wisest woman in the clan, was treated with great respect and everybody resorted to her to consult their matters with her.

When the dance ended, the dancers mixed with the spectators and the girl got next to Asha. She was nearly as tall as herself and the sight of her impressive oiled body caused a flow of dampness between Asha's legs and made her nipples straighten promptly.

"What's your name?" she asked the girl with caressing eyes.

"I name Ranessa," she answered. The islanders spoke their own language and many of them were ignorant of the common language of Westeros, or they barely fumbled through it.

"Cute name, Ranessa. My name's Asha." Ranessa seized a cup and drank avidly, thirsty after the vigorous dance that had left her sweaty and even more appealing for Asha.

"Cute too," Ranessa asseverated, with her smile on her plump lips and very white teeth.

Next to Asha, Theon looked like a shadow. Alcohol had relaxed him a bit and he seemed to be less inhibited than usual, but even so his sister knew that he did not feel comfortable there.

"He's my brother, Theon." He greeted the girl with a nod, without looking at her. Ranessa watched him puzzled, but she must have sensed his unease and felt pity for him, as she returned his greeting with respect and made no remark about the ironborn man's attire he had refused to replace with the Summer Island's one, more suitable for the tropical climate.
(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
"You sailor?" Ranessa asked, interested. They both sat down on the ground, opposite each other, crosslegged.

"Actually, I'm the captain of my own ship. Her name is Black Wind and she's like a daughter to me," Asha explained, proud.

"You command boat? Few women do," the girl praised, impressed.

"Very few, yes. In fact, I am the only ironwoman to be the captain of a boat," Asha clarified.

"What is ironwoman?" Ranessa asked with curiosity.

"Ironwomen are those who are born in the Iron Islands, that are part of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. They're on the West, in the Sunset Sea. Their capital city is Pyke, and I'm from there. Theon and I are children of Balon Greyjoy, the former lord of the Iron Islands, and he's been assassinated by our mingling uncle, Euron Greyjoy. The bastard has sat on the Seastone Chair, the seat on which the iron lord rules. That's why my brother and I have escaped from our home, because if we had stayed, our dear uncle would've cut our throats. We took with us the whole Pyke's fleet as a revenge." Asha spat to show her contempt toward the murderer of his own blood.

Ranessa took some seconds to process the information, unfamiliar with the common tongue, but she understood.

"Bad person, your uncle. Where you go?"

"I'm heading for Meereen. Have you heard of the Mother of Dragons, Daenerys Stormborn?"

Ranessa nodded.

"Here all know dragon queen. All admire she." That information increased Asha's optimism toward her plan.

"Well, I also admire her. I'm going to offer her my services as a captain."

"I hope you luck." Ranessa got her cup close to Asha's and both drank to the success of the mission, smiling. And the food was exquisite. The girl offered Asha a succulent bit of spiced fish and put it in her mouth. When Asha accepted it, she sucked slightly Ranessa's fingertips while looking her in the eye. The girl lowered her hand, stroked the emerald that hanged from Asha's neck and she slid her fingers to her breast. Asha held her breath while the dancer woman toyed with her rosy nipple and, with no more preamble, Ranessa bent and licked it. Asha moaned and observed out of the corner of her eye how Theon got tense as a snare drum, looking aside.

"Theon," she said, saddened, while Ranessa, oblivious to everything, devoted herself to Asha's breast.

Theon stood, murmured a quick apology and left before the stares and the disapproving murmurs of some hosts, who made sure that the guests were well tended. As for the rest of Asha's crew, all of them seemed to be entertaining themselves as much as her in those moments and they did not pay attention to Theon. Moreover, they were already used to him and to his reactions.
Asha's sorrow soon started to vanish when Ranessa made her lie down onto one of the mats scattered over the ground of the terrace. Her tongue and her hands on her breasts made her forget about everything. Around her, she could hear the sounds of many other people totally absorbed in intimate acts, but alcohol and sexual arousal helped Asha to not seeing anything strange in all that. Besides, it was not the first time his men fucked in front of her, though indeed it was the first time she was doing it in view of her men. On the morrow, they probably would hardly recall something. And they had done more weird and much worse things than that, so Asha let herself be carried away by the rapture of the moment.

Ranessa was caressing all her skin and slid down with her mouth to her sex. With expert movements of her tongue, she drove her to one of the most intense climax she had had in a very long time, and Asha cried out in delight. Afterwards, it was her who tasted Ranessa's sensual body and made her scream in pleasure. In some moment of the night, several islander men joined the blowout with both women and Asha engaged in group sex among men and women for the first time in her life. She had done it before, but only with women. All that was tremendously pleasant and Asha thought, amused, that the lifestyle of the Summer Isles was the best she had known, and that the standoffish Westerosi people did not know what they were missing.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 487

The Summer Isles

When it was nearly dawn, the party ended and the scant ones that were not sleeping it off yet on the terrace retired to the lodgings. Asha somehow managed to arrive at them and fell like dead weight onto her sleeping mat, next to Theon.

When she woke up, with her head heavy and her mouth like major cotton, the day was quite advanced. Theon remained sitting on his mat, though he must have got up hours ago. Most of the people had enjoyed the excesses of the feast and there was little activity despite the late hour, so Theon would not have had much to do outside the lodgings area. Asha felt a sting of remorse for having left him alone, but the night had been too much irresistible. She could not know when she would have more chances to have such good times once they had left the Summer Isles behind. She addressed Theon a late good morning and kissed him on the cheek to ask for his forgiveness quietly, although she knew he was not angry with her. The affectionate gesture seemed to cheer him up a little and a slight smile appeared on his rough lips.

Asha went to take a bath in the river and the cold water cleared her head. Feeling fresh and in high spirits, she put on her clothes for the day, that were plainer than the gala skirt. She thought with a smile that it would have been the same if she remained naked, as that could hardly be considered clothes. But if that was the islanders' fashion, she accepted it. Back in the lodgings, she reflected if she should wear the emerald, and she decided that she would wear it at all times, so the hosts could see that she appreciated their prince's gift. Perhaps, when they were far from there, she would sell it. Her practicality tended to turn automatically all the valuable items into money, and the ironborn mindset was prone to despise people who adorned themselves as if they were whores of expensive brothels. On the other hand, that emerald was the nicest thing Asha had had along with her mother-of-pearl shell, which unluckily she could not take with her in that place, because she did not have pockets where putting it into, and she had to leave it together with the rest of her scant belongings in the lodgings.

Soon her stomach began to growl with hunger and she headed with Theon for the terrace, where the women were cooking. The smells of lunch were spreading pleasantly, though Asha was sure that many of her men would not touch the food, especially the young men that were not so used to have benders with high amounts of alcohol and sex, and whose stomachs would not be up to any sort of things in those moments.

When Asha was finishing her lunch, an emissary arrived at the settlement, asking for her and inviting her to the palace. The prince was summoning her for an interview and Asha wondered what he would want to talk about. It was too soon for the islander princes to have adopted a decision regarding her plan, and that put her on her own's guard.

The palace was placed on the outskirts of Lotus Port and Asha had already been led there the previous day, when the iron fleet reached the coasts of Walano and they were welcomed at the beach by some court dignitaries, dressed in multicoloured feather capes, and their escort of warriors armed with bows and arrows, made of valuable goldenheart wood. Asha admired those weapons, though she preferred, obviously, everything that was made of iron or steel.

The palace was a luxurious ebony wooden building with goldenheart wooden carvings, and the contrast between the dark and the golden hues was cute. Asha was led once more to the audience hall, where the prince of Walano was waiting, sitting on a cushion in the lotus posture. He was
wearing on his head a crown made of goldenheart wood and gemstones, and his long and richly
decorated cape spread along several metres over the floor. Such as the rest of the islander men, his
only garment apart from the cape was a loincloth, but it was a more ornamented one. Noblemen
were the only ones who could wear capes along with the loincloth.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 488

The Summer Isles

Asha knelt respectfully before the man's impassive face. He was not young any more, but he kept himself fit enough, and only a slightly bulging belly gave away his fondness for spirit drinks. Some grey strands could be seen in his black and rabidly curly hair, what gave him an appearance of serene dignity.

She armed herself with patience. She knew that the islanders did not use to rush when it came to deal with any matter (except for sex, Asha thought restraining a smile) and going straight to the point was considered in bad taste, so she got ready for an exchange of courteous sentences before the prince decided to expound at last the reason of his summons. Besides, though the ruler of Walano was fluent in the common tongue, he spoke it slowly. Jheranos wanted to know if she had enjoyed the party displayed in her honour at Lotus Port and if everyone had honoured the gods. Asha knew that he actually was asking her if the orgy had been to her liking and she answered yes heartily.

After the pleasantries and though she was forewarned for what could come next, she had not expected the blow that the prince's words were going to deliver to her.

"The Mother of Dragons has disappeared, my lady. My informants had told me this morning that some time ago she was seen leaving Meereen, riding one of her dragons, and she hasn't come back." Jheranos uttered those sentences as calmly as if he were speaking about the weather, but for Asha they were like a kick on her stomach. She made an effort not to get carried away by astonishment.

"Is it known under what circumstances those incidents happened?" she asked, to gain time and to know if she still had any chance to save her plan.

"They say that she was in Daznak's Pit, presiding over a competition with free men who wanted to fight for gold and glory. Her dragons appeared unexpectedly and many people died burnt and crushed, though my informants don't agree if the dragons' wrath was aroused by the crowd or if they burnt the people for fun. What they all agree is that the queen ran to her dragons and rode the biggest one, and they soared far away from Meereen. Her counselors sent men to search for her, but her whereabouts are still unknown. The dragons have been spotted without her." The prince hushed solemnly, waiting for Asha's contribution to the conversation.

She, recovering, reflected quickly.

"They also say that Daenerys Stormborn never has been ill and that fire doesn't affect her. She's not an ordinary woman, Your Highness. She's devoted to her cause of freeing the world from slavery and she stayed ruling Meereen so as not to leave behind the people she had freed. She won't abandon the city for which she has fought and sacrificed so much, before making sure she leaves it in good conditions when she decides to march on Westeros. I'm certain she's going to come back, Your Highness. I have faith in her. I wouldn't be willing to go supporting her with all my ships and my men through half the world if she wasn't worth it." It was also true that Asha at present did not have any house to return to because an usurper assassin had snatched it from her, but she would not tell that to Jheranos, though he knew perfectly well why she had to flee from the Iron Islands in all haste.

"If the Summer Islands contribute with their swan ships, their men and their goldenheart bows and
arrows to Daenerys Stormborn's cause, what guarantees do we have?"

The prince was interested in supporting the dragon queen's cause, not only because of her crusade against slavery, but above all because he had his sights set on Westeros and Jheranos was ambitious. If he managed to persuade the rest of the princes to become Daenerys's allies, they might help to tilt the balance in favour of the queen's victory over Westeros, and the Summer Isles would achieve a glory and a prestige at a world level that they had never had in spite of the high quality of their boats, of their wood and of their archers.

"The same guarantees my men and I have, Your Highness. But it's worth it to try. I know she's alive and she'll come back." She said it with full conviction, because she had to believe it herself.

The prince observed her with his black and tranquil eyes, without giving anything away.

"All right," he declared in the end, to Asha's relief. "We'll carry on with the plan and we'll wait for the answer of the other princes." Asha saw again the spark of ambition in his pupils and she told herself that the apparent serenity of that man concealed much more than what he let be showed. She was certain as well that he was who truly took the lead in the Summer Isles and that gave her more hope.

Jheranos invited her to spend the rest of the day and night in the palace, offering her a lavish hospitality, and they both honoured the gods in the princely bedroom.

But of course, Asha did not forget to ask him to send word to her brother Theon so he would not get worried for her. That night she did not enjoy herself very much in the prince's bed, not only because she liked men less than women, but because she missed Theon and she knew he was missing her. She did her best to hide her stab of nostalgia the best she could, and she did it very well, as she was an expert on submitting men in bed.
Meereen: Month 4. Day 8

In the next Council meeting, convened to debate about the organization of the outskirts freedfolk's move to the city, another subject was discussed, of which they had received news that morning.

After Balon Greyjoy's assassination by his brother Euron, who admitted his crime in the kingsmoot in which he was elected as the king of the Iron Islands, his niece Asha escaped, taking with her the entire fleet of longboats, as the majority of the captains were loyal to her. But as surprising as the fact that a woman was so respected in that region of the kingdoms as to have earned the loyalty of men accustomed to pillages and rape, was the fact that Theon Greyjoy was traveling with her. Sansa had turned pale when Tyrion, she and Missandei deciphered Varys's message. The traitor, taking advantage of the circumstance that the Boltons were very busy crushing Stannis, had managed to slip past the decreased watch of the castle, had went over all the distance between Winterfell and Blazewater Bay, walking through the woods, and he finally got on a boat toward Pyke. But once in his homeland, he had to flee once more, because his uncle, his father's assassin, had sat down on the Seastone Chair. His sister and he had taken with them all the longboats of the islands, leaving Euron practically isolated, as a few rowboats that the humble fishermen used were all the means of transport he had left. Seemingly, the iron fleet was traveling southbound, without stopping to attack and sack, what indicated that Lady Asha was in a hurry to flee, and she very probably had forged a plan. She was clever and Tyrion doubted she was drifting, without a certain destination.

The ironwoman's bold ploy implied too that the islands had been greatly weakened without their fleet. Euron was nothing without the ships and Kevan could take advantage of the situation to force the rebel king to surrender and that way he'd subdue the islands and he'd make them return to the fold of the Iron Throne.

Sansa had remained very quiet and she looked through one of the windows in Daenerys's private hall, with clenched fists. Theon had betrayed Robb, attacked Winterfell, killed Ser Rodrik and burnt her youngest brothers, or that was what he had made everyone believe. And Maester Luwin had died because of him too.

"Theon is one among those who have contributed to the destruction of my family, and he not only is still alive, but he has escaped from the clutches of the other Bolton monster," Sansa said while they were going back to their rooms, with her chin trembling.

Tyrion held her hand in a consoling gesture.

"He's no more the man he was, Sansa. Ramsay has tortured him savagely and he's mutilated him. I doubt that much of the former Theon remains in him."

"Even so, he's still breathing. And he now is free and has run away with his sister. They're ironborn, Tyrion. For them betraying, killing, raping and plundering is the most normal thing in the world. What do you think they'll do now with more than a hundred longboats in their possession?"

"According to what Varys tells, they are passing by and leaving the coasts of Westeros behind. If their intention was to keep their Old Way, they might have assaulted any poorly defended town and left with the booty, but they haven't done that. That makes me think that Asha Greyjoy has other intentions. Her father has been murdered by his own brother and this one has convinced the kingsmoot to elect him as the king of the islands, what has left his niece and nephew in a very
precarious situation. But Asha is smart and tough, she's gained the respect of all the captains and they've decided to follow her. Euron has been for many years far away engaging in piracy, while Asha has grown up together with those men. Besides, for the ironborn the worst crime is to kill someone of their own blood, and lots of those sailors are very superstitious. They'd never accept Euron after what he's done. But the noblemen, that are who choose the king when someone decides to oppose the Iron Throne and declare his candidacy for being the king of the islands, don't pay so much attention to questions of ethics or to superstitions. According to Varys's message, Euron promised them an alliance with Daenerys by means of a marriage proposal, and he intended to persuade her by sending his fleet of longboats to her. Now Asha has snatched from him his plans and his power. Without his ships, he's nothing. And I think she's stolen her uncle's plot to take revenge on him. I believe she intends to come here to put her fleet at Daenerys's disposal.” Tyrion looked at Sansa's face while they were walking, foreseeing her reaction. She, in effect, stopped dead in her tracks and pierced him with a stunned gaze.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4. Day 8

"That ironborn scum, here? We can't allow it, Tyrion! Theon is a disgusting turncloak traitor and his sister is a thief and so much a killer as him! And those captains and sailors that travel with them aren't better. Plunderers, rapists and killers of defenseless fishermen. The queen would never accept them as her subjects," Sansa spat with all the contempt she was able to express.

Tyrion closed his eyes for a moment and sighed, foreseeing the storm that would approach if he did not manage to calm her. He was not so sure that Daenerys would refuse them so hastily. Their ships were very valuable, and having Asha Greyjoy as an ally was not a trifle. Tyrion hated the Greyjoys as much as Sansa, but in those moments he had to think as the queen would, and she would not turn down a good alliance lightly. On the other hand, Theon had betrayed the Starks and contributed to their destruction, and Tyrion owed himself to his wife and her sufferings for her slaughtered family. It would be a difficult decision and Tyrion hoped no to be compelled to adopt it without Daenerys's presence, when the ironborn arrived. It would be very hard for Sansa, and he did not want to take any decision that was contrary to her wishes and feelings. With luck, the ironborn still would take weeks to arrive and by then many things might have happened.

Tyrion had to be as cautious as possible when choosing his words. He squeezed Sansa's hand.

"Well, we don't know yet what will happen but, whatever happens, think that Theon is only a wreck. He's no more a true ironman. Ramsay stole from him lots of things along with his genitals. And his sister isn't stupid. She could be very useful. If she's traveling across half the world to form an alliance with Daenerys, she isn't doing it like crazy. I've heard she cares for her men and she won't endanger them more than necessary. Moreover, she wants to get back her home and if she wants to achieve that, she'll be willing to bend the knee before the queen. She knows that it entails stopping the plunderings, so I'm certain that she'll behave properly while she's here. And you won't have to have dealings with her or her brother if you don't want to see them."

"But he'd be here, under the same roof than us, breathing the same air we breathe. How do you think I'm going to agree to that calmly, Tyrion?" Sansa's eyes were shooting sparks.

"You don't have to agree to it, honey. I'd never ask from you something like that. I hate Theon as much as you, after what he did to your family, that since I married you is my family too. But something tells me that he's paying dearly for his crimes. When I see him, I'll look him in the eye and I'll ask him why. I'll ask him if that was worth it."

"No," Sansa denied vehemently. "I'll do it. I'll be waiting for him when he arrives and I'll ask him if it was worth it to become a traitor and one of the most despicable men in the Seven Kingdoms. I want to see it in his gaze. If I have to endure him under my roof, I at least have the right to demand an explanation from him."

Tyrion observed her with renewed admiration. Once more, she was surprising him with her fierceness. Sansa did not possess Asha Greyjoy's kind of fierceness, she had not grown up learning how to use the axe and the dagger before knowing how to walk, nor did she challenge anyone to perform the finger dance like that ironwoman did, but his wife's strength never stopped impressing him. She had doubted many times to be a true Stark, but Tyrion verified day after day that she was so much a Stark as the rest of her family, in a subtle way that fascinated him. In the passionate and possessive way she loved him; in her way of giving herself when they made love, allowing her instinct to take hold of her without restrictions, like a female wolf on heat in the rapture of her
joining with the male wolf; in the way she defended tooth and nail her pack and her territory against the enemies.

At the same time, Tyrion felt relieved that she, despite her hatred, understood that they needed the Greyjoys. Perhaps the Sansa of former times would have refused to budge and would have refused flatly to agree to the presence of old enemies, and she would have carried out her protest in that cold silence that left Tyrion completely outside, without the least chance to get close to her. But the current Sansa knew more. She knew how to see through the veil of hatred and to accept that sometimes it was necessary to work with the enemy in order to achieve a greater goal.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
"They aren't in a great position, and they need Daenerys, such as Daenerys needs them, Sansa. Theon's been punished dreadfully, it's true that not for his crimes, but for the whim of a sadistic who enjoys torturing more than anything in the world. But Theon has payed a high price all the same. I imagine him longing for death, begging for it, and Ramsay refusing to please him, because he knows very well how to turn others' lives into a living hell, that's what he's best at. He changes them into pure horror, and in the face of it death is the most desirable thing. I'd nearly feel pity for Theon if it weren't for what he's done. He could choose to make the correct decisions, but he chose the wrong track knowingly. His stupid iron man's pride won him over. Just as my stupid Lannister pride won me over when I insisted on doing something by which my father might feel even a little gush of approval, a thoroughly useless dream, of course. Pride often is our perdition. I don't envy Theon his perdition."

They entered their rooms, while Sansa remained thoughtful, internalizing Tyrion's words.

"Robb loved him truly. Theon wouldn't have found anywhere else someone closest to a brother the way Robb was for him. Bran also appreciated him, and Rickon. Arya always was very keen and she knew how to see quickly people's essence, like dogs and wolves when they growl and show their teeth to somebody they don't like. My sister argued many times with Theon and he used to mock her to needle her, but before the bickering went very far, Robb intervened and somehow he persuaded them to make peace. Well, that lasted until the next row, of course." Sansa was about to smile at those memories. "Jon was reserved in his presence and he usually disregarded his jokes. He never took up the challenge, and due to that Theon in the end left him alone. They respected each other in the training field, they both were good fighters. Jon was better, but he never boasted and he bore that Theon strutted about every time he knocked Jon down or disarmed him. He was arrogant, but I ignore if by nature or if his attitude was due to his past among the ironborn. But I suppose that none of us, except for my mother, gave importance to his behaviour, believing that he was like those dogs that bark a lot but hardly bite. I kept away from him for the same reason that I kept away from Jon: because my mother didn't feel affection for them. She tolerated them only because of my father, but she treated them as if they were strangers." Sansa sat down on the bed and continued with her childhood tale. "Robb and he were as thick as thieves. And I saw Theon messing around and laughing with my younger brothers. Lots of times he threw them over his shoulders, made them turn somersaults in the air and put them upside down, holding them by their ankles until they cackled, begging for him to put them on the ground again. In all those moments he looked happy, really happy. I didn't doubt that he loved my siblings, Tyrion. How could he not? How could he change so much as to destroy the brothers who had been with him for more time than his blood brothers?"

"Remember, Sansa, pride. Stupid pride. Very often it weighs more than reason and more than the heart. And so says someone who has had his share of stupidity." Tyrion had sat by her side and had held her hand.

"You reckon he regretted it, Tyrion? When he saw disappointment and fear in Bran's and Rickon's eyes, and in the others' who had treated him with care and respect? When he saw what he had made of the castle where he had grown up? Did he feel sorry for the stab in the back he inflicted on Robb, the brother who surely loved him more than those who had died in the Greyjoy's Rebellion? Did he regret having trampled the memory of the one true father he had known?" Tears were running down her cheeks and Tyrion slid his fingers over the soft skin to dry them.
(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
"Yes, I reckon he regretted it. I'm certain he does every day and every hour. I think that every time he gets up in the morning, he longs for rolling time back and having done things differently. I'm sure he detests himself and he can't stand looking at himself in the mirror. I believe that his burden crushes him with an overwhelming weight that kills him slowly. And I'm sure he wants that sort of death, but he denies it to himself because he's convinced he doesn't have the right to achieve the peace of its silent embrace, not yet. Perhaps he still has a mission to fulfil. Perhaps he feels that he owes an apology to the only person to whom he can offer it." Tyrion almost seemed to speak more for himself than for her. His sad gaze was lost in the distance. Sansa observed him with attention behind her tears. "I felt in a similar way once, Sansa. When I permitted my father to do to Tysha what he did. There's no worse punishment than feeling that you've ruined the life of someone you love." Now he also had tears on his eyelashes.

"Oh, Tyrion." She embraced him tightly and they both cried onto the other's shoulder. There were wounds that never healed.

When they calmed down and regained their composure, she said:

"All right, I'll accept that alliance. I'll tolerate his presence here. But I'll never give him forgiveness."

"It's not forgiveness what he's looking for. He knows there's no pardon possible. But he probably wants you to know that he's sorry. Even it's very possible that he is expecting you to yell at him, to insult him, to rub his atrocities in his face. He'll secretly crave for you to stab a knife in his heart, feeling that he has no right to find peace in death if not by your hand." The intense expression of his green pupils hurt.

"I'll neither give him the peace he wishes for, both because I'm not a killer, and because he doesn't deserve the end he wants. It won't be me who'll free him from his sufferings so soon. I hope he lives for many years and goes on agonizing each day until the weight of guilt takes him away." The harshness in her blue pupils hurt too, because that was something Tyrion could not erase and from which he could not protect her.

"Then so be it, Sansa." He gazed at her with need mixed with sorrow, with the hunger he felt for her when he was dying to sink in her body and her soul to cast out his demons and flee from darkness, to feel that the beauty he had found in her was not an illusion, a simple trick of his mind, as when, in the times in which he got drunk until losing his consciousness, he mistook his nightmares for reality, though he was not sure that there was a great difference between them...

He saw in her eyes the exact reflection of his hunger, and then Sansa leaned down and kissed him with primitive lust, devoid of the sweetness with which she used to pervade her kisses. Tyrion in those moments desired her that way, wild, unrestrained, leaving the lady behind, the armour of courtesy, the garb of decorum. He wanted her outright nakedness, not only of her skin, but of her senses too, of her spirit, of her heart. He yearned for devouring her whole, for reaching her depths, her most intimate core, that core that never would come to be completely his because no one could belong entirely to other person, and that was the abyss of mystery where a man madly in love like him submerged in the hope of grazing the absolute, always some steps far from it, eternally untouchable, perpetually unattainable, and that spurred him to keep moving forward.
(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 493

Meereen: Month 4. Day 8

They undressed as if their clothes burnt them, as if they were shipwreck survivors dying of thirst that only could quench it through each other's skin. Tyrion laid her down on the bed and then remembered about the new life growing in her belly, and he experienced a new gush of wonder and dread before the mystery that small creature was. He kissed her abdomen devotedly, containing his urge to hold her flesh tightly, to penetrate her with no preamble and so getting more and more close to her hot and bottomless core, which he believed he embraced for a second in the final ecstasy, in an instant that always was too brief. He revered with his lips and his tongue the skin that was all that protected the baby from the threats of a world for which it was still too fragile, that skin that every person keeps in his or her deepest memory and it is what gives that feeling of safety that nothing like the mother's belly gives, and later everybody misses it sometimes, when the hardships of life attack cruelly and one would wish to go back to the weightless security of the womb, to the happiness of ignorance, in that stage of innocence before our own time, when anything is still possible, and all the doors are still open, in front of us, blinking with possibilities. Before they start to close behind our backs leaving us the feeling of the things we have lost, of the things we have never lived.

During what seemed like a too short eternity, Tyrion adored with his caresses the first home of his child, he slid down to the gateway and fondled the threshold until it vibrated and convulsed against his lips, and Sansa shouted his name and squeezed him against her as if she wanted to turn him into an extension of herself. There was not anything in the world he desired more than being a part of her forever.

"Tyrion," Sansa whispered, without letting him loose to prevent him from moving aside. She did not want to stop feeling him for a single moment. She needed him in her desperately. All of him. She wanted to own up to the last particle of his being, up to the last wave of his thoughts and his feelings. She became greedy like a miserly old man counting his coins, stroking them, rendering the worship of the dissatisfied who always want more, who never have enough coins. "Own me thoroughly. I want everything of you. Everything," she declared with a strangled voice.

He thought that that must be the closest thing to the divine abodes of everlasting joy that believers said that awaited the souls of those who traveled to the afterlife, those who while being alive had done something good and regretted the wrong.

"I give you everything, Sansa. All I am is yours. I belong to you." He crossed the threshold of her insides, moved forward along the narrow lobby which always admitted him lovingly, and he accessed her cozy interior, which was living room and bedroom and library and all the places of the house he liked most. In all them a large hearth with a cheerful fire offered heat and light, inviting him, and he went forward and backwards, and after each recoil he advanced a little more, and more, and then he imagined his baby sleeping placidly in its mother's arms next to the fireplace, and Tyrion's happiness was so great that he finally rose, and the room where he was did not have a roof, it led directly to an unsullied sky bathed with light, and from above he could hear the laughter of Sansa and the baby, that were flying beside him, and none of them felt cold, or fear, or concern, and they smiled at him like he always had dreamt would do the people who would love him most.

Perhaps his mother had smiled at him that way too, when she knew that he was in her belly.
Tyrion, in his ecstasy, did not know if he was crying out or weeping or both things, but with no doubt the tears escaped from his eyes, as Sansa dried them with her fingers while she moaned his name without tearing her eyes from his and pressed him down against her, to withhold him for two, three more seconds in the heaven from which neither of them would have wanted to descend ever.

They had given in in such a way to their intense emotional and sexual rapture that it cost them a world to return to reality.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 494

Meereen: Month 4. Day 8

"What time do you think it is, Sansa?" he asked lazily, embraced to her and with his face between her breasts.

"Mmm, no idea. I don't want hours, or days, or weeks, or months. Only this moment, forever," she stated lovingly, stroking his wet hair.

"Me too, my love. I want to stop time by your side. But I'm afraid that a simple mortal like me has no power to do that," he complained.

"No. But a simple mortal like you does have something the immortal gods doesn't."
He moved a little aside to look at her, feigning surprise. "Really? And what is it?"
"Heart, Tyrion," she said cleanly, with a sweet smile.
He grimaced.
"Dear me. Then you're a heartless girl, because you're a goddess."
"Oh, fool. I'm not a goddess. I'm very human." She slid her hands over his back, as if proving her statement.
"I'm not so sure. Every time we fuck like this, I believe you're a goddess." He made his hands go down to her buttocks and he massaged them. "Definitely, this is a goddess' arse. A simple human can't have an arse like this one."
"And definitely you're very human. Only a human would be so romantic," she laughed.
"You think your buddies in the divines abodes would be much scandalized if we made love again?," he asked, feeling his hard and hot member against her tummy.
"Oh, of course they wouldn't. I'm your sex goddess," she said, challenging. She made him lie down onto the mattress and began to kiss and lick him from his chest to his lower belly, allowing her hair to brush him too during the process.
"Oh, Sansa. Didn't I say so? Only a goddess is so unbelievably exciting." The end of his sentence turned into a moan. "And only a goddess would have such a mind-boggling mouth." With her lips, she drove him near the edge and he held her head without stopping his moans, moving away the hair that fell like a curtain upon her face. Then Sansa came to a halt and rose, caressing him with her hand, and she rode him.
"Only a goddess can have such a juicy cunt. And such tasty tits."
"Has nobody told you that you humans have a very filthy tongue?," she scolded, trying to put on an expression of fake anger, rocking above him and stimulating herself.
"My goddess loves my filthy tongue. The divine abodes are so clean that they bore her. And my tongue can do lots of filthy things," he said, with his lewd smile.
She stopped suddenly, grinning wickedly, and he let out an exclamation of fake frustration.
"Oh, I see. You're punishing my poor cock, and that's unfair. You'd have to punish my tongue," Tyrion protested, smiling defiantly.

"Yes, it'd be the fair thing. I could twist it," Sansa suggested, bending onto him and grazing his lips with her fingers."

"Faced with the choice, I prefer you to twist my tongue to perform it on a certain member of my body, but you can impose the punishment on me while you resume your motion. One thing is not incompatible with the other." He pushed slightly, encouraging her to restart her swaying onto him. She did, very slowly. She kissed him and, when he introduced his tongue into her mouth, she bit it a little and retained it between her teeth, until he started to utter grudging sounds. She let him loose, laughing, and he rubbed and massaged his tongue comically.

"You happy? You've been about to pull it out of me," he reproached, when he finished his massage. He looked at her sideways.

"You do exaggerate. It's only been a caress. When I decide to punish you in earnest, you'll jerk up each time you eat a bite or take a spoonful."

"And also when I eat other type of bite," he added, and he was overexcited by the game. He grabbed her by the hips and the buttocks and made her move over him. "But I don't care. You can almost remove my tongue if you fancy, that even so I won't stop praising you with it, or telling you filthy remarks or devouring you."

"Headstrong man," she accused, accelerating.

"You don't know how much I am," he moaned, rubbing his palms against the exquisite nipples. "And I see you're very headstrong too when you pursue something. Like this very moment."

She finished onto him and shouted, driving him to the intimate paradise that only belonged to them both.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4. Day 8

While they were resting before getting dressed again and tending to their matters of that day, Tyrion placed his hand on her belly, still flat, and a thought wandered around his head. It was one of those bothering thoughts that appeared without invitation, like flies in the period of harvests.

What if this isn't the first child I've sired? I've fucked so many women that my seed has had to bear fruit in some of them. I never had given a thought to that, because I saw them as mere instruments for pleasure and little more. Yes, I tried to please them to feel less guilty for using them like any other used them, and I perhaps even felt superior to the other men by pretending to see them as human beings when they actually were to me hardly more than cunts, mouths, tongues, hands and skin. I left my seed in them and went away, and sometimes I didn't even recall their faces on the morrow. I forgot them and searched for others... I think that there were months when I went as far as bedding several dozens of them, soon after what happened to Tysha, when I was completely out of control and I didn't care a shit about anything. Some of them had to get pregnant with me. Surely not all of them drank the moon tea, and many wouldn't be so careful as to drink it punctually. It was true too that they couldn't know with certainty if the baby was mine, with so many clients. But neither of them ever came with a bulging belly or with a creature in her arms demanding my paternity. Was it because they were afraid of my Lannister surname and of the reputation of my house? What if there is over there a bastard with features resembling mine, who has never known what a father is? Tyrion paled. For some reason, for a moment, the baby Sansa and he were awaiting made him feel like the worst of men, as if the little child was reproaching him silently for having neglected and set aside his other children, the ones he had never known. Those women probably aborted the children before they were born. How could they want babies with the Imp, with the Halfman, fearing that they were small freaks of nature like the man who made them in a drunken night? Who would want to take the risk of having dwarf children with a dwarf Lannister? He remembered the fortnight during which Tysha and he barely had got out of bed. He by then ignored that the moon tea existed and now he neither would have been able to tell if she drank it. He tried to remember. Did she have the custom of drinking an infusion at night? If she did, she hid it from him. However great was the effort he made to recall those nights that at present seemed a very distant dream, he could not bring those details to his memory. The old wound hurt him again, because he had forgotten lots of little daily things he had shared with her. He no more knew for sure what meals his first wife liked most, how many times she had laughed, how many times she had told him she loved him. All that was a lie, every bit of that, but it had seemed so real, and he had believed it. But the seed he spilled inside of her so many times was very real, and he might have impregnated her if she did not have around the moon tea. And if he had not impregnated her, it could have been done by any of the twenty-something guards (or they were more than that? He felt a deadly cold when he thought of that terrible number) who took her during the worst day Tyrion could remember. Now he felt horribly filthy, suddenly unworthy of the creature that was growing in the womb of the woman he loved. What have I done to her? What have I done to both, to Sansa and to this little one? He got tense and some treacherous tears burnt his eyes. He tried to disguise his sudden gush of anguish, but he must not do it very well, as Sansa sensed immediately that something was troubling him.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4. Day 8

She sat up, resting on an arm, and looked at him with concern.

"My love... What's wrong? All of a sudden you've turned pale and tense. Is it something you can tell me?"

He stared at her with the desperate expression which always crossed his eyes when he was certain that he did not deserve her, that she was too beautiful to be intended for such a vile being as him, and she recognized that look.

"Tyrion... Whatever it is, I love you and I always will. I don't care about your silly ideas regarding that I deserve a man better than you. For me there isn't anyone better than you, and nothing's going to make me change my mind, so you'd better telling me whatever it is what's overwhelming you and venting yourself. Both of us have spoken about this already. When we feel that something stifles us, we mustn't keep it for ourselves or it'll grow until it chokes us and comes between us."

Sansa's gaze was firm and her hand on his arm was intended to make him speak.

He looked at her with immense gratitude and infinite devotion, and he did not know if throwing himself at her feet or if kissing her until losing his senses.

"It's only that... that baby... our baby... It could very likely not be my first child, Sansa. I was so irresponsible for so many years..." He could not continue. He lowered his eyes, ashamed of himself.

Sansa watched him profoundly shaken for some moments, realizing the implications of what he was revealing. But she recovered quickly and put her hand on his cheek.

"It could be. Loads of men have bastard children, I don't have any doubts about that. Anyway, you cannot know it, Tyrion. I doubt that even the supposed mothers know who the father is." Sansa bit her lip, suddenly restless. She also stared at the sheets, feeling her muscles getting tense. "You reckon that Shae...?"

"I hope not. She claimed more than once that she didn't want to have children with me. She didn't want bastard children whose grandfather would hang when he discovered them." The terrible harshness in Shae's eyes when she had blurted that out to him had felt like a stab in the heart, but she was right.

Sansa could not resist to ask the question that was going around her mind and that made her feel again a pull in the stomach, as when some weeks ago she came to the conclusion that her husband and her former handmaiden had been lovers.

"You desired children with her, Tyrion?" She was afraid of the answer, though it was absurd. Shae was thousands of miles far from there and he had stopped loving her.

He looked at her eyes with an expression of regret.

"There were some moments when I thought I did. But she had her feet well planted on the ground, luckily."

Another question sprang out of Sansa's lips, before she could stop it.
"And what if she changed her mind and decided to conceive a child with you without consulting you, so you didn't send her far away? Perhaps she thought you wouldn't want your child to be brought up aside from you."

That reasoning surprised Tyrion. His young wife managed to surprise him every day, but that time it wasn't precisely a pleasant surprise.

He shook his head, dismissing the possibility that that had been what Shae would have done.

"I doubt it very much, Sansa. If it had been that way, she would've told me about it to try to stop me from sending her to Pentos. She didn't mention anything about any baby."

Sansa breathed in and asked the most difficult question.

"What would you have done if she had confessed a pregnancy to you?"

For a moment, he felt he hardly could breathe.

"I'd like to think that I'd have done the right thing. But... What would've been the right thing? To keep on maintaining her and the child in King's Landing until my father discovered them and hanged them? Or to send them to Pentos, save their lives and pretend not to know about them, about my child?" he set out, with bitter sarcasm. "I don't know, Sansa. I don't know what I'd have done. In any case, my child would have been sentenced. Sentenced to die, sentenced to be an outcast, or sentenced to lack a father. I behaved like a damned jerk with Shae, even if she never carried a baby of mine."

She caressed his cheek.

"Yes, you did. You behaved badly to her. But now you're doing the right thing with me. And with our baby. You're going to be an incredible father."

Tyrion hinted a half-smile, feeling guilty for the great comfort that the words of the woman he loved were spreading through him.

"I'll do whatever possible to be it, my love." Sansa kissed him and he stroked her hair as if it was his last lifesaver.

"I know you'll do, Tyrion." Both smiled at each other and got up to get dressed, and he took a peak at her stealthily, as he always did when he was not very sure that she was not a goddess come down from heaven.
"Are you interested in knowing about another place to which you could take your wife when you're tired of your almost permanent confinement in this mass? She's very young and, however Stark she is and how much she pretends to endure stoically her seclusion, she needs to have a change of scene, to see other things and live a few adventures like all the youngsters, I assure you. If even others who aren't so young need to see other places, move around, see the world, live new experiences from time to time... And it just so happens that I know a place that might end up to be very suggestive for Lady Sansa. My ship is at your disposal whenever you need it," Oberyn offered with his naughty smile. "But, if you accompany me, we'll visit a place in Meereen where you'll be able to enjoy intimacy if that's what you're searching for, and at the same time you'll enjoy a very pleasant time. I spend quite a few times there. I discovered it during my first visit to Meereen. War was about to sentence it to closure, but its owners had known how to adapt it to circumstances."

Tyrion imagined right away what kind of establishment Oberyn referred to.

"A brothel? I'm grateful to you for your concern about the married happiness between my wife and me," Tyrion said with sarcasm. "But I doubt that she'll approve of your suggestion. And I neither am very sure that I want to take her to a disreputable establishment. Sansa never has set foot on any, and I don't think she'll jump out of joy if I propose to her to go to a brothel where there'll be people walking around naked and couples or groups in the heat of intercourse, not always hidden to sight and much less to the ear."

"This is special. It's not a common whorehouse, because it also offers other kind of services to the clients. You and your wife aren't the only couple in Meereen in search for corners less monotonous than the walls of their houses," Oberyn explained.

"What kind of services?", Tyrion asked, scarcely convinced. "If they don't involve things like fucking with strangers or public sex, maybe I'll take it into account. Neither Sansa nor me want anyone to intrude our relationship." He stressed that point, raising an eyebrow. And that is meant to you as well, Viper.

"I know, I know, you're a decent and faithful married couple, and I respect that, though I consider it a waste," the prince conceded, smiling mockingly. "If you come with me now, I'll show you and it surely will convince you. I suppose you can allow yourself to take a little stroll with me, can't you? You spend nearly the whole day busy and a small break will be good for you, my friend. And if you want to keep your pretty wife happy, it'd be good to look with her for a bit of escape from so much work."

"Yes, I agree. These days have been hard and I'd like Sansa and me to find some distraction from our tiresome routine."

The days of the freedfolk's move had been crazy and both he and Sansa were exhausted. To make sure that everyone had found a new location indoors had been hard not only for him and Sansa, but for Kerro, Jalima, Ser Barristan, Missandei and Grey Worm. Even Oberyn had bothered to give a helping hand. You'd better, prince. If you have the intention to be a king, even though you'll be only a consort king, you have to start to act like one, Tyrion thought derisively. The Dornishman did not have much the makings of a ruler and he admitted that, but he was not stupid and he knew how to do things well when he put his mind to it and when he was able to control his impulses, what was not so easy to him. Tyrion sighed, but he told himself once more that the benefits he provided
made up for the difficulties of keeping him at bay.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"But there's a little problem. My wife is very susceptible lately and prone to mood swings, and if she finds out that I've visited a brothel with you and without her knowledge, she'll hit the roof and it's very probable that I'll end up sleeping on the corridor's ground. You'll understand I'm not very seduced by that perspective," Tyrion objected ironically. "I'll take that stroll with you, but I won't enter the brothel, because I don't intend to lie to my wife or to hide from her that I've been there. I'll be satisfied if you simply describe to me the place and the services it offers, and I'll decide if speaking to Sansa about it and proposing your idea to her. The sum of my debts to you is starting to become considerable, my prince. I see that you take a great interest in my wife's married happiness, what indirectly comes to be my happiness too."

"As neither you nor she will let me please her by myself, I'll do it by means of you," Oberyn declared brazenly. Tyrion felt bothered in his pride. The insolent Dornishman used to cause that effect on him every time he hinted that he did not do everything possible to please his wife. Perhaps Oberyn was right and he was lacking in imagination. All seemed little to him with regard to Sansa.

"Ah, I thank you so much for your inestimable help. And I'm glad you've understood that my wife is private reserve," Tyrion replied, sarcastic.

"It's a pity you're as well. After all, for being a Lannister, you don't look like such a despicable man. Sometimes I've fantasized about stabbing my spear into some Lannister," Oberyn confessed, chuckling.

"I imagine that more literally than figuratively."

"You imagine correctly. Though I admit that I've always felt attracted to the idea of plunging the spear between my legs into your sister, and afterwards, plunging my other spear into another lion of your pride."

"It's not my pride anymore. Now I've formed a new one with the help of a she-wolf," Tyrion corrected. "And now you're talking about Cersei, you can fantasize about her as much as you like; I care very little about what happens to her. But I'm afraid that I do include Jaime in my new pride, as I include Myrcella, Tommen, Kevan and other Lannisters who live in Casterly Rock and have done nothing to your family. Some of them hadn't even been born yet when your sister was killed."

"You can breathe easily. I respect children and leave alone the people who have done nothing to me. But I can't say so about those who have, either directly or indirectly. Your father is dead and I hardly can pierce him right through in the grave. And although your sister is a bitch, she wasn't to blame for what happened to Elia and my niece and nephew. But I'm not so sure that your brother isn't to blame. I asserted it once in front of you, and I still assert it. I suppose that being so busy murdering the Mad King from behind didn't leave him time to save the life of my sister and her children."

They reached the main gate of the pyramid and Tyrion and Oberyn sent word to their escorts to accompany them. While they were waiting for them to arrive, Tyrion made the decision of telling Oberyn the truth about Aerys's regicide. In his heart of hearts he feared that the prince had a point when he accused Jaime of committing negligence, but he could not go on tolerating the threats Oberyn was pouring on his brother. No, before marching against Jaime, Oberyn would have to ride roughshod over Tyrion himself. The escorts turned up promptly and everyone set off.
"Everyone looks at my brother and only sees the Kingslayer, but you're smart enough to know that a man uses to be much more than his nickname, and that a reputation conceals much more than what meets the eye. You're aware that the world isn't white or black."

"I know that very well, little lion. You yourself aren't a true lion, as I myself am not a true snake. If I was, you'd have become my lunch a long time ago." Well, that's an improvement, Tyrion thought acidly. The Viper added: "But I think you'll have to illustrate an aspect for me. In what tone of grey should I include the fact that Ser Jaime killed Aerys from behind and turned a blind eye when your father's henchmen sneaked into the Red Keep to stab Rhaenys more than fifty times, crush Aegon's skull and cut Elia in half?"

Tyrion sighed mentally.

"As for if that was a negligence or not on my brother's part, or if he turned a blind eye, I can't answer to you. I feel inclined to think that he didn't know that my father had sent them, neither did he see them enter. The Red Keep is enormous, in case you haven't verified it with your own eyes. A kingsguard can't be everywhere at once, as well as the rest of us. And if somehow he found out about their presence there, it must have been not so strange, because those monsters worked for my father and it wasn't the first time the Mountain set foot on the Keep by Tywin's order. It's true that Aerys and Tywin had become enemies some time ago, but the hostilities between them never had gone beyond the undercover and my father hadn't shown open rebellion. Moreover, he never had the custom of conveying his plans to us, his children. He didn't consider Cersei sufficiently intelligent, with good reason. Jaime was a great disappointment for having become a kingsguard and for shattering Tywin's expectations, and I, of course, was the greatest disappointment of the three of us, and the son he hated. Well, I doubt that he had told Jaime that he had commanded the Mountain to kill your niece and nephew, as I doubt as well that the beast said hello to my brother when he sneaked into the Keep. I have the impression that my father wanted to prevent Jaime from finding out," Tyrion confessed, feeling that he owed it to his brother.

"Ah, of course. Because if he had found out, he'd have thrown himself bravely to stand shield between the beasts and my sister and the kids," Oberyn said with a caustic tone.

"It's very possible that he had done it, if in that moment he hadn't been next to the king, preventing his insanity from causing the complete destruction of the city. Are you aware that his gracious majesty had spent years commanding his pyromancers to produce wildfire in sufficient quantities to blow up the entire King's Landing? My brother knew about it, and he also had heard Aerys telling the pyromancers to place the wildfire under all the strategic spots. There are fifty leagues of tunnels beneath King's Landing. Aerys wanted to use them to spread out thousands of jars of the substance. I don't even want to think that a simple earthquake had shaken the city with all that wildfire stored underneath. It would have been enough for the explosion to be visible hundreds of kilometers around. The same would have happened the moment the Mad King gave the order to burn half a million people. And believe me, if Jaime decided to take actions and break his vows it was because he feared that the king he had sworn to protect was willing to reach that extreme. Day after day Jaime had to put up with his constant tune. Burn them all, he said at all hours. And it seemed that he was going to make it come true as soon as he felt cornered. His paranoia had come to that level. He sensed that things looked bad in the war Rhaegar had started."
(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Oberyn remained silent for some moments, taking Tyrion's explanation into consideration.

"I see. His nickname of Kingslayer should be changed for City Saviour. Please, now we're speaking frankly, don't start to exalt him to the category of an honourable hero. He has as much of a hero as myself." The cold wind was sweeping the streets of Meereen, but Oberyn did not seem to feel it. In fact, Tyrion had never seen him wearing warm clothes since he had landed at the city, more than a month ago. On his part, he himself felt a chill in his back, though he was not very sure that it was due to the inclement air.

"I've never claimed such a thing. Honour isn't something plentiful in my family, so I'm not going to start to defend an honour that doesn't exist. But a part of the common people do something good some time in their lives, however little it is. Saving the capital was one of the times when Jaime has wanted to do something good. That didn't serve for much, apart from saving half a million souls from fire. But he couldn't stop the massacre of your sister and of your niece and nephew, immediately afterwards my father sacked the city, and the only thing the world saw was that Jaime Lannister had committed one of the worst sacrileges. Why bother then to tell the truth, if no one would believe him? He might have taken Eddard Stark to see the stores of wildfire, but he didn't take the trouble to do it. He surely doubted that even so the Northerner would have believed him. And my brother, in his pride, must think that he didn't owe explanations to anyone. Probably it was a mistake, but he kept silent and allowed the world to believe what it wanted. Anyway, he was going to be judged implacably. When I was Hand of the King, do you think people saw in me a man who was trying to help them and save the city? No. People saw a demon monkey who instilled evil notions into King Joffrey's head (as if he needed someone to give him such ideas) and who was to blame for the ills of the city. That's the reality behind the nicknames we're often given. We're judged for our immediate appearances. I was judged all my life for being a dwarf. To tell them that I wasn't a monster would've been the same as telling that the White Walkers exist; not a single one would've believed me. Then, why bother to clean up my image before millions of skeptics?" Tyrion did a pause, looking at the prince to make sure he was listening to him. "But my brother and I haven't needed anybody's approval to do what we've done. We aren't men of honour, but we aren't cowards either. I don't doubt Jaime would've saved Elia if he had found out what my father was plotting and if in that moment he wasn't fearing that the city blew up. If Aerys had given the order, do you think that Elia and the kids would have survived the blast?"

Oberyn reflected. Around they both, the streets were immersed in a bustling morning activity, and the freedfolk recently moved were walking from place to place with confidence. Since the raid to catch the Sons of the Harpy, a new peace was breathed, a feeling of newborn trust in the future that people had not ever felt before, at least not those among the most humble social stratum.

"I know that my betrothed's father really was nuts, and he'd been able to do all that, Lord Tyrion. I didn't care about King's Landing, but I cared about my sister. She was what I cared about most in the world, along with my daughters. And I lost her. Perhaps I'd've have lost her because of Aerys, as you say, but your father came earlier and it was him who took her from me. The geezer didn't deserve to die placidly in his bed. A sweet death for an embittered scumbag." The prince did not try to apologize for speaking harshly about Tywin, but Tyrion agreed.

"Just as Daenerys knows perfectly what her father did, I know perfectly what mine did. Neither she nor I are proud of them, but we aren't them either. And if you are here, it's because, like her and
me, you want to change things. You can achieve for Dorne the greatest glory it's known since Nymeria's times. And by the way, you obtain the revenge you crave for. If Daenerys sits in the Iron Throne, many debts will be paid; her debts, yours, mine and my wife's."

Oberyn looked like he had been appeased for the moment, and Tyrion felt relieved.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
"Do you know what Elia liked most, in our childhood? Once, when we were very young, I woke her up before dawn and told her: "I have a little surprise for you. You want to come with me to see it?" She wasn't very much a morning person, we were very alike in that, but when she heard the word surprise she perked up in an instant. She was lovely, the most lovely girl there was. She had black and thick hair, her tanned skin was the colour of the warmest sunsets of summer, her round eyes were like two big jets which lit up her heart-shaped face. She also had a widow's peak on her forehead, like me, and two dimples appeared on her cheeks when she smiled." The Dornishman's expression while recalling his sister had softened to an extent Tyrion would have not believed possible. "The Martells spent a great part of our childhood in the Water Gardens. It was an ideal environment to grow up. There are always flowers and the trees bear fruit during the whole year. Well, that morning I led Elia to the beach where we played every day. The sky was still dark. Her small face was swollen by sleep, but she repeated to me again and again: "What's the surprise, Oberyn? Where have you hidden it?" "You'll see right now, ratty. Don't be so impatient. But you have to look in that direction," I told her, pointing at the east, where the sky was beginning to clear up. She by then was a very vivacious girl, she couldn't remain still for a long time, but she sat down to wait with the little patient she could gather. "Are you ready? Your gift is coming. Look at it." The sun started to rise above the horizon, like a huge sanguine orange, and Elia stood with her mouth open. Her image, with the fiery red of the sun reflected on her eyes and her skin, was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen, and since then nothing has been so beautiful to me except for having my daughters in my arms. Elia applauded, excited. "How have you done it, Oberyn? Could you do it again?" "Of course, ratty. Every day I'll make the sun rise for you, if you want." She threw herself to my neck and filled my face with kisses. That was one of the happiest days of my life. From that day, I took her to watch all the sunrises, until she fell ill for the first time and she remained bedridden for weeks. Her wealth was always fragile since then, and she became a serene and thoughtful girl. I never took her again to see the sunrises, but when we grew older Elia always remembered with a smile those days when I made the sun rise only for her. "You gifted magic to me," she told me. "I'll never forget how much happy we were." "Neither I, ratty." I kept on calling her that way. Even when she already was a married woman, she went on being my ratty." Perhaps it was the reflection of light or a simple trick of Tyrion's mind, but the prince looked like he had taken several years off him. It did not cost much to Tyrion to imagine little Oberyn gifting the sun to his beloved sister. He grimaced when he thought about Cersei.
Meereen: Month 4. Day 14

"If I had offered that present to my sister, I know perfectly what would've happened. If she had been able to seize the sun and tear it up with her hands, she'd have done it and afterwards she'd have thrown the pieces to my face with her scornful laughter. As obviously the sun was out of her reach, she would've spat at me and slapped me, saying: "I want nothing from the monster that killed my mother. This is what I do with your damned gifts." Since very soon I learnt to keep far from Cersei. What my sister liked most was to torture me. In fact, the first memories I keep of her aren't precisely tender. She often pinched me hard until she gave me bruises, but she was careful enough to do it in parts of my body that were not visible under my clothes. Other times she locked me for hours in a dark room and no one save Jaime noticed my absence, and it was him who took me out of there. He got very angry at Cersei and stopped talking to her for several days, and she, while trying to appease Jaime, left me alone. But later she went back to her old ways. She was always plotting a new torture to apply to me. When I grew up (spiritually, I mean, as my body couldn't grow up a lot) and she saw that the physical tortures and the insults didn't have any effect on me any more, she tried a more refined psychological torture. If she discovered something I treasured, she searched for it until finding it and she tore it or burnt it in front of me. Because of that I did everything possible to conceal my treasures, that used to be rare books, but other times they were as well ore veins from the mines of Casterly Rock, which had strange shapes and colours, or pressed flowers I wanted to keep... In the end she always managed to find my favourite things and she destroyed them. Finally, I limited to keep my treasures in my memory, from where she couldn't have snatched them without killing me before. You see, I also had a very lovely sister." There were many other things Cersei had done to him. Probably one of the worst ones was when she put in his bed a big spider, which bit him overnight. He was sick for several days, and she stood by his headboard day after day to see him die, with a wide smile on her face that, despite being beautiful, looked horrible to Tyrion, nearly as ugly as his own. But he, who since had dreamt with his mother when he had got measles at four had resolved to live at all cost, opposed his sister's wishes and survived. He never fell seriously ill again.

It was curious, but Cersei's hatred spurred him to wish for staying alive more than ever. With her mean attitude, she achieved the opposite of what she expected. You never were very clever, dear sister. I'm grateful for that.

"How did you feel when you saw your nephew Joffrey die victim of the strangler poison?," Oberyn asked brusquely. "I witnessed everything, and I observed your reaction. I know it wasn't you who dropped the poison in his cup, you were as surprised as the others. Or that, or you're an excellent actor. But I'm of the opinion that stage gained a lot when you decided not to work in the entertainment word, though as a strolling player you might have earned a living, doubtlessly." Oberyn addressed him his teasing smile. "And in case the notion crosses your mind, it wasn't me either who poisoned Joffrey. Yes, I know a lot about poisons, in my travels I learnt very much about them. But if I had wanted to kill Joff, I'd have done it with my poisoned spear in view of everyone, and not by dropping stealthily a lethal gemstone in a cup."

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
"In that regard, you have nothing to fear on my part," Tyrion assured, ironic. "I've never believed it was you. I know your reputation and for you it'd have been a too much disappointing way of killing my nephew. We agree that none of us was the author, though it wasn't as if we weren't in the mood for it, at least for my part. I envy and applaude to the one who did it. Joff was a dimwit and insufferable sadistic who made the kingdoms bleed and, among many other things, turned my wife's life into a living hell. Very few dudes would cry for him, apart from his mother and the bootlickers he rewarded for killing children, torturing poor wretched and satisfy his insane wishes. If he had lasted some more time in the throne, Joff would have mad the Mad King look as an example of sanity."

Oberyn then surprised Tyrion again with another abrupt change of topic.

"My brother Doran knows that Myrcella is actually a bastard. Lord Tyrion. Everyone at bottom knows that Cersei's children aren't Robert Baratheon's children, but the Kingslayer's."

Tyrion was not so naïve as to take the prince of Dorne for a mug. Doran Martell's apparent peaceful attitude hid a secretive and patient plan for revenge, which he at last was carrying out. Proposing Oberyn as Daenerys's husband was the first step of his vengeance against the Lannisters, and Tyrion knew it. He hoped not to have been wrong when he sent Myrcella to the snakepit. Doran might not be the well behaved ruler he pretended to be, but Tyrion did not doubt that he loved and respected his niece and he would not let anyone hurt her. He was not a child murderer. Moreover, Myrcella had gained the heart of his son Trystane, and Doran loved his son above all. He did not want to see him to suffer. The issue that she was a bastard was not so frowned upon in Dorne, not even among nobility. Besides, she was officially a Baratheon, unless proven otherwise. Tyrion expected that Doran decided to go on with the engagement, though he only did it to see his son happy. He already had arranged a very advantageous marriage for his family when he persuaded Oberyn to wed the dragon queen. Tyrion hoped that Doran did not disregard Myrcella in favour of another suitor with less dubious origins.

"I was under the impression that in Dorne the matter of surnames was not so important," Tyrion replied, wondering what were Oberyn's intentions with that revelation.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
"And it isn't. Many people over there is less hypocritical in that sense than the people from other places. Myrcella can continue to be a Baratheon, or a Waters, that matters little. But now we're talking honestly about our families and the affection, or the lack of it, we feel for them, I'll tell you that initially Doran accepted your proposal to offer Myrcella as Trystane's wife to keep the peace with the Lannisters, but especially to foster a valuable hostage. Don't misinterpret me, my brother doesn't have the slightest intention to hurt an innocent girl. She's not to blame for what her true parents have done, or for what her grandfather Tywin has done, or for her brother Joffrey. But Doran was surprised that you offered him your niece, and he accepted. At first he didn't intend to wed her to Trystane; his plan was to keep her for other goals. But Trystane fell in love with her, and she with him, and Doran couldn't deny his son's happiness. My brother is very grateful to Myrcella, and he loves her truly. He isn't going to put her aside from the boy who loves her." He kept silent while they went on walking along the circuitous streets he knew like the back of his hand. "Before all the issue with Myrcella, Doran, as soon as he found out that Daenerys had been widowed from the dothraki khal and that she had dragons, planned to marry Trystane to her. He entrusted that to me in the strictest secrecy. He even started the procedures for the negotiations. Just then, the raven with your proposal arrived, but Doran decided to carry on with his initial plan. He gave his consent to the stay of Myrcella in Dorne and approved the engagement. All in all, engagements can be called off if it's convenient, and my brother was determined to do it when the proper moment came. But the situation took a turn and my brother had to redo the plan. He then began to persuade me to marry Daenerys instead of Trystane. And that's why I'm here, my friend. Because my nephew loves so much your niece that Doran and I agreed to allow the boy to be happy with her. And, by the way, I neither lost out. I'm curious to see how it is to get up every day next to a beautiful woman with true dragon blood. I admit that when Doran pushed me into this adventure, I was reluctant. Marriage had never fitted on my plans. But look at me now." Oberyn was smiling. However strange it looked, Tyrion was starting to like much more the Dornish prince. Simply the fact that he was so fond of Tywin Lannister's granddaughter told loads in his favour. And the fact that, for his nephew, he had agreed to a marriage that had not filled him with excitement initially.

"Neither fitted marriage on my own plans. No woman with an important surname would have wanted to marry the Imp. My father had to deal with the refusals of many lords when he offered them my hand for their daughters, when I was still a little boy. But he neither would have agreed to a marriage between a Lannister of Casterly Rock and a woman from a minor house. More than one house would have been willing to offer their daughters even to the Imp, but Tywin never would have debased himself to accept them. So I resigned myself to the idea that whores and kitchen or tavern wenches would be the only women within my reach. And you see how events have developed in the end. I'd have been the last one to predict that I'd end up married to a beauty from one of the oldest lineages of Westeros. And that she would love me. They're too many gifts for an Imp like me. I'm a lucky dwarf." Tyrion remembered captain Letho and gave the hint of a smile. By that time, the Lorathi man must be back in his homeland, and the young Lysene girl Kyra, who he had adopted as a daughter, must be leading a new life as a normal girl, freed from brothels. Tyrion wished that things had gone well for them both.

"You're lucky, undoubtedly. But she isn't too unlucky either. Even if her husband is a Lannister Imp." That was the closest to a compliment Tyrion could get from the Viper, and he grinned, amused.
"Well. Are you going to describe to me the services of that brothel? We must be about to arrive by now and, as I told you, I won't go in."

"Alright, alright, but I still insist that it's your loss. They are chambers with bathrooms, which the clients who prefer privacy can reserve. There are pools with hot water, a steam room and the establishment also has massagers at the clients' disposal, if you're interested in adding them to the services. Besides, if you prefer to be drier, there is an adjoining chamber with the floor covered with carpets and cushions. And you can order the food and drink to be served to you. Those meals are quite good and the wine, of course, is Dornish. You can access to those chambers without having to walk through the rest of the premises or see the whores showing off, if you don't fancy it."

They had arrived at the establishment's gate. The outer decoration hardly gave away the exotic luxury that the interior promised.

"The owners want to offer an image of discretion, and their services are quite exclusive. Here the whores don't earn a single copper for a screw. I warn you that this place isn't cheap, but it's worth it. You won't find a more romantic retreat in the entire Meereen, apart from my boat, of course."

"It's all right. I'll propose it to Sansa, and I hope I won't end up sleeping on the ground. Well, I'm leaving. I have many tasks to carry out." Tyrion emphasized the sentence with irony. Oberyn rarely had much to do apart from relaxing at will throughout the city.

"That's one of the things that distinguish you and me. You take your duties very seriously, and I still have to learn to. A lack of habit, I suppose." And, with his most brazen smile, Oberyn disappeared from view into the building. Tyrion walked far from there and decided that, as he was already in the streets, he would go to the market and would speak with Sarik, so this one could acquaint him with the latest transactions. Later, he perhaps could locate Kerro somewhere and give him a helping hand. Since his two eldest sons had come from Yunkai safe and sound, Kerro gave off a boundless joy and was even more tirelessly active than before, and the whole Meereen was benefiting from it.

Tyrion, happy and truly relaxed for the first time in days, headed for the city centre, hoping that Sansa would not regard Oberyn's idea as bad.
Chapter 505

The Summer Isles

When she opened her eyes, Asha felt confused for some seconds, until she remembered where she was. She had dreamed that she was back in Pyke, and in her dream she was a thirteen-year-old teenager again. Lenny was also there, a childhood friend with who she had lost her virginity. He was barely a year older than her, and a virgin too, and Asha knew that he felt for her a youthful infatuation that very young adolescents experienced many times, out of curiosity to become acquainted with love and sex for the first time. Lenny was for her no more than a buddy to play, have adventures and make mischiefs, but the games between them had developed progressively a less innocent touch... And Asha, who did not feel carried away by desire toward the boy, let him do little by little. She was not new to sexual games, she masturbated since a while ago and had watched openly people fucking. Sometimes, on the beach or in a tavern, some sailor laid a whore or a tavern wench without much discretion, and she also had caught sometimes a few men forcing themselves, on board of their ships, upon any of the salt wives they had brought from some of their lootings. Asha was a very restless and dauntless girl who was always poking around and looking at everything, and the sailors had got used to her almost constant presence, so they stopped feeling bothered by the fact that she sometimes witnessed their sexual activities. They told her, mockingly, that that way she would know what was in store for her when her tits began to grow for real and men desired to place themselves between her legs.

Nothing of what she had seen had impressed her. The majority of those women did not give the impression of enjoying that very much. It rather looked like they did it simply as a means to earn money or, in the case of the salt wives, it was obvious that they detested it. Asha did not feel fascinated for the male member, and she was not eager at all to have it inside of her.

But Lenny sometimes did pleasant things to her. Asha taught him to touch her with his hand, in a similar way as when she touched herself. He was a little giddy and clumsy and it cost her a lot to make him drive her to climax. Soon afterwards, she asked him to do it to her with his tongue and he at first refused, scandalized, but she got angry with him, accusing him of being a selfish boy, as she performed things on him with her mouth though she was not delighted to do it. Iron men were not used to please women that way, but Asha was determined to achieve a certain degree of sexual reciprocation with Lenny. When he started to perform oral sex on her, she realized that that was what she liked most of all they had done up to that moment. She wondered if intercourse would be as much pleasant, though she doubted it. One day Asha asked him to do it in earnest, like the adults did it, and the boy agreed, impatient for it and tremendously nervous. He had been awaiting that moment for a very long time.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 506

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After some foreplay to put herself in the mood, Asha placed herself onto him, took a breath and descended. She preferred to do things with determination and heartedly, so Lenny's cock introduced into her all at once, to the bottom. The pain pierced her as if she had been stabbed and she could not help to let out a cry, biting her lip quickly as if crying out in pain was a sign of weakness she could not allow herself. Lenny gazed at her between worried and excited, and asked her if she was all right, but she, in reply, started to move upon him implacably, disregarding her own blood that was staining Lenny's crotch. The pain subsided a little once her hymen was torn, but Asha did not feel any pleasure in that. By contrast Lenny, judging by the expression of his face, was having a great time. His eyes were closed and he had a smile of sheer delight. He began to squeeze her small breasts and that bothered her, because her breasts were very sensitive. They were growing and even the brush of her clothes was unpleasant to her. After some seconds, he trembled, moaned loudly and Asha felt the flow of his seed into her lower belly. But she had felt hardly anything save pain and uneasiness. She experienced a little compassion for some of the women she had observed, forced to do that with men who had abducted them and who they probably hated. But things were that way among the ironborn and she was accustomed to that. Sex was something to which women had to submit to give pleasure to men and give birth to their children. But Asha deep down did not resign herself to that. She decided that she would forge her own fate, and from then on she would take charge of her sex life as she fancied.

After her disappointing first experience with Lenny, she did it with him some more times along the days. The pain disappeared and the act improved a bit, but Asha still did not enjoy it a lot and did not reach climax during penetration. In the end, she had had enough of doing it with him and told him that they could remain as friends, but without going to bed together, at least until they were older and maturer, if by then they kept their friendship and wanted to have sex again. He, displeased and hurt, dodged her for months, but after some time he forgave her and they treated each other as old friends once again. By then he had met another girl and he even was about to get engaged, as soon as their families approved their relationship. Anyway, if he some time had dreamt naively of marrying Asha, he knew that it was utterly impossible. She was a Greyjoy, whereas he came from a low fishermen's family. Moreover, Asha had no intention to get married. She would do everything possible to avoid that bothersome obligation.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 507

The Summer Isles

By that time, she had realized that the sight of appealing women caused a tingle in her crotch. Their naked bodies aroused her sensuality in a way men's bodies could not. One day, a wench of one of the taverns at the harbour to which Asha went sometimes to drink ale and to perform the finger dance, looked at her brazenly and smiled at her. Asha got close to the counter and they both had a talk. Finally, the wench told her to wait, because her shift was about to finish. Asha awaited and she afterwards accompanied the girl to her poky room, placed on the top floor of the tavern. It seemed that she also worked as an occasional prostitute in order to increase her incomes, of which she gave a part to the owner of the establishment. The girl undressed and washed herself in front of Asha, who was watching her, aroused. After that, they went to bed and Asha learnt how sex with another woman was. She enjoyed it a lot more than when she had fucked Lenny, and she knew that that was her thing, sex with women. With them, everything was pleasure and she gave in completely. Asha returned more times to the tavern, to bed Marna. And since then, whenever she could, she searched for girls to have a good time with.

She sometimes seduced men as well, when she realized that it was an excellent way of getting from them what she wanted. She learnt to reach climax during intercourse, though it was more difficult for her, and she occasionally faked it, if the man in question was too clumsy or was too much focused on his own enjoyment to give special attention to her. But the power she wielded over them in bed amused her.

That night she dreamt about Lenny once again and about his rough hands over her. She woke up wet between her legs and for a moment she did not know where she was, until she remembered she was in the Summer Isles, in the palace of Prince Jheranos Kha. He had requested her presence at his palace once more after two weeks without summoning her, and Asha had divided those weeks between Theon, who had recovered some colour and gained a little weight, and Ranessa, the sensual islander girl with whom she used to spend her nights. Other times she joined her men to drink and chat with, of course with those who in those moments were not in someone's arms, and mingled with the noble people who were her hosts, though officially, of course, the prince of the island was the supreme host.

Her fair skin had got a tan with the strong sun and the tanning gave her a more exotic appearance. She wore the light native attire as if she had been born with it, and she felt fully at ease. But as a woman of action, she was starting to feel restless because of the mild stay at the islands. She needed more adventure, to cross the sea on her Black Wind. Every day she hoped that the princes did not delay an eternity to take their decision concerning the alliance with the dragon queen. If it were not for the damned protocol, she would have asked Jheranos directly how the negotiations were going, and she did not lack desire to shake him by his shoulders so he spilled out where the opinion of the other princes was inclined to. But there were certain barriers that no one, not even a noble woman like her, could overstep in the Summer Isles, and rush or wheedle information out of a prince were included among those forbidden things. Not even in bed had she been able to make Jheranos speak. She had not asked him, but she had dropped certain hints to which he had responded placidly that all would be known in due course, with an unhurried tone with a touch of firmness which warned Asha that it would be considered bad taste that she mentioned the subject again. So she resigned herself to wait.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
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The Summer Isles

The previous night she had bedded Jheranos again. As a man accustomed to the convenience of being pleased and regaled, he was not a great lover. He was indolent and passive in sex and allowed Asha to take on nearly everything. She liked being in command when she fucked a man, but that prince almost looked as if sexual intercourse bored him. He performed it out of duty mostly, because it was the most important way of honouring his gods, than out of pleasure itself. Jheranos had ten wives who lived in other wing of the palace and he only visited them when he had to carry out his marital functions, generally choosing a different wife each day, except for the times he received visits from noble women like Asha. Jheranos only bedded high-ranking noble women, and he had done it with all the ones in the island and also with others of the neighbouring islands. The princes' wives only could bed other princes, apart from their own husbands, and these ones usually shared their wives with their counterparts of the other islands, to lavish among themselves and keep the good diplomatic relations.

Asha did not find stimulating to share the bedroom with Jheranos, and she even got bored, but she hid it. While she was riding him or doing other things to him, she thought about practical matters. The provisioning of the fleet, the repairs of some minor damage in the ships that were not finished yet, the total number of boats and men that would get going to Slaver's Bay if the negotiations were successful, the magnificent swan ships, the impressive bows and arrows made of goldenheart wood... Finally, the prince finished quietly, with his eyes closed, and Asha faked a climax she had not come to feel. If it were not for the seed he spilled, she would doubt that even he had reached a true orgasm. But it was obvious that sex was not one of the passions of the prince of Walano. In spite of that lack of carnal ardor, and according to what the hosts had told Asha, he had forty nine children, and three of his wives were pregnant currently. Of course, with full certainty not all the children came from his own seed, and other noble women must have conceived babies with Jheranos, but in that place it did not matter who sired the babies, but the family or clan where they were born and brought up. The prince's wives had given birth to fifty seven babies in total, but eight kids had died. And if some wife died, either by birthgiving or by other reasons, the prince married quickly another noble woman, to replace the deceased one. The first-born son was the heir prince, and the rest of the children were not considered princes or princesses, but high-ranking noble people. The exception was that, if the eldest son died, the second one in the succession took the place of the heir, and so on. The sons and daughters who did not have status of princes or princesses formed their own clans when they married, and left to live with their new families in Lotus Port or any other settlement of their choice, or in a neighbouring island. Obviously, endogamy was part of the islander culture. Everyone had family relationships over there. The only marriages regarded as taboo were the ones between fathers and daughters, mothers and sons or brothers and sisters between themselves, and the sexual intercourse between them was prohibited too. But all the other joinings were allowed. Asha observed that, despite those customs that bordered incest, the islanders were generally healthy people and they had a low number of cases of insanity.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 509

The Summer Isles

The prince never slept accompanied, so as soon as he was satisfied with the sex sessions, he sent Asha to her guest room. She was there that morning. At first she had no idea where she was, until she noticed that her bed was too much soft and fluffy to be her pallet in the *Black Wind*. She shook her head to clear her mind and she went out to the terrace such as she was, completely naked. There it really did not matter if one wore clothes or not, and that was one of the things she most liked of being there, far behind from enjoying Ranessa's body, of course. A heavy tropical rain had bathed the landscape overnight and the jungle dawned wet, sprinkled with thousands of dewdrops that sparkled in the sun. The sight was so beautiful that it took the breath away. At the far end, the sea shone like a wavy silver mirror and licked the white sand. Asha would not have minded to live there, if she could go on being the captain of her own fleet. Though she would not change her *Black Wind* for any other boat, she imagined herself captaining a swan ship and an intense tingle crept down her stomach. With those boats, the sea would open in front of her with infinite possibilities...

But Asha did not let herself dream too much, and even less about things that would not happen, so she got rid of her morning daydream and she got ready for the day she had ahead of her.

She knew that the prince had summoned her for a specific reason, not because he fancied a lot having a tumble under the sheets with her. That day would arrive the raven with the final decision of the other princes. Jheranos wanted her to be present at the moment when the outcome of the deliberations would be revealed at last.

She could not help it. She was nervous. Within a few hours she would verify if the time invested in the islands would get results, or if she would depart from there such as she arrived. She would not lose anything in any case, except perhaps for a few of precious weeks. But when she thought about how much fun she had got there, it neither was something to regret.

She went to take a dip in the river, like every morning, and when she returned to her bedroom, she was served breakfast. She ate with relish (on the high seas you could never know when you would eat so well again) and she got out to take a stroll through the gardens. There were lots of species of plants Asha knew nothing of. In the Iron Islands vegetation was sparse, and the little there was stood as hardy and grey as rocks. In those gardens, on the other hand, there were wonderful flowers of all the colours with such a delicate appearance that they gave the impression of breaking if they were touched. They had a velvety touch and each one of them gave off a different scent, to the extent that a short while later Asha's sense of smell was saturated. She thought about Theon, as always. Her brother did not complain when she had to attend the palace, what fortunately happened very few times, but she sensed his sad gaze and felt guilty about leaving him alone. Well, he was not completely alone, as there were people around all the time, but she knew he felt even more alone than usual without her. Since he had come back from his captivity, all his world revolved around her and Asha had recovered fully the protective streak she had always felt toward him, but now it was increased tenfold, when she saw him so broken and helpless. She could not fail him. As soon as all that bloody issue was resolved, she would return with him and she gladly would tell the prince to go to hell. Not even when she bedded Ranessa she was far from her brother. Theon had got used to the activities of the two women, and had stopped running away. He simply turned to look aside, like the others did, and he waited patiently for them to finish and for Asha to devote all her attention to him once more.
(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
The Summer Isles

She heard sounds of trainings and she walked to a cleared area in the middle of the gardens, where a dozen boys were receiving fighting lessons and bow and arrow trainings. Their ages must vary from four to fifteen years old, and Asha guessed that they were the prince's sons, at least the ones that were still underage and had not abandoned their father's palace to go set up their own clans. Judging by the prince's age, who was already in his maturity, some of his sons and daughters must be older than Asha and they would have left the palace many years ago. Except, of course, for the heir, who lived in an independent wing of the palace with his first wife and his children. Once his father died and he was a prince, he would be allowed to have more wives. Only princes could practice polygamy, though people of a lower status were allowed to have concubines, along with their legitimate wife. And of course, everybody, both men and women, could engage in free sex with people who were not their spouses or official lovers.

The guards recognized her and let her in, and Asha watched the lessons, amused. She was surprised by the discipline and dedication the boys showed. The summer islanders gave a deceiving impression of indolence and placidity under their soft and kind manners and their phlegm when they carried out their daily tasks. But it was not for nothing that the reputation of the islander archers had spread everywhere. They took very seriously their facet of warriors, and all the boys enabled to it were trained. Though only a few were destined to be warriors when they became adults, all of them should know how to fight and be ready for a possible war or invasion. Despite being a basically peaceful nation, they were not naïve and they knew that the outside world was not peaceful. Neither they had always been. Along history some infightings had shaken the islands, and there was even a time when they embraced slavery. Those were times of an excess of ambition which were about to destroy them and, after many human losses, they were able to recover and repudiate the bad influence imported from the other continents. They returned to their old ways and peace settled again in those paradisiacal lands.

The boys noticed Asha's presence, of whom they must have heard, as they for sure knew that she was a guest in the palace. The master-at-arms payed his respects to her formally and afterwards the boys performed the greeting ritual, one after another. They spoke the common tongue correctly, and Asha deduced that they probably had in the palace a tutor who taught it to them. She quickly forgot almost all their names after having heard them, because they were too many to remember them at first. Smiling, she introduced herself as Asha, daughter of Balon Greyjoy, the legitimate lord of the Iron Islands, who had left the world of the living to join the Drowned God in his watery halls at the bottom of the sea. Just then, she pronounced solemnly the motto that was sacred to all the ironborn: *What is dead may never die*, tapping her chest with her fist. The boys looked at her wide-eyed, as if she was a very rare and exotic creature. She thought, amused, about how each one perceived things. To any Westerosi those dark-skinned people were little more than mere lazy and indecent savages who spent their lives getting fat and fornicating, but Asha had seen enough of the world at that point to know that the prejudices of many people against other people always exaggerated the truth. The summer islanders knew how to enjoy life, but from that to being lazy and spending their lives getting fat, there was a long way. Asha had learnt to respect them during the short time she had been a guest there.

*(Part 6 of a longer chapter)*
The Summer Isles

When the greetings finished, she made quite a bold proposal.

"Do any of you want to train with me? I haven't exercised for a while and if I don't practice, I'm going to get rusty and I don't know if I'll be able to lift any of my axes."

The boys stared at her, stunned.

"You fight?," asked one of the older ones, impressed. Asha sensed that she soon would have a few entranced adolescents drooling behind her.

"At ten I was already able to shave a fly's head when I threw my axes. And I could hit a rat's eye with my dagger twenty metres away," Asha admitted, and she could not help to swagger a little in front of that audience of astonished kids. It was evident that they had never seen a warrior woman. "Well. Any of you want to try?," she challenged, with her most inviting smile.

"I'll train with you," said the boy that had spoken before. "I'd like to see how you throw the axe and the dagger."

"Unluckily, you know that I can't carry my weapons while I'm staying as a guest in your island, so I don't have them here, and I neither believe that I'm allowed to use them with you. But you might lend me one of those bows with blunt arrows. I need to exercise my aim." The kids trained with blunt arrows and dull wooden swords, of course, like in all the noble houses of Westeros.

Right away they gave her a bow and a handful of arrows. Asha also had trained in the use of that weapon, though she did not master it to perfection. If she wanted to keep the boys' admiration, she would have to aim well and polish up her shots. She was a good shooter and she used to hit where she set eyes, but it had been a long time without using a bow.

She placed the arrow, stretched the bowstring and aimed to one of the targets, which were circles made of hemp that were resting on sawbucks. She focused on the central spot. The boys and their master-at-arms were awaiting in an expectant silence.

Asha shot. The arrow pierced the centre of the target and she smiled, proud of herself. All the kids let out exclamations of awe.

"Now it's your turn," Asha invited to the oldest lad, called Jezibar, who was looking at her as if she was the incarnation of Rhi, the goddess of fertility, who according to the religion worshipped over there, had sixteen tits and had given birth to the whole world after fornicating with the god Khuri, who also had begotten the sun, the moon and the stars with another goddess whose strange name Asha could barely recall, but who apparently was the goddess of light or something of the sort.

The boy aimed and shot at the target Asha had hit previously. His arrow pierced the centre, next to hers.

"I see why the islander archers are so famous," Asha praised, observing the lad's proud expression. She went to pick up the the arrows to clear the target and try again. She walked back close to Jezibar. She noticed that the rest of the brothers were keeping track of her exhibition and that amused her greatly. At least that pastime was much more entertaining that waiting and doing nothing.
"How are the Iron Islands?," Jezibar asked. Undoubtedly he already bedded girls and women since a while ago, as it was normal there, and he was trying to draw her attention to seduce her. But Asha did not take to bed such young adolescents. She preferred older lovers and moreover, however liberal were those people's customs, she was not very sure that the prince would like very much that she laid his son. She better would not risk to cause his anger.

Asha described her homeland to him in outline, and Jezibar listened to her as if instead of being a handful of large rocks nearly shorn over the sea, lashed by the wind, the rain and the snow in winter, they were a sort of paradise comparable to the one where he lived. They went on practicing their aim and they kept a tally of the points, in a competition which the rest of the boys followed enthusiastically. In the end Jezibar won two points ahead and Asha admitted her defeat with a comical display of sportmanship.

"But you'd never defeat me with an axe or a dagger, I guarantee you," she boasted.

Later, the other older brothers also wanted to compete with her and Asha accepted, delighted, because Jezibar was showing himself very interested and she tried to avoid his gallant advances stealthily. The other kids gave her the ideal pretext when they monopolized her. In spite of that, the lad was not prone to give up. And he probably did not ignore what his father and she did at night, but that did not seem to annoy him. Jealousy was something rare in that place.

A while later a servant arrived, notifying that the prince was requesting her presence. Her heart throbbed. At last he was going to convey to her the decision concerning the alliance with Daenerys.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 512

The Summer Isles

She appeared in the audience hall, where Jheranos was awaiting in the lotus posture, as unshakeable as an ebony statue. If it were not because she had the full certainty that barely some hours earlier that man who looked so hieratical in public had been inside of her, she herself would have been willing to believe that she had never had any dealings with him. She sat down in front of him onto another richly embroidered cushion, and she waited for him to start the conversation.

"How has the morning passed, my lady?," he asked courteously, without looking at her yet. It seemed that he was much more interested in the scenery which could be seen from the window and that he must know by heart after so many years gazing at it, than in her.

"It's been very pleasant, Your Highness," Asha answered with all her courtesy, concealing her impatience.

"I've been informed that you've been in the training field with my sons and that you are a good archer," he commented, as if there was nothing more urgent to talk about.

"Not as good as Jezibar. And that taking into account that he is at least ten years younger than me. I learnt how to use the bow, but the iron men don't specialize in that weapon. We are experts in the use of the axe and the dagger," Asha explained, as if the prince did not know full well what the specialties of the iron men were. Decidedly, she did not like to beat about the bush.

"You are a peculiar woman, Lady Asha Greyjoy."

She was not sure if he had said it as a compliment to her intrepidity or as a veiled reproach for daring to adopt roles to which women could not access without great effort and criticism. It was very difficult to know what that man truly thought or felt.

"A woman has to fight a lot for what she really desires, Your Highness. And it's obvious that my wish is not to remain shut inside four walls whereas the man of the house takes all fun. Neither it's my wish that my uncle Euron the usurper gets his own way after what he did to my father." Asha preferred to play the card of frankness.

The prince observed her with his impassive face.

"Yes, it's evident that you are different from what women use to be. But there have been warrior women like you here as well. Are you acquainted with our past?"

Asha would have wanted to scream, but instead of that she hinted a smile.

"Yes, I know the story of Xanda Qo, the warrior princess who fought against slavery. Thanks to her the swan ships exist and men started to train in the use of the bow and arrows made of goldenheart wood. You see, some of the great episodes of history have been led by women. Like Daenerys Targaryen is doing now." Asha hoped that that deliberate turn in the conversation took them to the topic she wanted to tackle.

"Let's trust that her prominence in history has not ended abruptly, on the back of three dragons," the prince objected. Asha felt a sting of uneasiness. Did that sentence with pessimistic hints mean that the princes had rejected the proposal?
"As I told you, I don't think so, Your Highness. She'll come back." Decidedly, the prince of Walano was one of the most exasperating men she had come upon. For her it was much easier to deal with rough and foul-mouthed guys than with that extremely reserved man who barely gave away his feelings. Except perhaps for pride and ambition. Asha had bet on that ambition she had believed she had seen in his eyes, but maybe she had been wrong when she had judged him.

"May the gods listen to you. It would be a great waste for our islands to go to help a missing queen. One hundred swan ships plus the crew and three hundred archers are a considerable investment for any business, if this was lost beforehand."

Asha felt a burst of joy. A hundred ships and three hundred archers! If Jheranos had revealed such specific numbers, it was because the princes had agreed to send all those forces to Meereen.

"It's not lost, you'll see. Your contribution is very generous, Your Highness."

"We'll see. The preparations are in motion. You'll set sail within a week, my lady. You with your fleet of longboats and the fleet of swan ships. You'll have to get ready for the departure and keep in touch with the captain who will lead the Summer Fleet."

"I'll do it, Your Highness." Asha in that moment would nearly have wanted to kiss him. She restrained herself in order not to jump from the cushion.

"Go back to Lotus Port and make sure that your men and your boats are ready in time, my lady."

Asha stood up, with a pounding heart.

"So shall be it."

And with her nimble steps she went out to the jungle. If it were not because protocol ordered that a noble woman who was a guest in the prince's palace must be carried in a litter to her place of residence, Asha would have returned to Theon running.
Chapter 513

Meereen: Month 4. Day 21

"Oberyn knows of a place to which you and I might go to break away from routine," Tyrion proposed tentatively. He had waited for a week to tell her, because the previous days they had been too much busy and Sansa in addition had fallen ill with a cold. She spent several days sneezing, with a temperature and her nose congested. Tyrion was extraordinarily attentive, and Sansa joked, accusing him that he was exaggerating his care. He needled her by saying that she was gorgeous with her red and puffed nose and made her laugh. Ray stayed with her in the rooms and Leena and Missandei also spent some while with her. The young Naathi girl coped with her sorrow for the death of her foster child Menelan thanks to constant work and to Grey Worm's and her friends' company. The captain of the Unsullied spent every night in his lover's rooms, because she had asked him to. The long night hours were endless in her loneliness and only the presence of the man she loved helped her to sleep.

Several days after the chat with Oberyn, Tyrion and Sansa had just woken up and were getting ready to get out of bed and don their clothes, tidy themselves up and break their fast, and he had thought that it was better to bring up the topic that morning, when she was recovered, rested and in a good mood. Perhaps that way she would not regard as so much atrocious the fact that he was planning a romantic encounter for both of them in a brothel.

"Dear me, the prince knows this city better than any of us," Sansa jested. "As it seems, he didn't lose time during his former visit. And this is the second time he helps us to seek a place for us alone, outside the pyramid. He's very interested in our happiness, don't you think?" She used a light ironic tone and smiled with a spark of mischief in her eyes.

"Too much interested, I daresay," he replied, in a complaining tone that widened Sansa's grin. "The Viper rarely does something out of kindness of heart, darling."

"Except for accepting a marriage which didn't thrill him so his nephew can be happy with the girl he loves," she pointed out, moving an accusing forefinger in front of his face. Tyrion had told her the story about how Doran and Oberyn had agreed to allow Trystane to wed Myrcella, and Sansa had felt very touched with that revelation.

"Yes, you're right. Let's take into account that exception. But Oberyn is not an altruist precisely. He's doing all this for you, Sansa, because you're beautiful and he thinks that a beautiful woman must enjoy as much as she can or her life will be wasted. And if that woman doesn't want or can't let him make her enjoy by himself, then the prince will give her a helping hand indirectly, because he has an interest in lavishing her. As if another man apart from him couldn't live up to it. Especially me." Tyrion could not help to mock himself a little, though that did not contribute to cover up the insecurity he felt before a man whose reputation of sex predator nearly made his own pale in comparison.

"Well, I don't need anyone to give me a helping hand. I already enjoy myself as much as I can and my life is not wasted, because my husband doesn't permit that to happen. So, although I'm grateful for the prince's efforts, I'm perfectly tended to and I'm as much happy as I can be," she said, caressing his cheek, smiling.

Tyrion, despite the mocking tone they were using, felt that a rush of emotion tightened his throat a little bit.
(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"Even so, I think nothing's too good for you, beauty." *I'll never be worthy of a woman like you, my love,* he thought for the umpteenth time. He knew that if he said it, Sansa would deny it vehemently and would not let him undervalue himself, such as he did not want her to undervalue herself. Sometimes it was like a dream to him that she loved him like he loved her. In the latest nights he had suffered a recurrent nightmare that made him wake up sweating in anguish. He dreamed that he was returning to his and Sansa's rooms and she was not there. He searched for her everywhere and then, terrified, he ran away to the pyramid's gate and there she was, riding a white horse, embracing the waist of the Knight of Flowers. Loras said something by her ear and she laughed, flushed. He dug his spurs and the horse trotted away, while Sansa shot Tyrion a last glance full of that disdainful pity he detested in people's eyes. One of those times he had that nightmare she woke up as well when she noticed his turmoil, and asked him to tell her what was tormenting him. He did, with downcast eyes, and then Sansa told him: *I don't want any Knight of Flowers, or any other man. Only you. I'll always love you.* And she had made love to him, breaking the silence of the early morning, and he had felt swollen with joy. He attributed that insistent nightmare to Oberyn's closeness. Unconsciously, he always felt inferior before men like the Dornish prince.

She pulled him out of his absorption and made him come back to the present squeezing his hand, and he shook his head, as if he wanted to get rid of the annoying fly that was hovering around his head.

"I already have everything I want to have, my love," she said, smiling, placing his hand on her belly. "Don't you think it's beginning to show up?," she asked, to distract him from his insecurities. She knew that the allusion to the baby would make him forget his fears. At least the fears that another man might steal her heart.

Tyrion's face lit up.

"Oh, yes. There is a small roundness you didn't have before. Your gown is tighter over your hips." He immediately felt hard. "Umm, Sansa. Definitely, pregnancy suits you too well and because of that the state matters can be in serious danger of being slightly neglected. How am I going to focus on them from now on? The roundness of your tummy turns me crazy, beauty."

Sansa giggled. Definitely, her maneuver had been resounding successful to distract him.

"Well, to begin with, we could take advantage of that place Oberyn knows and when you're sated with the plumpness of my belly, you'll be able to focus again on state matters."

"Are you sure? Perhaps it'll be even worse and I'll desire your round belly even more." Tyrion roamed her with his most lecherous stare.

"Oh, incorrigible man. Come on, tell me how the place is. Have you seen it?"

"No, I haven't seen it, but Oberyn has described it to me." Tyrion hesitated for some instants, and then resumed. "They're a sort of baths with pools of hot water and a steam room. If one wants to keep dry, there are other adjoining rooms, very comfortable. And the service includes massagers, if one wants." He was not very convinced by the thing about the massagers. Just thinking that another man touched his wife's half-naked body made him clench his teeth. And Sansa neither
would want another woman to touch him, or see him half-naked. No, the idea that another person interfered in their intimacy, though it was just a massager, did not attract him in the least. It would be like an intrusion. And he was sure that those massagers were used to give massages which were not innocent at all. They probably were usual workers of the brothel that sometimes did extra work.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
"What's a steam room?" she asked, curious.

"It's a room where some stones are placed in a fire and, when they are very hot, they're removed with pliers. Water is spilled over them so the steam spreads throughout the room. It's said that those steam baths are very good for the skin and to relax from strain."

"Ah. And what about the massagers?"

"They give massages to relax the muscles. They do it directly on the bare skin."

Sansa opened her eyes very wide. "What? Would we have to be naked in front of them?"

"Well, not completely, if you don't want to be. But basically, yes. To tell the truth, I don't feel very prone to the things concerning the massagers," Tyrion opined, looking sideways at her.

"Neither me. Are those massagers women too? I don't want any woman to see you naked or to lay her hands on you, Tyrion. I've told that to you other times." Sansa said it half joking, what meant that she by no means would allow any other woman to touch him, not even a masseuse. He liked that possessive streak.

"I don't want either any man to see you naked or to lay hands on you, Sansa. Then, it's already decided. Massagers are ruled out."

"Absolutely," she corroborated, tying the laces of her bodice. She pulled them a little less tight than other days, in order not to press down her belly. Tyrion felt even harder than before when he observed her.

"Meals would be brought to us too, and Oberyn has assured me that they are of good quality." Now he had to tell her the rest. "According to him, the owners of the establishment guarantee full discretion and privacy to those that require it. But there's a problem, and that's what made me harbour some objections, and the reason why I didn't want to enter there before consulting you. The premises are a brothel as well, but the owners have specialized in other services for couples that want to escape routine from time to time, like us." He said it nearly without stopping, as if he had to dive in a pond of very cold water.

"What?," almost shouted Sansa. "Oberyn wants us to go to a brothel?" Her expression was incredulous.

"I told him that you probably wouldn't like the idea. And I refused to set foot in that place. I haven't visited a single brothel in many months, and I neither feel the desire to do it. I'd only go if you accompany me and we could be alone in a retreat exclusively for us. We could access to the baths independently of the rest of the establishment. We don't have to walk through the brothel," he specified. "But if you consider it's a bad idea, then we'll come up with another thing. And we always can go back to Oberyn's boat," he suggested, caressing her hand.

Sansa remained thoughtful.

"I've never been to a brothel, but you know that. I've always been the perfect lady." She stared at him with a naughty expression, what was something he was not expecting. "If we went there, I
might fantasize that I am one of those girls who pleased you in your nights of scatterbrain guy. I've
learnt a few tricks and I think I know how to pleasure a hungry-for-sex client," she insinuated, with
an expression which fully turned him on in desire. Sansa slid her hand up his thigh, until nearly
grazing the throbbing member that made his trousers bulge.

"Oh, indeed you do," he gasped, delighted by the pleasant turn the conversation had taken. He had
feared a much colder and furious reaction. "But I'm the only hungry-for-sex client you have to give
pleasure to," he added, putting her hand onto his inflamed crotch.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
She laughed, rubbing her palm against the hard and hot bulge. Tyrion needed to fuck her at that moment, and he knew she needed it too. Sansa laid him down onto the bed and pulled out in a couple of jerks her tights and her underclothes, while he was untying his trousers so as not to lose time. She freed his member and mounted it.

"Your whores did it this way to you, Tyrion? Am I doing it well?" She looked into his eyes all the time, with her wolf-in-heat gaze, and that was tremendously erotic.

"You do it incredibly well. No one has done it so well to me ever," he moaned, helping her with one of his hands to rock over him and fondling her breasts with the other hand.

"Some of them had to be very good at it. They almost made you forget that they did it to you for money. That's the secret of good whores. But not all of them faked all the time, I know it. I'm sure that those ones you returned to didn't do it to you only for gold. For once I want to pretend I'm one of those girls you bedded many times, who started to treasure your visits, because no other client treated them like you. Those girls who started to love you hopelessly and that gave you everything they could in a single night, because that was all they could get from you. And you were convinced that all that was part of their performance. It looked so real. And that's why you returned again and again to the ones who loved you in secret. Because it was real, though you didn't want to see it." Sansa was panting while she spoke, rocking over him. "Now I am one of them. Because I understand them. Poor girls. And poor, poor lost boy, that blond and green-eyed lad who mocked himself to hide his sadness. I want to give you everything, Tyrion."

"You always do, my love. Give it to me right now," he murmured, trembling, enraptured and thoroughly moved because she understood him so well. Because she knew so well that womanizer and drunkard wretched man he had been, and she loved him in spite of that.

She gave him everything. She shivered and cried his name and he melted into her and wished to stay in her interior forever.

Dara was styling her hair before the mirror and Sansa was smiling, with her cheeks flushed and her eyes bright, recalling the hot and tender scene of barely half an hour earlier. They had spent several days without so intimate and deep moments like that, both by the workload and by the cold that had postrated her in bed for three days. Sansa had felt slightly humiliated by the fact that she, a Northerner, had caught a cold in the winter weather of Meereen, incomparably much more benign than the Northern one. Her long stay in the South had left its mark, and she now lacked her former ability to withstand the cold. And when she thought that she had swum naked in the pond of the godswood when around it the snow reached up the battlements of Winterfell's ramparts... She sighed with nostalgia. No, she was not that girl any more. She partly regretted having left behind her happy childhood. But she did not regret how her life was currently. She thought that very probably no other man would make her so happy as Tyrion did. She did not delude herself. No other Westerosi lord, not even one her parents had chosen for her if she had not been betrothed to Joffrey, would have been so special to her as Tyrion proved constantly to be, without failing a single day. So she did not regret in the least that her marriage to him had been a consequence of her doomed travel to King's Landing. She longed for turning time back for everything else, to erase all the horrors. But not to erase her relationship with Tyrion.
Meereen: Month 4. Day 21

There was still four months left until her husband's nameday, but she was already turning over and over in her mind an idea which she would have to set in motion long in advance, because it would require an exhaustive search in which Sarik could not help her. The market supervisor could get practically everything that could be bought with money, except for some specific rare items which were impossible to acquire in Essos. And she precisely had in mind one of those rare items. She was looking forward to gifting her husband a birthday as unforgettable as the one he had gifted her. Moreover, everyday he deluged her with attentions and gestures, and she felt that she must give him in return at least a part of what he gave her. She knew that the lack of affection and the contempt he had suffered had turned him into an insecure person and had left his self-esteem low, and he had the need to be attentive at all times with the woman he loved, both because his kind heart needed to express its love in any possible way, and because he at bottom was convinced that that was a way of making up to his beloved for what he believed were his great flaws: his height, being Tywin Lannister's son and having spent all his youth frequenting brothels, drinking to excess and being an inveterate cynic. He was used to the fact that it was him who gave everything when rised up the rare chance to have someone to bend over backwards. In exchange for that, he only wished for being loved.

Well, Sansa would show him in his nameday that he also deserved everything. That he was not the only one who wanted to gift the world to the person he loved.

She smiled in front of the mirror, amused, while Dara applied herself to her hair. Tyrion would not be the only one who would resort to Oberyn in search for ideas to surprise her. For once, it would be her who would resort to the Dornish prince because no one else in Meereen could assist her in what she was planning. The best thing would be to do it in secret, because she did not want to reveal the slightest bit of her surprise to Tyrion and because she knew he would not like to see Oberyn wandering around her. If any time the prince got near her to exchange some courtesies with her, Tyrion did not interfere, but Sansa looked out of the corner of her eye at his darkened expression, however much he tried to conceal it. And as she did not want to give him reasons to be jealous of the Dornishman, she would carry out her plans when Tyrion was not present. Like that morning. Her husband had gone away for some of his many dealings in the city. It was the proper moment.

"Dara," she told the girl. "When you finish, I want you to do me a favour. You must do it in the strictest of secrecy, because it's a surprise for the master. A surprise for his nameday. There are still some months left for that, but I need to speak with a person as soon as possible, and right now only you can help me to get in touch with that person. Will you give me a helping hand?"

The little girl gazed at her entranced. She loved doing the mistress favours. It made her feel loved, needed and important, and that was precisely what Sansa conveyed to her subtly, day after day. The fact that Sansa entrusted the care of her hair to her, Ray's care as well along with Mhyraz and other little tasks she trusted her with, made the girl immensely happy. In exchange, Sansa made winter dresses and warm clothes for her, gifted her sweets and lemon cakes when Tyrion ordered them for their menu and she chatted with Dara every morning, while the girl was styling her hair.

"Of course I will, mistress."

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
"Look for Prince Oberyn and tell him I want to talk with him, and ask him if we can meet in the Mother's private hall. At this hour he probably hasn't gone out of his quarters yet, so I'm sure you'll find him there. Specify that it's a surprise I'm going to get ready for the master and I need to consult him about that. Make sure that no one else save Mhyraz finds out that I'm preparing a surprise for the master. Come back with the prince's answer, I'll wait for you here, all right?"

"All right, mistress." Dara finished the hairstyle she was making to Sansa and left in a rush to fulfil the errand. Sansa awaited her return sewing. She could not attend the meetings of the guild of seamstresses due to a lack of time, so she did her needlework in her rooms, like she did before the foundation of the guild. Almost always that she had spare times in which Tyrion was not with her, she occupied herself with making clothes for the children, and lately she was doing them exclusively for the baby, Mhyraz and Dara, as she did not have time for any more. Leena was making clothes for her own baby and for the girl who tended to Pod and her, and Cloe, as the queen was absent, had more time to devote herself to supply the wardrobe of the other kids in the pyramid.

Dara returned a while later. She was out of breath, after nearly having ran through the three floors that separated the prince's quarters from Tyrion and Sansa's ones.

"What did the prince say?"

"He said that he'll come to pick you up promptly, mistress. When I arrived, he was already dressed and was breaking his fast. I told him that you need his help to prepare a surprise for the master, and he smiled a lot. He gifted me a silver coin and sent me back here."

"Very well, my girl. And now, run to school." The girl obeyed and left.

Sansa went on sewing. There were still three or four months left for Mhyraz's and Dara's namedays, but Pod's would be soon. And anyone who had heard or read history books about Daenerys's birth, must know that she would be twenty years old within six months.

Once more, Sansa refused to be invaded by the doubts about Daenerys's return. All the followers of the queen in Meereen acted as if they were sure that she was absent temporarily. It was very difficult to keep high the city's spirits, and lots of citizens attended the audiences to ask when the Mother would appear. Sometimes doubt and restlessness made an impression on people and some of them showed open skepticism. The counselors did as much as they could to appease their doubts, but nothing could be guaranteed a hundred percent when, in fact, the queen had not shown up yet. Tyrion was trying to get news about her whereabouts and the dragons' as well. It would be easier to locate the beasts, but even these seemed to have vanished. No one in many miles around had seen them in weeks. The last thing people knew about them was that they had flown over the Great Grass Sea and had headed East, toward distant lands. And with regard to Daenerys, there was nothing. Tyrion pleaded with the other counselors not to divulge that information, because people's displeasure would increase if even the queen's closest collaborators showed evident signs that not even they had any clue of where she was. *Jorah and Daario are stubborn guys and, more important than anything else, they love her. They won't rest until finding her. If she's alive, they'll take her back,* Tyrion affirmed in front of Sansa, because he needed to reassure himself and believe that he had not been wrong when he judged the abilities and the feelings of the knight and of the sellsword captain.
But more than two months had passed, and it had become a habit for everyone to gaze at the sky and scan the horizon in search for three dark spots. That would be the clue that Daenerys had come back at last.

Some knocks sounded on the door and the prince announced his arrival from the other side. Sansa set aside her needlework and went to open the door.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Oberyn smiled at her gallantly, with the perpetual mischievous spark in his eyes.

"Good morning, Lady Sansa. You grow more and more beautiful each passing day."

"Good morning, Prince Oberyn. Thank you." She blushed and he stepped aside to let her walk out and close the door. They set in motion along the corridors.

"Pregnancies suited my paramour Ellaria too. She shone, and during those months I hardly had eyes for other women. I don't know what pregnant women have, as they drive crazy the senses of some men like me. Ellaria laughed at me saying that she couldn't understand that I felt so attracted to a woman with a belly so big as the prow of a ship, but it was the truth."

Sansa felt her cheeks burning out of shyness. It was one of those conversations for which Septa Mordane had not prepared her. It was one thing to joke with Tyrion in their intimacy, and quite another thing to talk about that topic with a man who was not her husband. They were not subjects fit for a lady in a courteous conversation. But Oberyn was not very fond of etiquette. Sansa already had a lot of experience with Tyrion's straightforward and erotic language, but she still felt uneasy before any other man who had a loose tongue. She could never leave behind, on the outside, the sense of modesty she had been instilled.

"I agree with her, my prince. I can't understand either certain men's tastes," she said with a small smile.

"In fact, what I don't understand is how your husband has willpower to leave you alone even for a while."

"He has a lot of business to attend and a city to rule. He can't be stuck to me every hour of the day. But I accompany him as much as I can. He needs me by his side." Sansa stressed those words to create a distance between herself and Oberyn. He was a natural seducer and she would not allow even for a moment that he doubted her absolute devotion to Tyrion.

"Of course he needs you. What man with half a brain wouldn't? You're a gift for any real man, my lady."

"You honour me, but there are few real men, and I'm lucky enough to love one of them."

They started to walk down the ramp to the first floor.

"And well? You've requested my help for your husband's nameday. It seems that for now my most important role in this city consists in acting as a sentimental adviser for couples in search for romantic ideas. I'm losing faculties as a tough man, without a doubt," Oberyn jested.

"When the queen comes back, you won't have plenty of time to offer advice to lovers." Sansa let out a giggle. It amused her that the veteran Red Viper thought that he nearly had dropped to the level of a middleman.

"I hope that by then these activities are history, though I'm afraid that certain couples will continue to need the advice of an expert like me. Maybe in other things I'm not the best, but nobody beats me in seduction tricks, my lady. With my experience and your devotion, I don't doubt that your
husband will have the best nameday a husband can have. Well, tell me, what do you need?," he inquired. They arrived before the door of Daenerys's private hall and they entered. On the table there was a decanter of Dornish wine and two cups. Oberyn must have ordered them to be brought. He took the decanter and made the gesture of serving a cup to Sansa, but she refused.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
"I don't drink alcoholic beverages, my prince. Because of the baby," she explained.

"I don't think that a cup will damage the child, but I respect your wish for protecting its health. Ellaria also refused to drink alcohol when she knew she was pregnant. She and my daughters are called Sand Snakes, but Ellaria is like female cats in regards to her girls. She's very capable of ripping out anyone's eyes for them. She has done it some time. Literally," he told with a casual tone, as if that was the most ordinary topic to chat about.

For the old gods and the new. What kind of family the queen is going to be part of?, Sansa thought with a small chill down her spine.

"It's alright, then I'll order an innocuous drink to be brought to you. An infusion, perhaps? Some peppermint tea?"

"No, thank you, my lord. I don't fancy drinking anything." Oberyn made a gesture of compliance and served himself wine. Sansa went straight to the point. "I need your help to find a book. Your family keeps a close bond with the Citadel and you yourself studied there. The archmaesters have copies of all the existing books and they sell some of those copies to the houses which demand them for their libraries. If your brother asks for a copy, I'm sure they wouldn't deny it to him."

Oberyn grinned.

"Of course they wouldn't deny it to him. What book is it?"

"Dragon Heart, by Maester Carlus. My husband had a copy when he was a child, but his sister destroyed it out of meanness. I know it was his most cherished object and that he's always missed it. He might have asked the Citadel for another copy, but he never did it, because his uncle Gerion gifted him that copy. Tyrion loved him very much, so the present was more special as it came from him. I suppose that Tyrion afterwards wasn't interested in getting another copy, because it wouldn't be the one his uncle gifted him in his sixth nameday. But perhaps he'd be glad to receive it from me," Sansa explained.

"You say he'd be glad? You'll see how he won't permit even dust to graze it," Oberyn assured, smiling at her warmly.

"Then, will you help me? Might you write to your brother asking him to acquire the book and entrust it to someone who will travel in the next dispatch of ships from Dorne to Meereen? I'm aware that soon the prince will send more vessels and that way the book might be brought here. I'll pay you its price plus the bother of the transfer to here."

The Viper made a categorical gesture of denial.

"You don't have to pay me anything, my lady. Regard it as a gesture of courtesy on my part. The truth is that even a heart so little prone to weakness as mine gets moved by so much proof of love from such a beautiful young woman. Lord Tyrion is very lucky in that. As lucky as me."

"I am as well. There are very few husbands like him."

"Very true, my lady," he admitted, with his mocking tone. "Is there anything else with which I
could be useful to you?"

Sansa had thought about another present that perhaps would be impossible for Sarik to find.

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4. Day 21

"Could you get me a Valyrian steel dagger? With a lion and a direwolf carved out on the haft. I know that Valyrian steel is not easy to find, but you move in lots of circles and have many contacts both in Westeros and here. And I will pay you this order, whatever you say. I'd never abuse your goodwill," Sansa said firmly.

"You can abuse as much as you want," he offered with a suggestive tone. "My lady, I'm a rich prince. The Martells are in quite a prosperous position. Not as much as your Lannister relatives, but I can afford a Valyrian steel dagger, what for you and your husband for now is a considerable expense, not to mention the book you want to acquire. Lord Tyrion at present doesn't have access to the gold of Casterly Rock and you only count on what he earns as a queen's counselor. Allow me this courtesy as a little gesture of admiration and respect for you, Lady Sansa. I think that if there is someone capable of getting back what she was snatched, it's you. You're a true wolf, I sense it," he complimented, and Sansa reddened again to the roots of her hair. "But meanwhile, don't deny me this little pleasure."

She decided to hold her ground. She wanted to show that neither Tyrion nor she were beggars. Now you'll see if I am a true wolf, prince.

"I'm very grateful to you. I really appreciate your gesture. But I'll pay that dagger. I'll accept that you don't want to charge me the book, but the issue about the dagger is immovable. Us wolves are proud, my prince. If you really respect me, respect that too."

Oberyn smiled with an air of amused defeat.

"All right, my lady. It'll be as you wish. With a woman like you, maybe even I might become completely faithful, like your husband, if I didn't have Ellaria already."

Sansa returned his smile and reproached herself for blushing at every turn. Oberyn Martell's reputation as a seducer undoubtedly was well deserved. It was natural that any woman fell under the spell of his visceral and dangerous appeal. But Sansa was not any woman. She loved Tyrion, the nicest man on earth in her eyes. Sansa's heart was already so full of him that it overflowed. The prince did not have the slightest chance.

"Thanks a lot for everything. I'll never forget the great favour you're doing to me. For me it's fundamental to gift him the nameday he deserves. He's always showering me with attention, and that day I want to show him in a special way that he's the most important person in my life together with our baby. Until recently he's always had a shortage of affection and it's time to make him up properly for what he hardly had the opportunity to know until we both escaped from King's Landing. I also was guilty for being cold and distant to him. I was a naïve girl blinded by hatred and pain. But in the end I opened my eyes and I saw him as he really is."

Oberyn almost looked at her tenderly.

"Nothing is felt as deeply as youth's love," he murmured softly.

"That's something you know better than me, due to your experience. But I'm certain that mine is much more than youth's love. As long as I live, my love will grow and mature with me," she stated emphatically.
She stood up and he imitated her.

"If you need something else, tell me, my lady. You have earned the unwavering friendship of the future king of Westeros, or that's what I hope," he offered with sparks of amusement in his dark eyes.

"It's a great honour, my prince." She curtsied in front of Oberyn and he took her hand to kiss its back. Sansa again turned burning red and the prince let loose her hand, shooting her a last naughty glance, before which she could not help but smiling.

They stepped out of the hall and he accompanied her to Pod and Leena's rooms. Sansa wanted to spend a short while with her friend, who she met less lately, and that was one of the scant moments she had available for that.
Sansa could not believe her ears.

"Lady Brienne of Tarth is at the gates of Meereen and she's requesting an interview with me?" She turned to Tyrion, who was very surprised as well. One of the Unsullied that watched the gates of Meereen's ramparts had run to the pyramid to announce the arrival of the warrior woman and he remained in the corridor, waiting for Sansa's answer. "Can you believe it, Tyrion? She has traveled here to offer me her services again. She's really stubborn. I once rejected her request for serving me. Why does she insist on looking for me? She has taken the risk of going through thousands of miles without knowing if I want to admit her as my bodyguard." She was strolling across the room, stunned.

"It's not so different from what we did when we carried out the same journey than her to come to ask Daenerys for asylum. We did it even ignoring if she would admit us. And nonetheless we did it, because we didn't have another place to go. Perhaps Lady Brienne neither has any," Tyrion reasoned.

"She wants to be my personal guard. Instead of offering her services to the queen, she's offering them to me. I remember that in King's Landing she told me that she had taken an oath to my mother and that it was her wish to go on fulfilling that oath. But I'd never had thought that she'd be so willing to fulfil it, to the extent of traveling through half the world to come to a foreign city to swear allegiance to a woman she doesn't even know. Though I am Lady Catelyn's daughter, Lady Tarth only knows me from hearsay and she only saw me several times briefly in the Red Keep. It's difficult to believe in such loyalty, Tyrion. I've been so terribly disappointed since I left Winterfell that I distrust any stranger who comes near me with an apparent display of goodwill or honesty, I can't help it."

"Jaime spoke reasonably well about her to me, and that considering that my brother very rarely compliments someone. I think that his exact words were that the maiden of Tarth was like a pain in the ass, as she is very headstrong and doesn't surrender when she gets an idea into her head. He also said that she's an incredibly strong and nimble woman, and she's not a fool, even if Jaime attributed an excess of sense of honour to her, which makes her take her decisions through to the bitter end, however difficult they're to be carried out. She always exerts herself to do the right thing. My brother complained saying that she bored him, but I guessed that he truly admired her in his own way. And that's saying a lot, coming from my brother. He and I share that cynical and skeptical streak that makes us believe in very scant people and mistrust most of them." Tyrion kept silent and observed her. "The decision is yours, Sansa. She wants to be your personal guard, and I won't interfere in what you regard as the best for you or not. My advice is that you think carefully about it. She looks like an upright person and it's always good for us to have someone else in our circle who is loyal to us. We need all possible support to be stronger, if one day we want to get back what has been taken from us. And it's not bad for you to count on extra protection. You know that I think that nothing's too good for you, honey."

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
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"But the Unsullied already protect us well enough, Tyrion, and they've been trained to endure long hours of stillness without flinching. Lady Brienne won't have much to do apart from standing guard by the door and patrolling the corridor, and accompanying me each time I have to move somewhere. It's not precisely a stimulating job and nearly everyone needs a little action in their life. I doubt she is very different from the majority of people," Sansa objected.

Tyrion reflected.

"Probably she isn't, but look at her, Sansa. How many women achieve what she has? She's had to cope with dozens of brutes who looked at her with contempt for daring to wield a sword, and she has defeated them. If she's managed to make her way in an environment reserved for men, she can do many other things, like remaining by a door for hours, hearing how her lady fucks her lord for half the day." Tyrion shot her his sparkling and lecherous gaze, and she blushed as usual.

"Oh, no. Now you've really pictured it as the most thrilling job in the world, Tyrion. And that's all we need, another witness of our bed activities. As if we didn't have enough with the whole pyramid hearing us," Sansa complained, without restraining a chuckle.

"Well, I don't think that one more witness matters very much, Sansa," he needled, with another chuckle. She pinched his forearm.

"It's alright, if that's what she wishes for. But I'll tell her that she can resign when she wants, if she gets tired. After all, she's not going to take the vows of the Kingsguard or the Night's Watch. She doesn't have to be tied to me for life."

"For someone who aspires to be a true knight, like her, and that's something very rare in these times, her vows are so sacred as those of any other sworn institution. I'm sure that, if she swears her sword to you, she'll do it for life, unless you manage to make her change her mind some time. She'll stick to you as if she were your shadow, you'll see." Tyrion was smiling, with the naughty glint in his eyes. It amused him to imagine such a strong and honourable woman following his wife everywhere and standing stoically at the door hour after hour. He was taking a liking to the maiden of Tarth, as he did with all the people who did not fit in a world that despised them. In King's Landing he had seen through her quickly, what was not difficult at all as she had a honest and noble nature. In her intensely blue gaze there was not the slightest trace of duplicity.

"Well, in any case, it won't be me who will stop her if she any time decides that she has fulfilled her oath more than enough and she wants to let it up." She remembered a detail. "But you've heard that she hasn't come alone. The Unsullied has said that she's accompanied by a blond man who seems to be her squire or sort of that. Do I have to admit him to my service too?"

"In the private audience with them listen to what they have to tell you. If Lady Brienne has traveled with that man, he must be fully reliable, unless he is a spy or a traitor who knows very well how to pretend, and I doubt that's the case. Anyway, we'll speak with them and you'll judge what is more convenient to you."

Sansa nodded, thoughtful.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
"And what if I don't accept her? What would she do then?"

"It's very likely that she hasn't taken that possibility very seriously. No one who travels through thousands of miles does it thinking that he or she is going to receive a no for an answer. Remember us, Sansa."

She smiled at him with her gaze lost in the distance, evoking the great adventure they had lived from King's Landing to Meereen, about which one day they would tell their children and grandchildren, if the gods allowed them to live long enough.

"It's true. Well, Tyrion, ask Fly Grub to accompany Lady Brienne to the queen's private hall. And we should send word also to Ser Barristan and Missandei at least, so they can be present and give their opinion. We can't count on Oberyn at this hour of the day, as he hardly is here in the pyramid. If we admit her in Meereen, it has to be with the consent of other counselors as well, like we do in the public audiences," she expounded.

Tyrion looked at her with admiration and tenderness. No, definitely that was not any more the scared and quiet girl he had married.

"When you are the lady of your own house, no one will be able to stop you, my love. I'm longing for seeing you at full action. Are you aware of how much it arouses me that you give orders and have confidence in what you do?," he needled, feeling very hot.

Sansa burst in laughter.

"Oh, you fool. Are you thinking of laying me down in every corner when I'm the lady of our house? Then you won't let me do anything in the whole day, my naughty husband." She bit slightly his bottom lip, very conscious that it would turn him on even more.

"That's the point, my ardent wife." He slid his hands over the fabric that covered her breasts.

"You're very wicked. How do you think I'm going to get out of here with this bulge in my pants?"

"My poor thing. I'm so wicked." Sansa let out another giggle.

"Yes, very much. You have no compassion." Tyrion breathed in deeply several times to try to relax.

"Come on, come on, go now. Let's not make our new guests wait for longer." She was enjoying the situation greatly.

"I'll catch you later, brazen girl."

Tyrion went to the door and stepped out to tell Fly Grub to escort the lady of Tarth to the pyramid. He also asked Green Beetle to be present in the hall as a escort along with Pod and White Fly. Lastly, he requested Green Beetle to send word to Ser Barristan and Missandei to attend the private hall to receive Lady Brienne. Ser Barristan was a great warrior, but it would be better to take sufficient precautions and count on more soldiers. As far as Sansa's safety was concerned, Tyrion spared no effort. The Unsullied ran to convey the notifications and messages to their recipients. Afterwards, Tyrion returned again to his rooms.
"It's a pity we don't have time, or I'd lay you down right now and I'd wipe the floor with you, woman. Are you ready? To go to the private hall, I mean," he asked, mischievously.

"I'm ready for everything, Tyrion," she answered playfully.

"For the hells, Sansa. Why are you so evil to me? Provoking me this way just when we have duties to tend to..."

"Oh, yes, you have the most evil wife in the world." She leaned forward and kissed him, licking his lips. She stood up quickly and strolled to the mirror, to make sure that her hair was tidied and then she smoothed her skirt.

They went out and headed for the private hall, holding hands. On their way they picked up Pod, who had already been informed by Green Beetle, and Sansa and Leena greeted each other gleefully and they regretted that they could not spend more time together.

Pod also was surprised by the news. He remembered well the warrior woman, who he had come across often in the Red Keep. He admitted that he liked her. *It isn't strange. They both are kind-hearted people, loyal to the core and regarded as freaks. If Sansa admits Lady Brienne, I'm nearly sure she and Pod will get along, and that's important to Sansa and me. If those two are going to be our personal bodyguards from now on, they'll have to get on well together, as they'll spent a lot of time in mutual company, Tyrion reflected.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
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They were the first ones to arrive at the private hall. Not long afterwards Ser Barristan, Missandei, White Fly and Green Beetle arrived as well.

"It's been quite a surprise to hear that Lord Selwyn Tarth's daughter has reached Meereen. I met him many years ago and he's a good man, though I've never seen her. Do you know something about her, Lord Tyrion?," the knight inquired.

"Quite a bit. In fact, it was her who accompanied my brother in his trip back from Robb Stark's camps, where he had been held captive, towards King's Landing. My mother-in-law, Lady Catelyn, freed Jaime by stealth, in exchange for her daughters, who Jaime had to send back to her. Those so-called daughters were my wife here and Arya Stark, and she entrusted Lady Brienne with the task of making sure that Jaime would survive and fulfil his promise. It's a long story, but for now is enough to know that Lady Brienne helped my brother to arrive alive at the capital, after a very dangerous trip. Jaime lost a hand when they were captured by a bunch of Roose Bolton's henchmen, but in the end both of them managed to continue the trip."

All the others were listening to Tyrion's tale in silence.

"It's obvious that he didn't fulfil his promise. None of her daughters was sent back to Lady Catelyn," Ser Barristan retorted.

"No, he couldn't do it. Sansa was married to me and Arya had disappeared. And shortly after, my mother-in-law was murdered," Tyrion clarified.

"Too suitable for him. It was very easy for him to get rid of his promise, wasn't it?"

Tyrion felt bothered by that remark. The old man harboured strong prejudices against his former comrade-in-arms in the Kingsguard, and Jaime was not exempt from guilt, nor was he a great man, but Tyrion did not like in the least that people misunderstood some of the things his brother had done.

"He'd have fulfilled it if he could. But he couldn't simply because it was impossible, Ser Barristan. My father would never have allowed Jaime to take the key to the North (as he himself said) from him, that's to say, Sansa. And Arya Stark hadn't given any sign of life for a long time. Nothing was heard of her since the day Joffrey ordered Ned Stark's execution. And when the King in the North and Lady Catelyn died, to whom was Jaime going to send a married daughter, kept prisoner in King's Landing, and other daughter who presumably might be dead as well or who knows where? To send ghosts to another ghost? I admit my share of guilt in everything concerning Sansa and her captivity in the Red Keep. But Jaime wasn't to blame for that or for Arya's vanishing. Neither did he have anything to do with the Red Wedding." He caressed Sansa's hand under the table, as if he were asking for her forgiveness for having to bring up such a painful subject for her. Sansa returned his caress and she addressed him a sad smile, to show him that she understood.

The knight pressed his lips together and did not say anything else.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
"Lady Brienne has expressed her desire to serve my wife. As it's not possible to bring Lady Catelyn back to life, the maid of Tarth intends to go on serving her in the only available way: devoting her sword to one of the daughters she swore to send back to Lady Stark," Tyrion added. "I can't say that I'm very acquainted with her personally, but I believe in my brother, however a different opinion of him some of the people here have. And my brother had faith in her. Jaime hasn't respected many people along his life, but he respects Lady Brienne. If my wife is willing to admit her as her bodyguard, I don't see why there must be any objections. I think she should be given a chance, as Sansa and I were given one when we arrived here. If it weren't for the fact that the queen gave us the benefit of the doubt, I don't know what would have happened to us. This woman deserves to be taken into account, and I'm convinced that it would be a wise choice to have her among us. I myself would vouch for her." Tyrion hushed and waited for other interventions.

Ser Barristan spoke again.

"As far as I'm concerned, I agree. I really have nothing against her and, as you say, she deserves an opportunity to be accepted, like all of us had it," the old man expounded simply.

Tyrion turned to Missandei.

"If Lady Sansa has nothing to object to, then neither have I," said the young woman from Naath, looking at the aforesaid with her shy smile.

Sansa made her mind up.

"All right then. Let's listen to what she has to say and we'll take a decision. Of course, I'll also vouch for her if I admit her. After all, it's me who she wants to serve and I'll be responsible for what she'll do relating to her duties to me."

"Very well. Let's welcome her then," Tyrion said. "With regard to the man who accompanies her, I reckon that it'll be her who will vouch for him and, if he has traveled along so many miles with her, he must be fully reliable. Anyway, we'll observe her behaviour carefully and we'll listen to what she has to say. Does everyone agree?"

The others nodded. Afterwards, the people in the hall, except for Pod and the Unsullied (the young squire due to his shyness and the soldiers because they were not prone to trivial chat) talked around the meeting table. The maid of Tarth would not take long to show up.

Effectively, some minutes later she was announced by Fly Grub and the counselors stood to receive her politely.

Lady Brienne entered the hall. Her stature made an impression on those who had not seen her before. Tyrion had never met such a tall woman, and he doubted that the others had crossed paths with many women like her. Her armour looked impressive as well, especially because no one was used to see a woman wearing one. Her weapons had been confiscated at the city gates, and they would be given back to her when it was proved that she was to be trusted. Her blond hair was cut short and it was nearly as fair as Daenerys's, and her big eyes were deep blue. She was not beautiful and moreover her attire hid her femininity, but she did not seem to care a bit about that. She had devoted her life to a kind of goals for which female charms were more a nuisance than anything
else.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
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Lady Brienne bowed clumsily in front of the assemblage, with so little grace as she had displayed before Joffrey and Margaery the day of the fateful royal wedding.

"My lords. My ladies," she said, looking around her. She fixed her stare on Sansa, who felt strangely moved. There was a deep respect and a quite pain in those eyes, as if Sansa reminded her of Catelyn vividly and that resemblance brought memories of a period which the woman kept in her memory with fondness. Sansa wondered how the relationship between her mother and Lady Brienne had been, but she could be certain of a thing, and it was that Catelyn had treated her with the deference with which the Starks treated the people who served them. "Lady Sansa. As you already know, I had the pleasure of knowing and serving your mother. If it were not for her, probably I'd be dead. She gave me a purpose to keep on living when King Renly died, assassinated by Stannis's order. I was a member of his Kingsguard, and I'd have gone on being one until the day I died if I could. Lord Renly always treated me with the kindness with which barely anyone has treated me. And I lost everything in an instant. I wanted to stay there next to his body and avenge him, but Lady Catelyn persuaded me that I'd be sentenced for his death and in that case I wouldn't be able to do anything for him. We escaped together and I swore my sword to her. I swore to protect her. I failed, like I failed Renly." The blond woman did a pause to swallow and her stare became hazy. She recovered and continued. "But I had made a promise to her before she died. I told her I'd bring back her daughters to her, in exchange for taking Jaime Lannister to King's Landing. She loved her children most than anything, my lady. She freed Ser Jaime without King Robb's consent, because she wanted her daughters by her side. I came to truly admire her. She was one of the strongest women I've met. And I failed her. I wasn't there with her to protect her, and I didn't fulfil my promise either." She gazed at Sansa with determination. "My lady. I know I don't deserve to be accepted by you. But if you do, you'll have at your feet the most devoted servant. I'd give my life for you, if with that I could save yours when such a moment came, and so I'd make up for my many mistakes." And after saying that, she knelt in front of Sansa, with her head down as a sign of absolute submission.

Sansa was staring at her with perplexity, as if she could not give credit to the scene that was taking place before her. She looked at Tyrion, who addressed her a slightly amused grin. She turned to Ser Barristan too. The knight was observing Brienne with a mix of emotions, as if that scene reminded him of something similar that he had experienced in his past. In that moment, he intervened.

"How do we know that you really are who you say you are? Yes, Lord Tyrion and Lady Sansa know you because you helped Ser Jaime to arrive alive at King's Landing. But that doesn't prove that your intentions are honest. You might have been sent here by Cersei or by the Kingslayer himself to kill my friends here present, as a revenge. Cersei believes that Lord Tyrion and Lady Sansa were the perpetrators of King Joffrey's and Tywin Lannister's deaths. And Ser Jaime perfectly could believe the same. He also was a son of Lord Tywin and the king's uncle." He stressed ironically the word uncle. Tyrion could not blame the knight for suspecting the truth. "You spent a lot of time in Ser Jaime's company, Lady Brienne."

She had reddened, and stood up again.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
"Ser Barristan. You're the knight I respect the most in the world. But you're wrong. No one has sent me. And Ser Jaime doesn't blame his brother, that I know. He himself told me, and I believed him, because he was my friend. He saved my life, you know? When Roose Bolton's henchmen caught us and took us to Harrenhal, Jaime could have departed alone and left me there. I was worth nothing in Lord Roose's eyes. But he came back and rescued me. He didn't have to do it, but he did. Later, in King's Landing, we discovered that the oath made to Lady Catelyn was very difficult to fulfil. Lady Sansa was married to Lord Tyrion, and Lady Arya was nowhere to be seen. Things had got very complicated. But I decided that, in spite of all, I'd continue with the mission. I'd search for Lady Arya, and I was resolved to find her trace though I had to give my life in the effort. Ser Jaime gifted me his new sword. It was his contribution to our mission. Lady Sansa," Brienne said, turning again to the girl. "I have some very important things to tell you, things I suppose you ignore and I hope that they will convince you of my intentions."

Sansa opened her eyes very wide, with her heart beating fast, and she nodded.

"Go on, my lady. Say what you have to say."

"The sword Jaime gave to me is not an ordinary weapon. It's made of Valyrian steel, and it's one of the two swords Lord Tywin ordered to be forged after melting your father's large sword, *Ice*. I've called it *Oathkeeper* and I've taken it with me to give it to you, as it's legally yours, my lady, because you're a daughter of Lord Eddard's. I've handled it with care and I've had the privilege of verifying that there are no better weapons than those made of Valyrian steel. I've never had anything better in my hands. When you see it, you'll realize that I'm not lying. The Valyrian steel of each sword is unique and can't be changed even though it's reforged. You'll see the trace of *Ice* in *Oathkeeper*." 

Sansa felt a knot pressing in her throat and she could not speak. Tears threatened to escape from her eyes.

"But I haven't told you the most important thing yet, my lady. I took the road to go in search for your sister. And I found her."

Sansa covered her mouth with her hands and fell on her knees, because she suddenly felt them as sloppy as butter. Tyrion quickly encircled her shoulders to hold her, worried that she could hurt herself.

"What? Did you see Arya safe and sound?" Sansa asked with a shaky voice.

"Yes, my lady. I found her in the Vale of Arryn. She was traveling with the Clegane Hound, who surely had kidnapped her to give her to Queen Cersei. I told Arya that she could come with me, but she refused, and Clegane got in the way. I fought with him and I defeated him, leaving him badly wounded, but Arya had escaped. I couldn't find her. I'm very sorry, my lady. I once more failed Lady Catelyn." Brienne had her eyes downcast and her shoulders bent down.

Sansa was still covering her mouth with her hands and tears were flowing profusely down her cheeks.

"Arya is alive! I knew it, Tyrion, I knew it. My sister isn't dead. She's a strong girl. Where must she..."
be now? Do you have any idea of where she could go, Lady Brienne?" The young woman had completely forgotten her composure and her voice was anxious, almost anguished.

Brienne denied with her head, crestfallen.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
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"No, my lady. I searched for her thoroughly, but she had vanished. When I saw her, she looked like she was all right. Dirty and disheveled, as it's normal in a fugitive, but she didn't seem to be hurt or too much ill-fed, only a little rangy. I'd even say that she had developed a certain... friendly relationship with the Hound, and he behaved in a fiercely protective way, though of course how wasn't it going to be that way, if a reward was waiting for him in King's Landing..."

Sansa burst in laughter suddenly, with a nervous laugh that gave away her altered mood.

"Of course she was dirty and disheveled! She was always dirty and disheveled... And I know that the Hound wouldn't have hurt her. I know. He took care of me in the Red Keep, when all the others treated me like the traitor's daughter. He took care of my sister too... I know she's still alive, somewhere. She's so headstrong..." She stood up suddenly. "Oh, Lady Brienne! Your revelation means a world to me. Now I'm sure my sister is alive. That gives me a lot of hope." Her body was shaking like a leaf in the wind. "Tyrion, we have to find out where she is now, and see if we can bring her here. She surely ignores I'm in Meereen, we can locate her and make her come here..."

Tyrion held her hands firmly.

"Sansa, look at me." She partly recovered her composure and obeyed. "I promise you that we'll do everything possible to locate your sister. It's not going to be an easy task, but I'll move whatever necessary. And now I want you to calm down. Getting flustered won't help Arya or you. All right, my love? We'll find her, but it can take time."

Sansa breathed in deeply several times and let loose his hands to try to wipe the tears on her cheeks, which were still flowing. She smiled happily.

"All right. I'll calm down. I still can't believe it. Now I know that two of my siblings are alive, Tyrion." That time it was her who held his hands, and Tyrion squeezed them.

"I'm so happy for you, honey," he said softly.

The whole hall looked like hypnotized. Ser Barristan coughed discreetly and the others recovered suddenly the use of their senses.

"Do you remember something more about your meeting with her, Lady Brienne?," Sansa asked, with a controlled voice. "I need you to give me as much information as you can about her."

_Smart girl. She wants to know all the details she can gather to treasure them in her memory, and at the same time she makes sure that Brienne is telling the truth, Tyrion thought, proud of her._

"Her eyes. They were the eyes of a girl who has seen much more than she should. I felt pity for that look. She wore her hair short and very threadbare clothes. And on her belt she had a small sword, as if made-to-measure. I observed that your sister is left-handed, as she hangs her sword on the opposite side of the usual. Most people is right-handed," Brienne explained.

Sansa was satisfied with the description, and she smiled widely.

"Her sword is called Needle. Our brother Jon ordered it to be forged for her in Winterfell as a farewell gift when she and I left with our father for King's Landing, and Arya never detaches from
her sword. In the capital my father hired a Braavosi swordsman to teach her to fight. And it's true, Arya is left-handed."

"She stared at me for some moments as if she envied me, my lady. As if she wanted to be like me when she grows up. In a certain sense, I pity her," Brienne said, with a slight smile.

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
"In effect, Arya dreams of being a warrior, Lady Brienne. You're very observant," Sansa complimented sincerely.

"I have to be that way in order to survive, my lady."

"Of course. And now, we'd like to get to know your companion. It's impolite to make him wait by the door." Sansa stared at the others and they nodded. Fly Grub ushered Larko in the hall, who entered with an intimidated expression.

"He's Larko of Lys," Brienne introduced. The lad gave everybody a nod and Pod lifted his eyes suddenly, observing him carefully. With no doubt, when he heard that Larko was from Lys his interest increased, because Leena was a Lysene woman, Tyrion thought. "He's not really my squire, but he's been very helpful." She hushed and encouraged him to speak with a gesture of her head.

"Thank you, Brienne," he said, having regained the use of his voice. "I met her in Lys, when she stopped over accidentally at the island due to a storm. I offered myself to accompany her because my life there didn't have too much incentives. I lack a family and I hated my job." Though the young man did not give more information in that regard, Tyrion imagined what his job had consisted in. "Brienne gave me the opportunity to start again, and here I am. Being a squire isn't the dream of my life and I'm neither a very good fighter, but I have other skills. If you admit us in Meereen, I'll make an effort to be accepted in some guild where they need good drawers." Larko hinted an unsteady smile. "Here I am a complete stranger but, if I'm allowed to speak in favour of Brienne, I'll say that she's the best person I've ever met, and I've crossed paths with many more people than I'd have wanted. You'd rely on a great ally. If you reject her, you reject me too, because she's my friend and I won't abandon her."

Brienne interrupted him with a bothered gesture, as if they had already argued about that before without reaching an agreement. "Larko, no. You have to make your own life without worrying about me, I've told you that before. I won't permit you to throw away your opportunity."

"And I've also told you that wherever you go, I'll go. You aren't going to get rid of me, and you have to get used to the idea that that's how things are."

Sansa and Tyrion exchanged a knowing gaze. It seems that these two share more than a friendship, conveyed their glances.

Brienne shook her head and restrained herself, remembering that there were more people in the hall. She blushed, as if being caught arguing with her friend was the most shameful thing in the world.

"Excuse us," she said. "He's as stubborn as me, I'm afraid."

Sansa held back a giggle. She felt ecstatic since she was quite sure that Arya was alive.

Brienne and Larko remained standing next to each other and in a tense silence. Sansa broke it.

"It's all right, Lady Brienne. I'll admit you under my service, but you won't have to swear an oath to me yet. Before that, we both should be sure that that's what we want, do you agree? And the oath isn't necessary either. You'll always be free to choose what you desire. If some day you wish to quit
your service, I won't stop you. I understand that it must be hard to spend your life being a bodyguard, and I'd never require anyone to lay down their lives for me."

Brienne stared at Sansa for a while, with her deep blue eyes.

"You're the very image of your mother, my lady. She'd be proud of you." Sansa trembled and her eyes filled with tears again. "At any moment I'll be delighted to swear the oath to you, right now if need be, I don't mind. But I'll wait until you're ready. I'll do whatever is in my hand to be worthy of your service, Lady Sansa."

"For now, I'll be satisfied if you have your rest and start to adapt to your new life in Meereen, Lady Brienne."

"I'm infinitely grateful to you, my lady." Brienne knelt once more with devotion. Sansa on her part nearly had forgotten how it was to experience so different emotions in a single day.

"I suppose that it means that your friend Larko of Lys also will stay among us, won't he?," Sansa asked, with a slight teasing tone.

"Of course, my lady," Larko asserted promptly, and Sansa laughed again, still invaded by the strong emotions of that unanticipated meeting.
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Meereen: Month 4. Day 22

Tyrion, Sansa, Pod, Green Beetle, White Fly, Brienne and Larko remained in Daenerys's private hall after Ser Barristan and Missandei had left. Tyrion and Sansa's three escorts were standing behind them, who were sitting opposite the two newcomers, with the meeting table in the middle of them. There was a jug of wine and several cups, but no one had served it yet. Tyrion picked up the jug. In King's Landing it was Pod who served the drinks, but now he was more than a simple squire and, besides, Tyrion liked to serve the wine to those who shared it with him.

"Do you fancy some Dornish wine, my lady?" he offered Brienne, courteous. As Sansa did not drink alcohol since she discovered her pregnancy, he did not ask her if she wanted some wine.

"No, thank you, Lord Tyrion. And I'm not a lady," Brienne replied, uneasy.

That reaction of the woman reminded Sansa of Arya. Often Robb, Bran or Theon needled her calling her my lady, because they knew that annoyed her. She yelled at them that she was not a lady and that she would never be, and that one day she would defeat them in the use of weapons. The others laughed and then Arya seized small stones and threw them with very good aim, while they started running to dodge them. In some occasion she threw something more than stones. Sansa several times thought she had seen horse dung flying. In that period Arya's rebellious and wild behaviour scandalized her and she disapproved of it deeply, but now she only could smile with nostalgia. She even felt a certain admiration for her sister, something she would never have considered possible before, because of the skill with which she handled the bow and because of her resourcefulness and boldness. Despite Sansa was too much busy learning to be the perfect lady and dreaming of the mysterious gallant that one day would steal her heart and would take her to his splendid castle, she had been happy. Sometimes she even had laughed with her siblings' endless pranks and she had taken part enthusiastically in the snowball battles, among other little mischiefs. She almost always was at daggers drawn with Arya, but now she was observing Brienne and missed her only sister so much that her heart nearly ached. The certainty that she was alive contributed to increase that sensation, when she thought that Arya might be alone and helpless anywhere, with no one to watch over her like her family had done.

"How would you like us to call you, then?" Tyrion wanted to know, addressing Larko a gesture with the jug. He nodded and Tyrion filled a cup for him.

"Simply Brienne," she answered.

Tyrion served himself a cup.

"All right, Brienne. Tell me. How was Jaime when you left him in King's Landing?" Tyrion was craving for finding out something about his brother, though it was information from several months ago. Since Jaime had written to him, he had not received more news from him.

"He was doing well. He trained every day with Ser Bronn to improve his left hand." She got silent and Tyrion sighed furtively. That woman was not precisely very talkative. He would have to worm more data out of her.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"How was he dealing with Joffrey's death?"

"He didn't tell me anything, but I know that he blamed himself for not having been able to prevent his poisoning," she confessed, always cautious with her words.

"I can imagine it. He takes more seriously his duties as a kingsguard than he seems to. And being the Lord Commander, it must have been a hard blow that his king died in front of him." Tyrion did not allude to the kinship between Jaime and Joffrey. His brother never had felt much affection for the little monster. He was more concerned about his task of protecting the king. "Were you there when my father died?"

"No. He was still alive when I left. I found out about his decease some weeks later."

"And my sister? Did she clamour for my execution?," he asked, with a sarcastic smile.

Brienne got tense. It was evident that, during the short time she had had the chance to keep in touch with Cersei, Brienne had not felt precisely delighted by her.

"She was... as if gone insane. She didn't stop saying that she wouldn't rest until having your head." She was going to continue, but she got silent in time. Tyrion knew that she had held her tongue in order not to add that his sweet sister also clamoured for Sansa's head. But Sansa was not a fool, and she must have realized what Brienne was omitting.

"Then I doubt she gets a lot of rest, as it's not going to be easy at all for her to remove it from me," Tyrion joked. He took Sansa's hand to calm her down. The poor girl had paled. Since the beginning she was aware of what Cersei's threat meant, but that she was reminded of it reopened her old fear.

"Were you present at Tommen's coronation?"

"Yes, Lord Tyrion. It was carried out one week after the dead King Joffrey's funeral. He seemed to be scared. He looked so young in the Iron Throne...," Brienne recalled.

"Yes, too much," Tyrion agreed. "But at least Tommen is not a monster. A pity he doesn't have more strength of character. My uncle Kevan is who really rules, of course. Luckily he has taken the reins, he's a competent man. But the task he has ahead of him is very difficult. Winter is already here, and this winter is going to be specially hard, I'm aware." Tyrion stared at Brienne silently for some seconds before continuing. "Do you know that Jaime is at Riverrun, trying to conquer the castle that Ser Brynden Tully retook from the Freys?"

When she heard that news, Brienne addressed Tyrion a worried look. He observed Larko sideways, when he noticed that the young Lysene man was stirring a little in his chair. He did not seem to like that Brienne's former friend was mentioned, and that discovery amused Tyrion. Undoubtedly there was something between those two. Traveling together along so many leagues had its effects over a pair of people that clearly felt attracted to each other.

"I ignored it," Brienne said. "When I left, he was planning a quick trip to Dorne to visit Princess Myrcella, and that was all I knew. Not only to visit Myrcella. My sister would've wanted Jaime to throw the girl onto his shoulder and lug her off to King's Landing. But Cersei was let down. Her daughter was daring enough to tell her to go to hell when she gets annoying."
(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
"Indeed, he went to Dorne, and he could verify that Myrcella was very well with the Martells. He came back shortly after, and my uncle Kevan sent him to end the uprising of Riverrun." He and Sansa were a little worried in that regard. They had not received yet any message about how the siege was evolving, but Tyrion had a bad feeling. He did not feel easy about Jaime and moreover, if the Blackfish died because of his stubbornness, it would be another blow to Sansa.

"The Blackfish is a hard nut to crack. My father sometimes talked about him with admiration," Brienne recalled. Sansa addressed him a smile.

*That's what I fear. That he perhaps is too much stubborn,* Tyrion thought.

"Let's hope that they'll find a solution to the conflict that could avoid a great bloodspill," he said. *Though if it was Frey blood, I wouldn't mind a lot.*

He felt uneasy knowing that diplomatic skills were not Jaime's strong point.

"I hope that too, Lord Tyrion. But I'm afraid that he's not a great negotiator. He's not very patient and he loves provoking. I learnt that very well during the weeks I spent with him." Brienne allowed herself a small smile. She did not give the impression of smiling a lot in her day by day.

"I also know that, Brienne. But he at least isn't a fool." *Reckless, but not stupid.* That did not calm him much more.

"I have to admit that I am impressed. To have made such a long journey to honour an oath... I've met very few people like you, and that taking into account that I consider myself a man of the world and I've had dealings with all kinds of people."

"If I didn't have my word, what would I have left, Lord Tyrion?," she replied. "My word is all I have. Not even the sword I'm carrying with me is mine."

"You're right, it belongs to my wife." Tyrion turned to look at Sansa, grinning. She spoke then.

"I want you to keep on using it, Brienne. Who better than you? I wouldn't know what to do with it, apart from handing it on the wall. A sword like that deserves more than being a simple ornament to be shown to the visitors. I'll feel honoured to have you at my service, Brienne."

The woman gleamed with pride. "I'll carry it with honour, Lady Sansa. I'll protect you and your family with it until the end of my days."

"I know you're ready to do it. But, as I told you before, I also want you to know that it's not necessary for you to take an oath of allegiance. Perhaps a day will come when you get tired of devoting your life to such a tedious job as being my bodyguard. Maybe, when the moment comes, you'll feel you want to do other things, to start a family, well, the usual things a young woman does." Sansa shot a quick glance at Larko. He was paying his full attention to the conversation. "That's why you don't have to be tied to me by any oath. For me it's enough with your good will and your dedication. This is not as if you were a member of the Kingsguard, Brienne. You're free to act as you fancy."

Brienne blinked.
(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
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"This is what I want to do, my lady. I was born for this. And besides, there's the oath I swore to your mother, which ties me to you just like it tied me to her. I'll serve you with pleasure and I assure you that I won't regret it."

"Then we've come to an agreement. But remember, if at some moment you feel you don't want to go on, you're not forced to and I on my own will rid you of the commitment. I want you to be happy with which you do, Brienne," Sansa said.

"I will be, my lady."

"Great. And you, Larko? You're from Lys, aren't you?"

"Yes, my lady. But luckily, I left. Life there didn't offer anything to me. And Brienne offered me a new life."

"What kind of job are you planning to apply for?"

"I lack experience in most of the jobs, but I have a good disposition to work. My best skill is drawing. I might be useful in the guild of builders, for example, or in the carvers' one. I know how to do complex designs and I can draw by heart, with no need to use a model," Larko explained.

"Very well. When you have taken your rest from the journey, search for Kerro, the freedfolk's spokesperson, and explain your case to him. He'll help you. He's one of the royal counselors and, though he almost always is very busy working in the city, it's not difficult to locate him if you ask for him. Anyone will guide you to him," Sansa recommended.

"That's what I'll do, my lady," Larko nodded with a smile.

"My best friend is Lysene too. She's the wife of Podrick, my husband's bodyguard." Sansa pointed at Pod with her hand and he leaned forward slightly.

"Really? I'll be pleased to meet her and chat with someone who is from my homeland too. Though I don't keep many good memories of Lys, it's been the place where I was born and where I grew up. And where I met Brienne. I couldn't allow her to continue her journey alone, with no one to take care of her." Larko turned to look at his friend, grinning.

Brienne rolled her eyes.

"I know perfectly how to take care of myself, Larko, as you know. You're going to make me look weak in front of Lady Sansa."

"And I've also told you hundreds of times that everyone needs help, Brienne. That doesn't make you look weak," he refuted.

"No, of course not," Sansa interspersed, amused. "Larko is fully right."

Brienne let out a light sigh of annoyance, as if that was not the first time she kept such an argument with her companion.
Is she in love with him? It's very likely... It's obvious that they care about each other and they like one another. But I'm afraid that she's too much hard-headed to admit that she harbours feelings for him... And Larko probably won't wait for her forever. Sansa felt a little sad when she thought of that, but it was not much what she could do. Brienne was a grown woman and free to decide what she wanted to do with her life. And she seemed to be very clear about that.

"We won't steal more of your time, Brienne and Larko. You need to rest. The Unsullied will guide you to your rooms, and the children of the pyramid will tend to you in everything you need," Sansa offered. "We hope your lodging is comfortable. Until recently, most of the freedfolk of Meereen lived in camps on the outskirts and they've moved to the inside a short while ago, and a few families live here, in the pyramid. The city is quite packed with people, but there's still some room available in the pyramid."

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"Thanks a lot, my lady. I haven't had a permanent accommodation in more than five years, and I've often slept in the open. After that, nearly any place is a paradise in comparison."

Sansa thought that it had been a pity that Arya had refused to place herself under Brienne's protection and travel with her to Meereen. Not only because Sansa missed her terribly, but because her stubborn sister would have been delighted to accompany a warrior woman like Brienne. But her distrustful nature had been stronger than temptation, and Sansa did not reproach her for that. She wished she herself had been even half as distrustful as Arya at her age. Sansa had had to learn in the worst of ways.

Sansa stood up, and the others imitated her.

"All right then, go to rest from the journey, and welcome to Meereen. Let's have faith that Queen Daenerys will come back soon. I know she will."

"She'll surely do, my lady. If Brienne left unharmed from a pit where she had to deal with a bear three metres tall, wearing simply a ridiculous dress as clothes and a wooden sword as a weapon, it's equally possible that the queen comes back," Larko encouraged, mockingly.

Brienne shot him a nearly murderous glance. It was evident she detested that Larko brought to light that episode. While they were going out from the private hall, Sansa sensed that Brienne would give Larko a telling-off on their way to their rooms, and she was about to burst in laughter.

Sansa felt in a similar way than when as a child she went bathing naked in the pool of the godswood with Jeyne Poole. The emotion of risk impelled her, in struggle with the fear settled in the pit of her stomach. In the end, the fascination with the forbidden ended up overcoming prudence and she carried out the little mischief with a guilty pleasure, looking everywhere constantly, fearing to discover the shadow of her father or her mother who at any moment would realize that she was not the perfect lady they believed she was. Perhaps they would punish her by not allowing her to eat lemon cakes for weeks, or they would forbid her to go out of the castle until the next spring (though deep inside Sansa knew that her parents were not as strict as to punish her severely). But little Sansa could not resist. Something pulled her to do some of the things she was very aware she must not do. They used to be things of little importance and that did not entail a great danger. She did not dare as much as her siblings, especially Arya and Bran. If their mother had caught Arya in some of her mischiefs, she would have punished her with making her remain in her bedroom for a long while. And what regarded Bran, how many times had he kept on climbing the walls of the castle on which it was less probable that Catelyn would catch him? And even so, Sansa sensed that her mother knew. That her children could not fool her, but there were times when she simply had no other choice but turning a blind eye or feigning that she did not notice. Because otherwise she would be constantly anxious, always with her heart in her throat. Perhaps that was the attitude mothers felt compelled to adopt in order not to die of a fright. To pretend sometimes that they did not see, and let their children believe that they did not notice, Sansa though with a grin. Probably that was what was waiting for her as a mother.

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Sansa had not gotten as far in her mischiefs as Arya or even Bran when she was a child. She was going to be a great lady, and great ladies did not get covered in mud, did not ruin their gowns, did not climb to the top of the towers or ran around everywhere spying and learning skills typical of men. They did not curse as if they were mule drivers or played practical jokes.

But even Sansa, who Arya used to criticize branding her as Miss Perfect and boring, sometimes felt the call of adventure, like any child. And each time she did something that did not fit into Septa Mordane's code of conduct, she felt that mix of thrill and fear, of attraction and rejection.

Such as she felt right now.

It was the first time she was setting foot in a brothel. She was glad that Brienne was resting from her journey in the pyramid and had not accompanied her. Sansa simply had preferred not to tell her her plans for that day. She had the impression that the woman would have insisted on escorting her and Sansa felt ashamed that her first task by her side consisted in positioning by the door of some rooms in a brothel. At least Pod, White Fly and Green Beetle were already used to hearing their sexual activities from the door and the corridors, and Tyrion and Sansa were also accustomed to the nearness of the squire and the soldiers. But Brienne had just arrived and Sansa ignored if the woman would feel very uneasy with that side of the work she wanted to carry out. Perhaps that would make her reconsider her desire to swear the oath to her and she would prefer to search for an occupation less... embarrassing. To be simply a soldier like the others, without being stuck to Sansa's skirts constantly. Or to start a family... Sansa had noticed that there was something between Brienne and Larko. She did not doubt that the lad loved her, and that moved Sansa. Surely Brienne herself had discarded the possibility that a man would love her. Most men rejected the women that did not fit into the role to which they supposedly were destined. Those men were too much close-minded to accept that those women were stronger than them, that they fought better than them, that they did not resign themselves to live inside four walls giving birth to children and running obediently the house of their husbands and lords whereas those lords came and went as they fancied, got drunk whenever they wished, bedded whores and tavern wenches and even sometimes they laid on the sacks of grain some of the girls who worked in the kitchens of the castle, and when there was a conflict or a war it was them who went to the battlefield.

But Larko was different from other men, as Tyrion was. Sansa did not have to ask him to know that the Lysene young man had grown up in a sordid environment, lacking affection. Lys suggested the beauty of an island which looked like enchanted, but only on the surface. Under that surface, there was a whole network of prostitution to which were destined many children that did not have the privilege of having been born in rich families, and it was evident that Larko had not been an exception. But those affective lacks he had suffered, instead of turning him into a cold and soulless man, had made him very sensitive to love. In that sense, he was very similar to Tyrion. The lack of love had not changed him into a monster, he respected women and did not undervalue them. And he dreamed of earning the heart of the woman that made him sigh.

Larko was in love with Brienne, that was clear. While Tyrion was guiding Sansa through a corridor of the brothel toward the private baths, she was smiling. Perhaps she could give a helping hand and made those two see the light at last.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
"I see that in the end you like the idea of coming here. You're smiling very much, my lady," Tyrion said to her, opening the door. Oberyn had bothered to reserve the rooms for them.

A pleasant heat enveloped them just when they crossed the threshold. In the centre of the chamber there was a square pool filled with hot and steaming water. It must be around two square metres. There were bronze braziers in every corner and the light of the candles was dim and suggestive. On a clothes rack hanged some large and fluffy white towels, and Sansa checked that they were clean and that they smelled pleasantly. Apparently, the clients used for the first time the towels that were offered to them. No one else had used them before, or that was what Oberyn had explained to Tyrion. It was one of the usual demands of the select clients. Sansa was glad with that detail.

There were two doors in the chamber, facing each other. One led to the steam hall, which was small. It had a fireplace with stones among the embers, a pair of big pliers to handle the stones and buckets to spill water over them. There were some thick mats on the floor and another pair of clean towels. The door in the other side of the pool chamber led to a normal room where there was a couch, a carpet, a profusion of embroidered cushions and a couple of small low tables. On one of them there was wine, peppermint tea and cups. Sansa smiled. The gesture concerning the peppermint tea was undoubtedly a little allusion of Oberyn to the meeting between him and her the previous day to start to plan Tyrion's nameday. On the other small table there was a lunch covered with a large convex lid to keep it warm. Anyway, if it got cold, they could heat it up over a brazier that had above it a broiler that could be pushed aside easily to prevent burns.

"What do you think, Sansa? Do you like this?"

"We should have discovered this place before, Tyrion," she answered, naughty.

"I see that you don't dislike very much to be in a brothel," he needled.

"It's not so terrible. And besides, this way I can play I am one of your old girls, and it will look much more realistic." She slid her hands provocatively over his chest and his abdomen. "I'll pretend that I work here and that you're a regular customer."

Tyrion closed his hands around her buttocks and drew her to him.

"I have the impression that I'm going to love this game," he murmured, caressing the firm buttocks over her dress. "Moreover, a pregnant girl gets me very hot."

"Have you bedded many pregnant girls, my lord?" She moved aside a little. "Are you going to undress me or you prefer me to do it?"

"Mmm, both choices are very suggestive. For now, I prefer you to do it, my dear. Do it slowly. You already know how I like it."

She faked a reproachful grimace.

"Aren't you going to answer my question, my lord? Or do you think I'm too much curious?"

"Oh, I like curious girls. And no, I haven't bedded many pregnant women, as far as I know." Tyrion
had an expression of genuine lust and amusement in his eyes.

"Had any of them a big belly? Did you have sex with her upon you?"

"Dear me, I see that you're very interested in those details. Is it to get an idea of how it'll be more comfortable for you to have sex when your belly grows?" Tyrion caressed the emerging roundness of her tummy.

"It's to know how I can please my lord better."

Tyrion felt tremendously aroused, She was good at that game. Very good.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
"You please me only by having you before me, beauty. You're a gift for any man."

She started to unlace her dress and slid the fabric over her shoulders until uncovering them.

"Lots of men don't value what they have in front of them. They're only interested in what I have between my legs for the pleasure they get. But they don't care a bit about me. For them it's enough with putting their dicks into a soft and hot hole. The rest of me doesn't matter to them. But you're different."

Sansa lowered her gown to her waist, pulled her arms off the sleeves and pushed the fabric over her hips to get rid of it, all that with slow and suggestive gestures.

"Why do you think I'm different? I'm like any other. I only use you for my pleasure." Tyrion was not very sure that the hint of guilt in his voice was part of the game. He had used all those girls. Even if they had agreed with that. But... Had he been truly so naïve as to believe that they had done it voluntarily? A poor woman, desperate and alone did really have other choice apart from opening her legs to survive? Had he really believed any time that they could like having to admit in bed men like him?

Sansa must sense his tone of genuine guilt, as she knelt again in front of him, half naked, and placed a hand on his cheek. Tyrion desired her wildly. How could he want her so much even when he felt so guilty? But it had been always that way, even in his worst moments. Did not people say that when a man got drunk almost to unconsciousness, his member did not lift up? Was not that what his father had reproached him the day of his wedding to Sansa, that it would not lift up because of him being stinky drunk and he would not be able to deflower his new wife? Well, Tywin would not have had anything to fear in that regard, Tyrion thought with sarcasm. His insatiable cock acted on its own accord and perked up proudly against all odds.

"You are different. You have allowed others to make you believe you aren't worth it, but I know about these things, and I tell you that it's not like that. You make me feel I'm a complete woman, not only a cunt."

Tyrion smiled at her tenderly and caressed her cheek. He knew that what she had just said was not either a part of the game.

"I don't even deserve to touch you. You're too much beautiful." His eyes were shining.

"You're the only one I want to be touched by," she said with determination, and she kissed him eagerly. He submerged himself in the kiss with total surrender, forgetting about his guilt, forgetting about everything except for that extremely soft skin, those lips, that tongue. His hands wandered over her chest. He untied the laces of the undergarment that covered her breasts, opened it and removed it from her in a yank. He enclosed her breasts with his hands and groped them, squeezing them with his fingers and rubbing the nipples with his palms. Sansa moaned in his lips, enraptured in the intense embrace they were sharing.

Tyrion kissed and licked the breasts and Sansa pressed him against her, with her hands in his curly blond hair, which was sticky due to the humidity of the chamber. That humidity made her skin shine and turned it slippery, and that got him crazy. He finished removing her clothes all by himself.

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and she helped him to take off his own without delay. Both of them were craving for feeling each other's bare skin.

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
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They dove into the hot pool. It was only filled to the half of its height. Oberyn must have told the managers not to fill it to the brink, out of consideration for his stature. Tyrion could not be less than grateful to him.

Sansa sat onto him and encircled his hips with her legs, while he rested his back on one of the sides of the pool. The water came up only a little above his waist. They could have sex without fearing that he could drown, Tyrion thought with irony.

It was more comfortable than performing it in the tub they used as a bath. They had more space available. Sansa rested on the edge of the pool with both hands and mounted his member. He received the warmth of her insides with a sigh and moaned while Sansa moved over him, stirring the water around them. Tyrion with his hand stimulated her between her legs and with the other one he applied himself to her breasts, until he felt her explosion and he let himself go inside of her. They both cried out their shared pleasure and shuddered, until they quieted down. Sansa remained onto him, enclosing him and resting her head on his shoulder, and he surrounded her waist with his arms, with his eyes closed.

"You're an incredible girl. Has no one else said that to you, beauty?," he asked lazily, smiling on her red hair that smelled of lemon and herself.

"Only you, my lord," Sansa answered, moving her head affectionately over his chest.

"How much blind men are if they aren't able to appreciate a beauty like you. You're much more than what you have between your legs. Whatever happens, don't allow anyone to believe otherwise."

"I won't allow it, my lord," she said.

"That's the spirit. You're a goddess. Don't forget it. Are you tired, honey?"

"Oh, no, my lord. I still have energy for much more. What do you think about trying now that steam hall?"

He addressed her his lewd stare.

"I think it's great. Your wet and sticky skin turns me crazy, did you know?"

"You men have very peculiar tastes," she said, laughing.

"You know a lot about that, don't you, dear?," he inquired with sarcasm. They got out of the pool. He had to grab the edge with both hands and propelled himself upwards with a leap. Sansa knew that in those cases it was better to leave him manage alone. She did not want him to feel humiliated by offering help to him.

"Quite a bit," she said evasively, with a wicked air. They headed for the steam hall. Tyrion removed the stones from the fire and spilled water on them. The steam spread and coated their skin and hair. They lied down on the mats. Tyrion caressed the slight swelling of her belly.

"Did any of your regular girls get pregnant during the time you visited her?" The question came to
her mind suddenly, and she asked it without thinking. Almost instantly she regretted having done so.

He got a little tense next to her.

"I don't think so, Sansa. Their bellies did not grow along the months when I was their regular client. Though, of course, that doesn't mean that any of them had not conceived right before my relations with her had ended and I didn't find out because of that. Perhaps some of them left me on purpose, so I would not know anything about it. I imagine that all of them were afraid of Tywin and of what he might do to them if he had knowledge that there were little bastards of mine in their wombs. And what regard to the one-night stand girls... It looked like the same thing. I wonder if only the liberality of my purse was the only thing that managed to overcome the terror they must feel for my father. In Lannisport there was no one who did not start to tremble only by hearing his name."

Sansa did not give up. Whenever that his self-esteem was at stake, she did not give in.

(Part 9 of a longer chapter)
"Yes, it's very likely. But I'm certain of what at least some of them felt while they were with you. I know. I don't care about the opinion you have of yourself, I'm a woman too and I know how it feels to be with you. Not even yourself can remove that from me, my love, or persuade me to think otherwise." She rested a hand on his cheek.

"I'm aware I can't. I'm married to a hardheaded girl." Tyrion kissed her palm, smiling.

"Quite a bit hardheaded. And now, I'd like to enjoy a little more this steam hall, you know. Since you've payed for it, we should make the most of it, don't you agree?"

"I agree," he coincided, adopting his predatory gaze.

They had intercourse onto the mats, with the added incentive of their bodies slippery by the steam, and afterwards they dried themselves and went to the normal room to eat and drink. That lunch was at least as decent as the ones that the cooks of the Great Pyramid prepared, and they were satisfied.

Later, they made love again over the cushions, and in that occasion they used the sex toys, which Tyrion had brought. They had not used them for a while, and that was the ideal moment. They also performed other erotic games with the wine and the tea and their cackles mixed with their moans. At last, tired, they got dressed and considered their stay in the establishment finished. They felt a little guilty for having had their escorts waiting outside for such a long time, but at least they had eaten as well. Oberyn had arranged that food was served as well to the guards who watched the door to Sansa and Tyrion's chambers.

"You know, they're used to that. For them, being there isn't so different from being in the pyramid patrolling the corridors," Tyrion justified, while they were getting ready to go out.

"I wonder if someone apart from the Unsullied is able to carry out such a tedious work without ending up sick to death of it," Sansa reflected.

"I suppose that almost nobody reaches that extent. I on my part wonder how Jaime could endure so many hours by Robert's door hearing him take a great delight in bedding a horde of women day after day." They got out to the corridor and started walking to the street. "It would've been more than enough reason to consolidate his title of Kingslayer, and I doubt that my sister or myself had anything to reproach him for," Tyrion said, with his black humour. "I doubt he bore it because he was fully devoted to his task as a kingsguard."

Sansa thought about that carefully while they were walking, with their escorts behind them, and she expounded her thoughts.

"Perhaps he didn't love what he did, but he felt that it was his duty. A duty that seemed absurd in many moments, I don't deny it. Every oath can turn into a burden at any moment of life. The black brothers of the Night's Watch must spend more than half their lives wishing to consign their oath to hell. Even my brother Jon, with all his sense of duty, has faltered more than once, I am convinced. But most of them never set the Watch aside. Because, at bottom, that oath is the only thing that makes their lives truly valuable. What did they have before becoming crows? Mystery, neglect, cruelty, both the cruelty with which they had been treated and the cruelty with which they treated the others. With their oath, they gain a certain sense of honour. Certain dignity. They gain
something that is only theirs and that the rest of the world can't share. It make them special, in a precarious way, but it make them be different."

Tyrion looked at her as each time he was convinced that she was not from that world. He stared at her almost without blinking.

"I understand your brother Jaime, and my brother Jon. I understand these Unsullied and Brienne. I know why they give their lives for something that goes beyond themselves. And marriage is a sacred oath too. Those who get married commit themselves to something bigger than themselves, though many despise the vows they pronounced in the sept, in front of the heartree, or before the Graces, whoever are the gods they worship. Many don't honour what they promise. The path of matrimony often is bitter and difficult, as is any other path which implies a sacred oath. But to others, that path gives something to believe in, a purpose that becomes the driving force of our lives. And we feel that we have to follow it until the end, because it gives meaning to what we are."

They were holding hands along the streets of Meereen in the twilight that was bathing the city with a halo of melancholic beauty, and they both kept a knowing silence for the rest of their walk, reflecting about the little things to which some lucky people clung tooth and nail so as their lives were something more than a dreamless sewer.
Chapter 541

Meereen: Month 4. Day 25

Tyrion was exhausted, but he could not sleep. He had the feeling that the world weighed upon his shoulders, but he might endure it perfectly well if it had only concerned himself, and not Sansa. With pleasure he would have taken her suffering and would have carried it himself, if there was some way of doing such thing. Unluckily, feelings could not be encompassed with the hands or be moved from one place to another as if they were objects, or be put into drawers where one could forget about them.

If he felt that way, then he could not picture how she must feel, and that frustrated him, almost the same as when in King's Landing he did not know hot to comfort her, and she neither allowed him to. At least now she did not keep him away from her side with a wall of icy distance, but he still felt that it was very little what he could do.

It was one of those days when he detested the world and cursed the gods for inflicting more pain on the woman he loved. As if they had not been merciless enough to her already.

That morning, maester Maero had sent word to him through Mhyraz, and the boy had explained to him discreetly, while Sansa was primping, that two messages had arrived with very bad news that concerned the mistress. The maester wanted to show them to him in person, and Tyrion sensed that he wanted to do it to offer him his sympathy and probably to move him away from his chambers for a while and thus he could have time to collect himself before going back next to Sansa and getting ready to convey her the bad news.

Tyrion had made a great effort to behave normally before her until he walked out to go to the maester's rooms. In spite of all, Sansa had noticed that something was happening to him, and he had tried to dispel the shadow of her suspicion with jokes and kisses, but she had become very perceptive and he was sure that he had not succeeded in tricking her. Sansa had nos insisted and seemed to have let matters take their course for the time being, because both of them had many matters to tend to and she must have decided that it was better not to bring up the topic until it was the proper moment.

Maero received him with a compassionate expression and Tyrion feared the worst.

"Two ravens have arrived, Lord Tyrion. And the messages they contain aren't precisely happy. I'm very sorry," the healer said simply.

"Are they about members of my wife's family?," Tyrion guessed, feeling his heart like a stone in his chest.

"Yes. Ser Brynden Tully died at the siege of Riverrun. He refused to surrender the castle and fought your brother's troops when they stormed the fortress. Neither the Blackfish nor any of his men survived." Maero handed him the piece of paper and Tyrion read it.

He felt the ground quake under his feet. He had feared that outcome. The idiot geezer had kept being an obstinate, pig-headed dude until the end. All that was very honourable, but that mistake only had served to lead a handful of men to death. Certainly, the Blackfish did not care about anything apart from those walls, not even about his own nephew. He had told Jaime that as much
as he was concerned, they could hang Edmure if they fancied. That quote, literal it seemed, that Varys had included regarding the old man's words, infuriated Tyrion. That was going to be a hard blow for Sansa. Even if she had not seen her great-granduncle for years, she loved him and appreciated him even more at those times, knowing that he was one of the scant living relatives she had left. It was probable that the joy that Arya was alive helped her to bear better the pain for the loss of the old Tully man, but even so...

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4. Day 25

The message also said that Riverrun had returned to Walder Frey's clutches and that Edmure was still being held prisoner in the dungeons of the castle, and he was hardly allowed to see his wife Roslin and his newborn son.

How could he tell that to Sansa? An unpleasantly familiar sensation settled in the pit of his stomach. He remembered very well the argument with his father when the news about the Red Wedding arrived, and how his heart suddenly weighed like a thousand stones when he thought about how he could convey such news to Sansa...

Do you think she'll open her legs for me when I tell her how we've murdered her mother and her brother? Tyrion shuddered at the memory. Now it was not Catelyn and Robb, but it was another person she loved, and the happiness that had cost her so much to build in the last months was going to suffer a stab.

He suddenly remembered that there was another message. Maero was awaiting patiently. He gave it to Tyion silently, and his stare was even more compassionate than before. That worsened Tyrion's fear.

If before that moment the ground had quaked under his feet, now a breach had opened and was threatening to swallow him.

Jon Snow is dead. When he went back from the campaign at Hardhome (where a terrible battle was fought against the White Walkers) and commanded to open the gates of the Wall to let the Free Folk who want to live in the Gift cross South, several black brothers stabbed him as a traitor to the Night's Watch, among them Ser Alliser Thorne and a boy who served as Jon's personal butler.

The Night King has awakened and in the slaughter of Hardhome he and his lieutenants have gained an army of thousands of corpses. A very dark night is approaching.

If the message about the Blackfish had left Tyrion very worried, that was nothing compared to that other news.

Tyrion looked up, dumbfounded, unable to react for some seconds. The maester's stare reflected sadness and commiseration.

"I'm very sorry, Lord Tyrion." After a hesitation, he added: "Perhaps you'll want to take a little essence of nightshade. Maybe she'll need it. A small dose won't have harmful effects on the baby."

Tyrion nodded, still shocked. He felt as if he had been hit strongly on the head and he were disoriented. And also as if he had sunk in ice and his limbs were too much numb to respond.

"Thank you, maester," he managed to say, with his throat as dry as straw.

The man went to other chamber to look for a flask of essence of nightshade, and when he came back Tyrion was still so motionless as if he had been nailed on the floor.

"If you want some for yourself, I might give you another flask. This one only contains sufficient amount for a single dose. The flasks of essence of nightshade I administer never contain more than that amount, so there's no risk of overdose, whether by accident or design."

"I understand. Thank you, but it'll be better for me to keep a clear mind. She needs me lucid."
"Of course. I hope you make her feel better," the Braavosi wished.

"I'll try, but it's not much what I can do in these occasions," Tyrion doubted, disheartened.

"You'll do much more than any medicine I can give to you," Maero assured, with a slight encouraging gesture.

Tyrion smiled at him sadly.

"Have a good day, maester."

"I wish your day ends better than it has started, Lord Tyrion."

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4. Day 25

Along his walk back to his rooms, he was squeezing the messages in his fists as if he wanted to crumble them in tiny paper shavings, as if that could erase the news they contained. For a moment, he considered the idea of hiding the information from Sansa, but he discarded it as absurd. The unavoidable could not be concealed or postponed.

The lugubrious sentence the red priests of R'hllor proclaimed so much came to his mind with tiresome insistence.

The night is dark and full of terrors.

Jon is dead. She hardly had just resumed her touch with him.

The night is dark and full of terrors.

Stabbed by his own men. Betrayed by his brothers. Betrayed for doing the right thing. Maybe you had Targaryen blood, but there's no doubt that you were a true Stark, Jon. So stubborn as your whole family. But I prefer your sister. She chose to survive amongst her enemies and fought for it tooth and nail, and in the process she didn't lose herself. Sansa is so much a Stark as all of you, but she's made of a sort I worship. She doesn't give up on her life and has learnt to be happy in a world that has shattered around her, and that makes her worthier of admiration in my eyes than any great feat the rest of you have achieved. She'll overcome this as well, Jon Snow, but not thanks to you.

The night is dark and full of terrors.

The Night King has awakened.

Winter is coming. Winter is coming.

No. We have to fight. Sansa will live. Our child will live. You won't take them away, damned winter, damned night.

And that sudden determination gave him strength to tell Sansa the fateful news.

Since Daenerys had disappeared, Sansa had not taught her lessons in the school again, and Tyrion regretted it, as he knew she loved that occupation. But his young wife had insisted on contributing to rule Meereen to help him share the burden, and she even did some things on her own already. She sometimes presided over some public audiences together with other counselors when Tyrion could not do it, because some urgent matter required him in other place. She also read the communiques that arrived, often when he was not present, and she analyzed them with Missandei before discussing them with him. Tyrion had made his own network of spies and messengers among the freedfolk and they supplied all the information they obtained from here and there. It was not such a large or efficient network as the one the Spider possessed, of course, but no one could match Varys in that. Even so, Tyrion found out about a great part of what was cooked up in the city and the surroundings. He feared a resurgence of the Sons of the Harpy or that another clandestine criminal organization was constituted, and he had the intention to prevent it at all cost. Moreover, that was how he knew what the needs and the shortages of the population were and, if it was in his hand to remedy them, he did what he could. The merchant fleets brought supplies every
few weeks, because trade with Yunkai, Astapor and other cities had increased. On the other hand, the benefits of selling the stone of the quarry or exchanging it for first need products, though they were not a very significant contribution, meant some regular income that each week thickened the royal coffers and they also meant fresh food, fabrics and utensils which were sold in the market.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Of course, there were numerous and difficult problems. The increasing and nearly crammed population of Meereen caused hardships and the coexistence was hard. Only the constant presence of the soldiers who patrolled the streets managed to stop many of the conflicts and fights, but even so every day brawls arose and sometimes some people died. Despite the solidarity awareness that Daenerys had made the effort to spread among the citizens of Meereen, they were a lot and people who had escaped slavery in other cities did not stop arriving. There were houses where several families lived together and it was natural that arose brushes which often degenerated into serious fights even for the most trivial things. The queues in the public audiences were so long that it was impossible to attend to all the petitioners in a single day, and the requests and complaints of many of them piled up and were postponed until other audiences, and that slowness to solve their matters heated up the spirits. Tyrion had set a system by which they attended as a priority the urgent complaints that could not be delayed, like those concerning murders, rapes, accidents with personal injuries and abuses of power of the strong over the weak. If someone was caught stealing the pay that was the only help on which a disabled person counted to survive, he or she was punished, as well as when someone was caught pretending a disability. On the other hand, the complaints regarding exclusively material damage, like thefts, were not considered urgent and there was no other choice but delaying them for weeks and months.

In addition, people claimed for the reopening of the amphitheatres, but without Hizdhar to organize games and performances, Tyrion refused. It was too much work and moreover, he hated the competitions in which men fought to the death. At least the Westerosi tourneys were not much more than a mere exhibition so that many men could make an impression and win favour, but the main purpose was not to kill each other. Accidents often happened, of course, and some knights died or became crippled because of a spear unfortunately well-aimed, a blow on a delicate body part, a bad fall of the horse or an infected wound.

Hizdhar's mother had put her own personal spies under Tyrion's service, and sometimes they met to talk. Though he did not trust the woman, Tyrion had to admit that she was useful to him. She was very astute and seemed to know lots of secrets. Tyrion kept an eye on her, because the feeling that there was something sinister in her did not leave him. The hatred for the death of her only son did not fade in her shriveled dark eyes, and that made Tyrion feel uneasy. A pair of members of the Great Masters had been found dead in the last weeks, but the inquiries for the moment did not clarify who might have been the authors. Tyrion was not sure if the authors were part of the Masters (he even suspected Hizdhar's mother), or if they were freedfolk resentful against the Masters. He was aware that incidents like that did not contribute to improve the peace will between the masters and the freedfolk, not even among the masters themselves. He had to admit that, however difficult and stressful it was to rule a city-state like Meereen, at bottom he loved the huge challenge. He preferred to stay active pulling the strings and coping with thousands of matters, than keeping hand on hand wasting his brain, like when he lived under Tywin's shadow. His father would never have offered him the opportunity to feel fulfilled, except for times of real necessity and when he had no other option, as when he appointed Tyrion as Hand of the King to control Joffrey and Cersei while war was waged against the North. It was indispensable to try to stop the series of atrocities and mishaps that had led the continent to the desperate situation where it was when Tyrion returned to the capital with permission to exert power.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
But ruling with Sansa by his side was infinitely more satisfying than it would have been without her. In King’s Landing he had missed a figure like her next to him, the constant support she provided, the satisfaction of their minds working in unison, with a person he loved and respected deeply, and who loved and respected him to the same extent. He might live happily with her for the rest of his days though he had no power in his hands. But she knew him very well. You’d always search for the way of returning to the arena. The arena of power, of politics, of your mind working at full capacity. You wouldn’t be really happy without that, I know. You’d love me, you’d take care of me like you’ve always done, you’d devote yourself completely to our children, and you wouldn’t feel unhappy, quite the opposite; but you’d lack something, something not even me or our children might give you, Sansa had told him, and he had looked at her astonished, because she had hit the nail on the head. Nevertheless, Sansa, if I had to choose between power and you, I wouldn’t hesitate for a single second. He had left the rest of the sentence deliberately unsaid and had smiled at Sansa wickedly. She had frowned, pretending to feel offended, and then he started to tickle her and they ended up making love without stopping laughing. Afterwards, he told her that he knew that what she lacked was the feeling of having a true home. She could live in borrowed quarters perfectly, like they lived currently, and she would never complain about that. But Meereen was not Winterfell. Even if Winterfell was never again what it had been, it was the only home she had known. Tyrion had told her that he wished she could get it back, because he knew that would be her way of feeling complete. Sansa had surprised him once more. You’re right, sometimes I feel strongly that I need to recover it. Sometimes my soul aches with nostalgia. There are moments when a certain nuance in the air of Meereen reminds me, and I don't know why, of some scent I smelled when I was a child. Winterfell and Meereen can’t be more different. But then I realize that what I smell is your scent floating in the air when you move next to me, and that scent makes me feel safe and protected, exactly the same as when I was very young and was surrounded by the essence of home. That's why I know home it's you, Tyrion. Wherever you go, I'll go with you, because you're my home. Winterfell won't be more the home I lost, because too many things have changed, there's too much horror and pain within its walls and that can't be erased. You're the home I worship, the only one I really need, the only one where the ghosts of the past can't defeat the dreams of the future. Winterfell is full of ghosts, and I wouldn't go back there without you. He had not been able to talk after she had told him that, because he felt his throat strangled with emotion.

But now, another piece of her childhood home had been snatched from her. Her brother Jon. It did not matter if he was not her true brother; as Tyrion suspected, he could be her cousin. That did not matter. For her he was a brother, they had been brought up as siblings, although she had behaved coldly toward him because of her mother's jealousy and resentment and because of the prejudices against the bastards.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 546

Meereen: Month 4. Day 25

Sansa would overcome it, like she had overcome so many terrible things. But Tyrion would have wanted to erase that news. To carry the burden he alone. It was so painful to see her suffer... Tyrion still was amazed at how she had managed to endure the hell of King's Landing without getting insane, without starting to yell with rage, without cursing aloud, without throwing things at the walls, without pulling out her hair or ripping her gowns, without grabbing one jug of wine after another to get drunk like he himself had done so many times in his life, without scratching her face or without seizing a knife and cutting her own veins, without spitting at Joff, without trying to kill Tyrion himself in his sleep... The self-control she had shown had him perplexed. How she had managed no to lose her head when any other would have lost it, it was something that made him admire her to no limit. Her strong instinct of self-preservation, her desire to live, her quiet challenge, all that along with her kind nature, that had not been ruined. The only time he truly had feared that she had given up was after the Red Wedding. What could he do if Sansa lost her willingness to live? Nothing. Only be a witness of how she wasted away slowly. And that hurt him terribly. He did not want to lose her. At that point, he did not give a shit about Winterfell, he did not give a shit about the North. It was her who he cared about. He was not sure yet if he loved her, but he could not resign himself to see her die. It was terrible to see his flower of the North dry up. His wife despised him, they did not speak for entire days, she did not even look at him, as if he did not exist. Tyrion always went back to their rooms in the Red Keep sighing and with his heart heavy as a stone of a hundred kilos. He even sometimes missed Shae's warmth, her petite and elastic body perfectly trained for sex, her laughter, her keen remarks and her sense of humour, which were the things that had attracted him to her. He did not feel any more for his former lover the same as before, but when he could not help that the dejection of returning to an inconsolable child wife overwhelmed him, he was not very sure that he would not have ended up running to Shae and releasing with her, however bad he had felt afterwards for betraying Sansa and for putting Shae at risk once more. He had managed to resist temptation, but he had felt tempted all the same, and that increased his guilty feeling.

But then, when he entered their rooms and Sansa was there as always, sitting on the windowsill, watching without seeing through the lattice, Tyrion stared at her lovely silhouette, her glorious hair that remained shiny and soft despite the fact that she hardly ate or slept, her loneliness that pierced him like an arrow... And, above all, he felt that he would do anything for her.

He would die for her.

Yes, he would be willing to die for her, like the romantic fool he was. And he would be happy while doing it. It did not matter that Sansa did not love him, or that she did not care about what he did.

In those moments when sunlight shone over the gorgeous outline of the most beautiful girl he had seen in his life, he felt that he loved her. But later, the light faded and she still did not look at him, she carried on pushing him aside of her life, and he again felt his heart heavy and his mood dark, as usual since Tywin had thrown upon him the slab of his fateful presence in King's Landing, the slab of ruining his hopes of feeling useful and loved by someone and, what was much worse, of wrecking Sansa's happiness and future.

And she resisted once more, she started to climb out of the abyss and decided to stay by his side. Or rather, to clear out with him.
(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Inhaling deeply, he opened the door, with the messages still squeezed in his fists. The coward part in him wished that she was not there, that some other task had requested her in other part of the pyramid, but he was not that lucky. He reproached himself for his weakness. Delaying the unavoidable would not improve the situation.

Sansa, who was sitting and reading some documents, turned to him and smiled. She immediately noticed that something was very wrong. Her smile evaporated like dew when the sun started to shine too much brightly.

"What's the matter, Tyrion? You already behaved in a strange way before."

He handed her the messages. "I'm very sorry, Sansa," he said simply.

She unfolded the two letters with trembling hands, moving her eyes from one to another. Thick tears slid and dropped on her dress. Tyrion watched the small dark stains they left on the fabric, feeling impotent.

The letters fell onto the floor and she collapsed on the chair, covering her mouth with her hands and closing her eyes tightly. Sobs shook her whole body so strongly that Tyrion feared that they could hurt her.

"Sansa," he said softly, getting close to her cautiously. Perhaps she did not desire his company and he did not want to force it on her.

"Oh, Tyrion," Sansa sobbed, clinging to his neck. He encircled her gently and caressed her back with circular movements, relieved that she had not rejected his touch. If she did not push him aside in the moments of crisis, he felt that he could help her. Neither of them both desired to go back to the emptiness of King's Landing.

"Come here, Sansa. Lie down on the bed. You must be very uncomfortable," he offered sweetly. He moved aside from her gently and took her hand. She followed him to the bed, as as sleepwalker. Her eyes were glassy and unfocused, and her face was swollen and reddened.

He made her sit on the edge and he himself took her shoes off. He set aside the bed clothes and tucking her in them while she rested her back on the pillows. He knelt at her side on the mattress and began to undo the hairstyle Dara had made her a short while ago, so she could feel more comfortable. Her strength seemed to have abandoned her and he was longing for taking care of her, for doing for her anything he could, though it was with those little gestures.

The sobs had stopped, but tears were still flowing. Tyrion rummaged in the drawer in search for a handkerchief and he wiped her cheeks. He did not want her neckline to get drenched.

Though Sansa remained quiet, she did not rebuff his gestures, and he thanked her without words.

"He was only nineteen. And I always was unfair to him, like nearly everyone else. I wasn't better than the others, Tyrion," she said with a faint and tired voice.

"In the end you asked for his forgiveness. You told him that you loved him. He surely kept your letter as if it was a treasure, and your words must uplift him in his terrible trip. I could come to
know him a little, and I'm sure he didn't hold any grudge against you, and that in his final moments he only remembered good things from you, darling."

Her stare kept lost in the distance.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
"He was stabbed treacherously. By his brothers of the Watch. The men he trusted. The men he treated with respect. They stuck their daggers into him mercilessly. Not even a slaughtered dog finds such a disgraceful end as that," Sansa said, sobbing again.

"He had to know that his measures were very unpopular and that many of the black brothers opposed them. Treating the wildlings as if they were human beings? Allowing them to cross the Wall so they could save themselves from the great threat? The Watch has fought the Free Folk for millennia. A mindset can't be changed overnight. And Jon was aware of that. He was aware of the risk. But he did what his heart told him to do. I don't know if that is very brave or very insane, or both things. You Starks are very hard-headed." Tyrion smiled at her slightly, doubtful that she would accept his sense of humour at those moments. Sansa did not imitate his gesture, but her lips shook a little, as if she was about to smile, and he considered it a good sign. "He probably has saved the lives of a lot of people for whom no Westerosi would've given a copper. That's worthy of respect, something that no other Lord Commander has ever done before."

"He could've done so many other things... Now the Wall is chaos. How is it going to be protected from the White Walkers? The Night King has awoken..." Sansa's eyes acquired an expression of terror. "The Night King. Who are going to fight him? A handful of treacherous crows, cursed for killing their Commander? A split Night's Watch? An undermined North, ruled by the crooked Boltons, who won't do other thing apart from fleeing with the tail between the legs when the monsters find the way to cross to the other side of the Wall?"

"I don't know, Sansa. We only can be confident that Daenerys will come back. She can fight the Night King."

Sansa looked him in the eye for the first time since she had read the messages.

"And what if she doesn't come back?"

He returned her gaze with intensity.

"If she doesn't, we'll manage without her. And we all together will find the way of destroying the White Walkers or making them go back to their sleep of centuries. If they were defeated once already, they can be defeated again."

She smiled at him sadly in the middle of her sorrow, and Tyrion thought that each smile of her was a battle won to the dark.

"You'd never back out. You wouldn't run away from the threat. You'd seize it from the front, like you did in the Battle of Blackwater. That makes me love you more, my valiant husband. But on the other hand, a part of me thinks that we should flee as far as possible without looking back. I'm a coward because of that, I know," she admitted. Her wet eyes shone in the midday light.

He took her face in his hands.

"You aren't. It's normal to be frightened. A part of me also wants to run away with you and the baby and to hell with everything else. Perhaps that'd be the most sensible thing we might do." Tyrion sighed and she rested her forehead on his.
"Perhaps. But we wouldn't do it." She moved aside a little to look at him again.

"No, we wouldn't," he agreed.

"We'll fight to get back our home. The monsters will conquer the whole world if we let them, and then there'll be no place to hide. We'll have to fight, sooner or later."

"Yes, but not now. And many things can still happen. Jon has a few friends in the Watch and many more among the Free Folk. Let's hope they don't abandon the deed he's started. They know that now, more than ever, unity is imperative."

Sansa closed her eyes and Tyrion regretted having mentioned Jon once more.

*(Part 8 of a longer chapter)*
"You reckon he suffered very much while...?," she asked, and new tears thronged her eyelashes.

"It's probable, Sansa. But the pain surely didn't last long."

"Perhaps he had some happy thoughts. Maybe he remembered all of us, and that girl he loved. I wish he had gone thinking about something happy." Her voice cracked in another sob.

"I'm sure it was that way, sweetie." He caressed her wet cheeks with his thumbs.

"And my uncle Brynden... We suspected that he'd end up like he wouldn't surrender. He didn't even take into account the men who were there with him. All of them stayed with him because they blindly trusted the Blackfish and his legend. How could he be so selfish and let them die for him and with him? He might have saved them. He might have persuaded them to leave. Or surrender to save their lives, simply. I know your uncle Kevan wouldn't have executed them. He probably would've sent them to the Wall for their rebellion, but at least they'd be alive."

That was one of the features that attracted him to her. That she knew when it was time to bend the knee. She valued life above honour. Death is too much definitive, he had joked more than once in her presence. And he strongly believed that. No one can do many things in the grave. There's always hope in life, and with regards to death, we don't know what's on the other side. We're not even sure that there's something.

"Yes, they'd be. But most men are very eager to go to the grave early, Sansa. A fixation I've never understood," he joked, to lighten her sadness.

"Promise me that, whatever happens, you'll choose to go on living to stay with me," she pleaded.

"Always, my love. I've promised you before, and I promise you now. I'll always come back to you."

"You'd better." They rested their foreheads one against the other once more, smiling. "Tyrion... Could you stay with me today? I don't want you to go out. I'm afraid of being here alone."

"I wouldn't leave your side even if Daenerys appeared suddenly in the pyramid, sweetheart," he assured.

"Then I'd have to go with you to welcome her, my love. It'd be rude to leave her in the lurch after more than two months absent."

"I reckon you're right. But I doubt she'll appear today, so nothing will make me go out of this room. I don't care if half Meereen come knocking on our door, I intend to tell all of them to go jump in a lake."

She was smiling again. Her eyelashes were wet and her face showed her weep. He felt his heart pressed in his chest.

"You're gorgeous when you smile. In King's Landing you hardly did. I secretly dreamed of your smile."
"You know, by then I didn't have many reasons to smile."

"I know, and I'm very sorry, Sansa. For everything. Truly that if I could erase all the terrible things in your life, I would. I wish I could make you go back in time and make that damned Robert's trip to Winterfell disappear. Even if now you weren't with me because our paths hadn't crossed. I'd give up on you if you could be a happy young girl again, surrounded by your family."

Tears slid once more down her cheeks and she took his hands.

"I know you would. And that's another of the things I love in you," she said, with a choked voice due to her weep. "But we can't go back, and I'm not sure I'd want to even if I could. I don't want to give up on you. I wouldn't change a single thing of what we have."

He embraced her and she cried on his shoulder. He talked with a strangled voice.

(Part 9 of a longer chapter)
"I still don't know what god I've pleased so as to let me have a wife like you, sweetie." Then he joked a little. "Luckily for me, we'll never be able to verify what would happen. If it were possible to go back in time, perhaps I on my own would push you to do it. Later you wouldn't remember anything of this, so you couldn't feel guilty for leaving me behind."

"Oh, you fool. Neither would you miss me. You'd neither remember to have ever met me."

"I love you so much, Sansa."

"And I love you too, Tyrion."

They kissed tenderly and she rested her head on his shoulder, lying down on the pillows.

"I hope Arya doesn't find out. She adores him. Where do you suppose she'll be right now?"

Tyrion reflected.

"Maybe she headed for Riverrun. It must come to her ears that your uncle Brynden had retaken the castle. But, if she went there, I doubt he admitted her. The Blackfish had returned home to die, and that wasn't a place for girls. The truth is that I don't have the slightest clue of where your sister might be at this moment, Sansa. If she's been smart as I think she is, she must have avoided the North. It'd be practically suicide. No matter how much a Northerner she is, a girl who roams through the woods in winter would froze in a matter of minutes. Moreover, if the Boltons caught her, they'd hold her prisoner or, what is worse, they'd force her to marry Ramsay. I'm sure of that. They need to consolidate their position in the North and, what a better way to accomplish that than doing it through a marriage to a Stark? If I were her, I'd neither count on seeking shelter in any Northern house at this point. We ignore which houses have bent the knee to the Boltons and which ones haven't, but in any case she'd be in great danger of being discovered or handed over. Let's hope that it neither occurred to her to go to the Wall, if she thought that Jon might take her in there. As I've said, she wouldn't have endured the winter weather staying in the open air. And she'd neither have got far if someone recognized her. I admit that would've been quite improbable, as she travels with the looks of a boy and most Northerners don't know her by sight. But there's always a risk. And at last, if she had been at the Wall, Varys would know it. By the time Jon prepared the raid into Hardhome, Arya wasn't there. We can be sure of that because it was right then when Jon and you exchanged letters and he didn't mention your sister. And if she had arrived later than your exchange of letters and she had stayed there, Varys would've found out. But another serious problem would have appeared. The Boltons would've heard about it as well, and they would have laid claim to her or would try to kidnap her. That would have created problems with the Night's Watch, and the Watch has enough problems already. No, they're too many issues. I'd bet Arya isn't in the North." Tyrion got silent and encircled her shoulder with his arm after his long discourse.

"I hope varys can send us some news about her." Sansa said. Tyrion had written to the Spider asking him to try to locate the girl's whereabouts. If there was someone able to find her, it was him. And if he didn't succeed, it only could mean three things. That she was dead, that she had learnt to hide very well, or that she was very far away, beyond the reach of the little birds.

(Part 10 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4. Day 25

"He's the best informed person in the world. He's able to find out what you ate for breakfast this morning. It's very possible that he locates her," Tyrion said, to encourage Sansa.

"I can't believe yet that Jon is dead. I should be used to that by now. I should have become insensitive and remain indifferent facing the complete destruction of the world where I was born and grew up," she said with a bitter tone.

"No, my love. Don't say that," he begged softly, with his fingers in her hair. He felt her hot tears on his shoulder.

"If it weren't for you, Tyrion, I don't have the slightest idea of what would've happened to me. Probably now I'd be nothing."

"Shhh, no, my love, you're strong. You'd have found the way of going on."

Sansa cried with total grief and drenched his shoulder. He stroked her hair and sang in a low voice a tune of those he had heard to some handmaids in Casterly Rock when they sang quietly in the kitchens or when they washed the clothes in the river.

When she quieted down, she raised her head up with effort. "Tyrion, I don't think I'll be able to eat or sleep today. My stomach is closed and my mind is too much grief-stricken. I feel the same way I did during those days in the Red Keep when I hardly could eat anything and spent my nights without sleeping a wink. You help me feel better, and I'm very grateful to you for that. But I'm afraid this is going to be a long day."

"I'll order something light for your lunch, something your stomach can digest, but you need to eat, Sansa, even a little. Do it for the baby and for me, all right?" It worried him that she lost her appetite. Her young body that harboured a new life needed to be fed healthily. He'd prevent the starvation periods she had suffered in King's Landing from happening again. He'd make sure that she ate.

"All right, Tyrion. I'll try."

"That's my girl. And in case you can't sleep, maester Maero has given me a small flask of essence of nightshade. It's a very small dosis which wouldn't harm the baby, enough to help you sleep tonight."

She nodded.

"Alright, but I'd rather not drinking it. I'll only do it if sleep doesn't come. But if I manage to relax in your arms, perhaps I won't need the essence."

"I'm not going to move away from our rooms for the whole day. I'll bring the food to bed, I'll tend to all your needs and I'll lie down at your side. I'll be such an attentive husband that you won't have to move a finger and you'll be able to relax as much as you need, love."

"Thank you. I don't know what I'd do without you." She hinted another slight smile.

"You'd still be the most beautiful and incredible girl in the world," he joked, and kissed her
forehead. "I'm going to call Mhyraz to send word to the kitchens so the cooks prepare something light for you. Do you want Ray to stay with us this afternoon?" He thought it would be a good idea for her to have the pup next to her. The dog was the joy of the pyramid's children and he was growing up very fast.

"Oh, yes. I'd be glad that he kept us company," she affirmed.

Tyrion went to the door and called White Fly with a whistle. The soldier was patrolling the corridor as usual. He got close and Tyrion explained to him what he wanted. The young soldier rushed in search for Mhyraz.

(Part 11 of a longer chapter)
"Once, when I was four or five years old," Sansa began to narrate as soon as Tyrion went back to the bed," I started to find small presents on my pillow. Sometimes they were flowers that had survived the frosts, or dolls made of twigs... Once there was even a figure that represented the seven-pointed star of the Faith, quite rudimentary, but I recognized it. Every day I took a look several times in my bedroom, eager to check if there was a new gift on my pillow and feeling a great curiosity about who the author of the presents would be. And I did. I caught him. It was Jon."

Sansa swallowed, with her stare lost in the ceiling. "I felt so disappointed that I yelled at him that I didn't want to see him get into my bedroom anymore. I seized all the gifts he had given me until that day and I broke them in front of him. I behaved horribly, but he didn't get angry or cried, he only gazed at me with a great sadness and told me in a thin voice: I'm sorry, Sansa. It won't happen again. He turned around and left. He never entered my bedroom afterwards and, of course, he didn't give me more presents. Since then, he only gave things to Arya. But the worst was that I felt satisfied with the lesson I gave him. I really was horrible sometimes, a genuine bitch. A person with good feelings and a true lady wouldn't have reacted that way." Sansa was contemplating the ceiling with distress, silent tears running down her face.

Tyrion took her hand.

"You were very young, Sansa, and you only were following your mother's example. You weren't to blame for the lack of love your mother professed to Jon."

"But my other siblings didn't treat him like I did. They weren't so blind or so arrogant like me. Not even Theon was so cold to him, he often mocked him and treated him with presumptuousness, but he respected him a bit. I, on the other hand..." She closed her eyes and the tears slid to the pillow. He wiped them tenderly.

"In spite of all, he loved you. He understood. He must take a great joy when he received your letter. He probably had hoped for years that you reached out to him," he said, trying to cheer her up.

"But that happened too much late, when I was about to lose him. I won't hug him ever again, or talk with him to ask for his forgiveness face to face, or tell him how much I remember him and all the gestures he had with me even if I didn't deserve them."

"He departed for Hardhome knowing that he counted on you, Sansa. That there were no more barriers between you both. That must make him happy. He had to feel very lonely in many senses. A Lord Commander of the Night's Watch in very hard times, who has left behind his blood family, who besides has a scary task ahead of him and that acts with half his men against his decisions, surely sees heaven when a sister he believed lost forever reaches out to him."

"I wish that what you say is true and he felt in higher spirits with my letter. It would be the only good thing I've done for him."

"You've done it, and that's what counts." He kissed her hand.

She did a pause and then she opened her eyes. There was hatred in them.

"I wish they die. Those who stabbed him. They don't deserve to be called black brothers. They
have betrayed their Commander. They've murdered one of their own. They aren't worthy of seeing daylight again."

"I don't believe Jon's friends have sat by idly. The bad thing is that the Night's Watch is already quite reduced and split, and dissensions and retaliations are the worst that can happen now at the Wall." That was what he feared most. If the crows fought and killed each other, they cleared the way for the Night King.

"Right now I don't care much about any of that, as bad as it sounds. I only want Jon to be avenged." Her voice was harsh.

"He'll be, somehow. His friends won't let that crime go unpunished."

"I hope so."

A while later Mhyraz arrived with lunch and with Ray. Sansa made the effort to eat the vegetable soup Tyrion bothered to feed her on, spoonful after spoonful, and the afternoon passed by slowly. They did not speak much, they only stayed in bed quietly most of the time, holding hands, chatting at times and silent other times, with Sansa recalling fragments of her past with Jon, and Ray sitting on the floor next to the bed, looking at his mistress as if he knew exactly how deep her grief was.

Perhaps he really knew.

Finally, Sansa did not need to drink the dosis of essence of nightshade and fell asleep out of tiredness, but Tyrion would have drunk it willingly. He did not know at what time of the early morning sleep overtook him, a restless sleep full of nightmares in which Jon was a blue-eyed specter, with a gaunt face from which any trace of humanity had disappeared.

_The night is dark and full of terrors._
Meereen: Month 4. Day 29

Sansa needed fresh air, so she decided to go out to take a stroll around the parade ground of the pyramid, as she did not dare to get out of the building without Tyrion, and he would feel terribly worried if she did. Though she did everything possible to remain busy and think as little as possible, Jon returned to her thoughts and the grief for his loss was too much great for her to endure it stoically. At night she had nightmares and she woke up crying in her husband's arms. Along the day she sometimes felt as if she couldn't breath and feared to faint. She was not well, and work and Tyrion's presence at her side were the only things that managed to support her. The maester had examined her and diagnosed that the tiredness she felt was more of the spirit than of the body, and that the remedies for the woes of the soul were time, affection and work. She possessed the three conditions, so her depression was not so deep like the ones she had suffered in King's Landing, but she was crestfallen and only with a great effort of her will she could carry out her routine. Tyrion tried to cheer her up and distract her and helped her feel better. Despite she had little appetite, she forced herself to eat and Tyrion watched her carefully to make sure that she emptied her plate and did not skip a single meal. So much vigilance would not have been necessary, as she would not have allowed the baby to suffer from malnutrition because of her and she would eat even though each bite cost her sweat and tears, but Tyrion always ate with her just in case.

She was neither interested in sex and he, as always, respected her wishes without complaining and did not invade her space. She ignored if he released himself alone, though she would have understood that he did. He was a man with strong passions whose ardent body needed to let off steam very often, and Sansa regretted not being able to satisfy him as usual. She had commented it to him in one occasion and he cast aside her concern with tenderness. Honey, I want to have sex when you want. When I know you desire me and you're willing. But when I know it's not the moment, I neither can make it. I'd never compel you to do something you don't desire, it'd be the same as forcing myself upon you, and I couldn't forgive myself for that. Moreover, if you aren't well, my hunger for your body lessens to the extent that I can spend the day without wanting you like mad. It's a hard test, I admit it, but I'm sometimes successful in shelving the lustful beast I carry inside of me, he had told her joking a bit to make her smile.

Four days after the news about Jon's death, Sansa felt like trapped. She had to go out.

"Tyrion, I think I'll take a walk to the parade ground with Brienne. I promise you I won't set foot outside the pyramid," she assured, facing his worried stare. "But I truly need to breathe fresh air. Only a little, it'll be enough."

"Sansa, I'll accompany you. You're right, it's unfair to be here locked."

"Oh, no, my love, I don't want you to interrupt your tasks. I'll feel worse if you do. But as Brienne is my new bodyguard, she right now can have the opportunity to do something more enjoyable than patrolling the corridor and stand guard at our door. She hasn't engaged herself in anything else in three days."

Tyrion observed her and nodded.

"It's all right. I trust that Brienne will take good care of you. She saw after my brother," he affirmed grinning, as if such a great deed by the maid of Tarth settled the matter.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4, Day 29

Tyrion got out to send word to Brienne and she went instantly, always eager to do her utmost for Lady Catelyn's daughter. Such devotion touched Sansa. She hadn't met anyone more loyal to the true values of knighthood, except for Ser Barristan.

Now both of them were walking along the corridors and Sansa felt safe with the enormous blond woman. She was wearing her complete armour and on her belt were hanging Oathkeeper and her two daggers. Sansa stared at the sword and she felt a stab of nostalgia. That piece of Valyrian steel had belonged to countless generations of Starks, and her father had been the last to hold it before the destruction of her house. A shiver ran through her. That steel weapon had put an end to Ned Stark's life, from Ilyn Payne's hands, the King's Justice.

The sword caused her mixed feelings, but that was the last palpable vestige of her house. Everything else had vanished, swollen by fire and the plundering to which the iron men and the Boltons had submitted Winterfell.

"How do you feel today, my lady?", Brienne asked politely.

"Better, thanks for asking," Sansa answered.

"Your brother looked like a good man. I heard stories about him. Not many men volunteer to serve in the Night's Watch, and there are few who serve so honourably as him. Doubtlessly he was your father's son," Brienne complimented.

Or perhaps not. If Tyrion's suspicions are true, he's my father's nephew. But it's true that he has so much Stark blood as myself.

She took a deep breath, silencing a sting of pain for her brother murdered so ignominiously. "Since he was a young child he had a very deep-seated sense of responsibility and sacrifice. He was serious and calm. He never was the typical naughty and impulsive boy who performs pranks and who drives mad everyone around him. Quite the opposite, he always was mature for his age. He observed everything quietly and he must suffer a lot due to his bastard status. I often saw envy in his gaze, the longing for what would never be his. But Jon did not hate us. She was too good to hate his family, though he did not fit. He loved us, even if not all of us loved him back to the same extent." Sansa sighed. "My other siblings counted themselves among the scant people who managed to make him laugh and who were successful in making him say more than two words in a row, especially Robb and Arya, with who he had a very close relationship. I reckon he wasn't very happy."

'I partly can understand how he felt, my lady. I neither fitted. A girl taller than normal with dreams of becoming a warrior to make the ones who laughed at her bite the dust. Little by little I realized that what I really wanted was to be a knight. Of course, it was an impossible dream. Knights aroused my envy and my longing for what would never be mine. But despite all I wanted to go my own way. Like your brother."

They both were walking along the corridors, that at that time of the morning had little movement. The children were at school and most people had gone to work. There were only Unsullied patrolling and a few freedfolk walking up and down the ramps.
(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4. Day 29

"Queen Daenerys has her own ideas, Brienne. Do you know that the freed girls are also being taught fighting lessons at the school? And some older girls have asked to be trained. Several of them have good aptitudes to be warriors, and the queen intends to admit them in her armies. I wouldn't be surprised if she appointed you as a knight one day. Your dream isn't impossible, Brienne."

The sapphire blue gaze of the blond woman lit up. Though she lacked beauty, the colour of her large eyes was incredibly pretty. Sansa rarely had seen that tone of blue. Daario's irises were alike, but not so intense as Brienne's.

"Larko tells me the same. But I prefer not to get my hopes up. I've learnt that it's better to live without great expectations. That way one can never fall from very high and the blow of the disappointments isn't so strong."

Sansa gave the hint of a sad smile.

"I had to learn that lesson the tough way as well. And even there was a while when I believed I had lost my expectations and hopes. I didn't see anything ahead of me. But he was there, next to me, although I didn't want to see it."

Brienne shot her a searching look.

"It's evident that you love him, and that he loves you. When I was coming here, I was ready to rescue you and get you out of here, in case you were unhappy in your marriage or Lord Tyrion didn't treat you well. With only one word of yours, or a glance at your face, I'd know if you felt trapped. But when I arrived at Meereen I only saw a woman in love, and I observed how Lord Tyrion looked at you. I've seen very rarely that look in a man's eyes, my lady."

"Neither I have seen it much in other men. My father also looked at my mother that way. But I haven't met many more who showed a great love to their wives." Sansa glanced sideways at Brienne. "Larko gives the impression of being a good lad. How did you meet him, if it's not very indiscreet to ask it?"

Brienne seemed a little uneasy with the question, and her pale cheeks blushed. It was obvious that Larko did not come precisely from the Lysene elite or had lived in the best neighbourhoods. But Sansa at that moment felt too much curious to regret a lot inquiring into something shady.

"Some bullies were giving him a beating in the street and I stood up for him. We struck up a friendship and he asked me to let him accompany me to Meereen."

"He must feel very lonely. A person who has any brains doesn't leave without a second thought with someone he or she has just met, unless there's nothing or no one to hold him back. And Larko seems to be a person with brains," Sansa supposed.

"He is. Quite annoying, but he's not a fool." They were coming close to the main door of the pyramid. The cold air was sneaking into the lobby and Sansa wrapped herself up in her woolen cloak. "And indeed, he has no family. All died when he was a boy." Brienne did not add anything else, but Sansa did not need Brienne to confirm that the boy had not earned his living in a very
decent way. Everybody knew that Lys was full of pleasure houses and that in most of them worked children.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4, Day 29

"Is he adapting well?" Sansa asked, interested.

"Yes. He's looking for a job. He went to speak with the builder Kerro, as you suggested him. Soon the guild will try out his skills."

"Great. I hope he finds the job he likes," Sansa wished. "And, what does he think of his accommodation? Is he comfortable?"

"Oh, yes. He says that he's never had an entire room for himself." Sansa blushed due to what that implied.

"Has he said something about moving?" she dropped.

Brienne blushed too. "Not yet."

Sansa decided to adopt a tactic which was not too much straightforward, but that involved the topic she wanted to tackle.

"And you, are you really at ease? Are you satisfied with your work? I already told you that you're not committed to do anything you don't want to do."

"I'm satisfied, my lady. Serving you is a great honour. I hope I can someday live up to the debt I incurred with your mother."

The parade ground was still calm at that hour. Later the children would went down to continue with their trainings.

"If I were her, I'd already have considered paying the debt for the simple act that you've come to Meereen to offer protection to one of her daughters. She neither would have asked for more of what you could give."

"I offered her my services with all my devotion, as I offer them to you, and that's all my life. I don't regret at all serving you as escort or standing guard close to where you are." Brienne walked with her back completely straight and she always had a watchful attitude.

"But you can combine your duties with other things. You don't have to stay around me during all your waking hours. There are excellent soldiers who escort my husband and me. You're acquainted with White Fly, Green Beetle and even Makkhan. And Pod is also a devoted squire of Lord Tyrion. Surely there can be something else for you, Brienne."

The maid of Tarth looked at her for a moment and shook her head.

"I don't see myself as a family woman, my lady. No man can love seriously someone like me. And I can't imagine myself tending to a house and raising children. I'm not that type."

Sansa decided to insist.

"You have set for yourself a destiny different from most of women's and have chosen a life which many can't have. You can go on doing things your own way. You don't have to be the lady of a
castle, or marry a man that your father chooses for you. He allowed you to choose freely. I don't see why love cannot be present in your life. Perhaps there's someone over there who would accept you just the way you are."

Brienne shook her head stubbornly.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 557

Meereen: Month 4. Day 29

"No one would want that sort of life with me. I don't have the slightest idea of how to run a house, and I'm not sure if I want to have children. What man doesn't desire to have a wife waiting for him at home and children to carry on with his legacy?"

"Perhaps not all of them desire those things, Brienne. You've traveled enough to know that."

"All right, not everyone. But most of them want to get old with grandchildren to sit on their knees."

Sansa employed other argument. "Many knights get married. Family life isn't incompatible with knighthood. I'd love to see you happy, Brienne. I know you love what you do, but I don't want you to remain alone due to serving me. If the idea of sacrificing your heart for the oath sworn to my mother has crossed your mind, then since this very moment I free you from your oath and I invite you to quit my service." Sansa used her firm voice. "So, as you are someone I'm entrusting my life to, I at least have a right to be treated with sincerity and to know the truth. I want people around me to be really happy with what they do for me, not to do it only because they consider it their duty, sacrificing other things, do you understand?" Then, she spoke in a softer tone. "I'm not asking you to give me your entire life. And now, tell me the truth. Don't lie to me to try to make me believe wrong things."

Brienne looked at her confused, with her cheeks very flushed, and she stayed silent while they went on with their walk, struggling with herself. At last, with an effort, she decided to speak.

"I know you think there's something between Larko and me. I'm not even sure of what it is, I have no experience in that matter. But it scares me. I stopped thinking that way about my life a long time ago. Since all the boys around me began to mock me because of my appearance. And I ignore if I have room for that kind of things. Love and all that. It's complicated."

"All that is frightening, it's true. But, Brienne, I'm certain you have an opportunity with Larko. I've seen how he looks at you. That lad loves you, but he's patient and perhaps he's awaiting," Sansa said.

"I've already tried to discourage him several times. And I suppose I've been quite successful. He hasn't deprived himself of searching for other women while he was traveling with me. He surely doesn't love me so much if he's in such a hurry to be with other women." Bitterness and jealousy were patent in her voice.

I can't even imagine Tyrion with another woman. That would destroy me, Sansa thought, feeling pity for Brienne. It's clear that these two have a few things to sort out between them. "But that doesn't mean that he doesn't feel anything for you. He respects your space, but he has his needs. As for you, you're doing everything possible to reject him, but at the same time it hurts you that he tries to live his life. If you don't give him any hopes, how can you expect him to stay celibate for you? He can't be waiting forever."

Brienne lifted her chin, obstinate.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 558

Meereen: Month 4. Day 29

"As far as I'm concerned, he can do whatever he fancies. I'm not very sure I want to change my lifestyle for him." She softened a little and lowered her head. "Actually right now I don't know what I want, my lady. I feel very confused. That's the only truth I can offer you for now. If you're not pleased, you can do without my services." Brienne tried to restrain her pained expression. Sansa felt a little guilty for having pressured her. It was obvious that the poor woman needed time to take in those feelings so new to her.

"I'm not going to do without your services for your sincerity, Brienne." Sansa rested her hand on her arm. "I'm sorry if I've made you feel uneasy or bothered, and I won't pressure you anymore, I promise. But, please, feel free to act as your heart dictates you. If one day you're ready to accept Larko, or whoever, don't feel restricted because of me, alright? I only request that from you. And if Larko loves you, he'll wait. Maybe not with his body, but he will with his heart. Since the first time I saw him, I knew he's waiting for you."

"And what if he decides I'm taking too much time and gets tired of waiting?" Brienne pressed her lips.

"It's a risk you have to take. As far as love is concerned, it's much easier to lose than to win. But it's worth to bet for it and give it a chance, though oneself loses most times. If Larko is your man, he'll find the way to you. And if he's not, he'll simply let you go."

They remained silent for a while, enjoying the sun that warmed the cold air.

"Please, don't tell Lord Tyrion what I'm going to reveal to you. I'd die of shame," Brienne pleaded.

"I know how to keep a secret." Sansa felt almost like when she shared her childish confidences with Jeyne Poole. So much water had flowed under the bridge since then...

The tall woman inhaled.

"I loved Ser Jaime. At first I only felt disdain for him, for the Kingslayer, like nearly everyone, but I spent weeks close to him, and some of the moments we experienced were terrible. I was little more than an annoying fly to him, in the beginning. He irked me constantly, mocked me and everything, and drove me up the wall, but since Bolton's henchmen caught us, he changed. He prevented them from raping me and I'd bet that they cut his hand partly because he defended me. In the past only Lord Renly had had some kind gestures to me, but what Jaime did that night was something I'd never have expected from him. Much more than what anyone else would have done for me. From then on, I started to look at him with new eyes. That trip showed me things about him that no one knew. And I fell in love with him, like a stupid. I couldn't help it. And I reckon he was aware of that, but he didn't say anything or mocked my feelings. I felt we were like equals. True friends who at some point of the road had left behind their mutual contempt. We had learnt to respect each other and felt at ease. He still needled me sometimes and I went on being as stubborn as ever, but mistrust had disappeared between us. I entrusted him with my life, as he entrusted me with his. And though I know he didn't love me, during those days I felt almost happy. Jaime Lannister looked at me with respect in those eyes which mocked everything, and something inside of me was stirring as if I was being shaken within. But I was conscious it couldn't be. Respect and friendship were the most I might obtain from him, and I resigned myself. Partly, I was glad to depart from him, to put distance between us. We had to carry on with our lives and I couldn't stay in
the capital. I decided to retake the mission Lady Catelyn had entrusted us with."

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 559

Meereen: Month 4. Day 29

She must know that Jaime and Cersei are lovers, or suspect it at least. Surely she's heard the
rumours. And Cersei certainly behaved as a lioness defending the territory around her brother,
while Brienne was in King's Landing. The former queen sensed quickly when a possible rival
appeared on the horizon.

"A while later, I met Larko. He looks like Jaime a bit, but the resemblance ends practically there.
Where Jaime is cynical and sarcastic, Larko sees the bright side of things. And that's only the
beginning of the differences between them both. At bottom, Larko is a better man than Jaime will
ever be. And he deserves a good woman who isn't full of doubts or afraid of letting him enter her
heart. He deserves a simple life next to a simple woman, without complications. He'll soon meet a
young Meereenese woman and will forget me." She pursed her lips again and looked forward with
obstinacy.

"Brienne," Sansa said softly, squeezing her arm. "If that hurts you so much, don't allow it to
happen. Don't let him go. Don't do something you'll regret for the rest of your life."

"There are lots of women prettier than me, because it's very easy to be prettier than me," Brienne
insisted with sarcasm. "How am I going to keep him?"

Sansa almost rolled her eyes. Brienne really was headstrong like a mule. Sansa hesitated to smile or
yell at her. She opted for possessing her soul in patience.

"There are more things than external beauty, Brienne. And obviously Larko has his own ideas and
tastes concerning that. I have a little experience with men in love, because I live with one, and I can
guess when a man is in love. For one so observant as to have seen love in my husband's eyes, my
friend, you refuse to budge when someone loves you." Sansa smiled at her slightly.

They walked quietly to the opposite side, caressed by the sun. At the far end, the wall which
surrounded the pyramid formed a right angle and disappeared behind the mass. The parade ground
ended there. They turned around and went back where they had come. At that moment the outdoor
area began to fill with people. The children were attending their trainings with Ser Barristan, Pod
and other soldiers. The old knight greeted them from afar and got close to them to pay his respects.
He bowed in front of them.

"My ladies. How are you this morning?"

"Better, thank you, Ser," Sansa answered, bending.

"Rested from the journey," Brienne said, with another bend.

"I haven't had yet the chance to ask you how your journey was. I imagine the waters weren't very
calm," Ser Barristan said, taking an interest.

"Not very much, Ser. The sea has been rough nearly all the time, but at least we haven't been
attacked by pirates or by enemy ships. It seems that the queen's fleet is carrying out a quite
effective cleaning work," Brienne praised.

"Almost all the fleet we have is patrolling the waters from here to Astapor to prevent attacks and
sea invasions. And in short, new spare boats will arrive."
"Do you refer to the ironmen's ones that are sailing here?," Brienne asked. In Meereen everyone already knew about Asha Greyjoy's story and that more than a hundred longboats were heading for Slaver's Bay. It was impossible that the movements of such a large fleet went unnoticed.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
Happy Christmas Eve to everyone who celebrates it. :-)
"I also deal with my own mistakes, Ser, in spite of my youth. And I'd dare to say that you haven't given up on your ideals, or else you wouldn't be here," Brienne guessed.

"A silly geezer like me doesn't know how to do otherwise. What purpose does my life have if it's not to serve as a kingsguard? I said some vows I committed myself to fulfil until the day I die. A kingsguard doesn't retire and no king has power to undo a sacred oath. Nothing or no one in this earth has. So, stronger than any ideal, is the undertaken commitment. I've wavered many times. I've felt empty. I've wondered countless times what's the point of what I do. But in the end, the strength of my commitment has always made me regain sanity. This is the only thing I'm able to do. And if I break my commitment, the only thing I've always truly believed in, then I have nothing left. Other sworn brothers desert and leave without the least bit of remorse or fear for disdaining the old magic. No one can break any sacred vows without suffering the consequences. Sooner or later, that debt must be paid."

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 561

Chapter Notes

Merry Christmas! ;-)

Meereen: Month 4. Day 29

"I'm here for the same reason as you, Ser Barristan. I swore an oath and I'm going to fulfil it. I didn't say aloud some vows in a sept or facing a heartree, but Lady Catelyn and I recited the fealty formula and to me that has so much value as if I were part of the Kingsguard or of the Night's Watch." Brienne shot a meaningful glance at Sansa. *Neither you nor I can erase the word given to Lady Catelyn. Not even her death can erase it,* her eyes told. A spark of humour passed through them. *You're not going to get rid of me so easily.*

"It's rare to find honourable people in these times, my lady... Excuse me, Brienne. If we don't honour our word, we have nothing. And now I have my last opportunity. I know I won't stay in this world for much longer, and I want to invest completely the time I have left in amending my mistakes. I wish the gods this time allow me to serve Queen Daenerys as I couldn't serve her father. I failed and betrayed him. What appellative deserves a kingsguard who jumps into the service of a king who has usurped another's throne, no matter how much the overthrown one showed alarming signs of madness? I'm also aware that I'm committed to serve any king who sits on the Iron Throne, and here I am, thousands of leagues far from Tommen Baratheon, the First of his Name, offering my sword to a pretender who right now isn't even present at the throne of a foreign city. Certainly, I don't understand why people still call me Barristan *The Bold.* They should call me Barristan *The Turncloak* or *The Joke.* I sometimes have the full certainty that the gods have a lot of fun at my expense, turning me into the goal of their jokes."

"Don't say that, Ser Barristan. You're so hard on yourself as Brienne is on herself," Sansa added.

"I'm not better than others. I don't deserve my nickname, Lady Sansa. It's not my intention to do a pathetic deployment of self-pity, I simply am not one of those conceited knights who feel proud of showing a false image to the world. Nicknames often are tricky and hide a great part of the truth behind fame, my lady."

"In that I agree with you. Nicknames were invented for creating legends and heroes in which people need to believe," Sansa said.

"Exactly, my lady." Ser Barristan addressed her a warm smile.

"But I suppose that even so you can't stop Brienne and me from being your admirers, can you?," the young woman asked, with an amused flash in her pupils.

"No, I can't," he admitted, resigned. "You're wasting your time with that, but there's nothing I can do."

They kept silent in the middle of the noise of the trainings.

"My father told my siblings and me tales about you, Ser," Brienne revealed. "He always has felt for
you a worshipful respect, and his opinion naver changed." She hesitated for some moments. "What did you think about my father when he declared neutral as soon as Robert's Rebellion was triggered? As a vassal of the Baratheons, my house should have followed Robert to war."

The knight evaluated the question.

(Part 9 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 562

Meereen: Month 4, Day 29

"Selwyn usually is a prudent man and doesn't act recklessly. He must think that bringing the war to your house would have turned out in its destruction. Besides, I think that the fact of living in an island, and in such a beautiful island like Tarth, gives the lords a certain sense of independence which they probably wouldn't have if they lived in continental lands. There we have also the example, though very different, of the iron men. To that sense of relative independence it must be added that the Tarths were kings of their territory in the past. The lords of the island always have kept very much to themselves, and a serfdom oath it's not enough to earn their loyalty."

"However, my father supported King Renly, after he had denied his support to Stannis, and I went to serve the youngest of the Baratheons. Lord Renly had visited our castle and he seemed kind and charming, and my father got very fond of him. I think that it was that what made him decide to take sides for him during the War of the Five Kings, after having remained on the sidelines when Robert and Stannis requested his contribution to their causes. The truth is that I don't reproach him for that. My father didn't meet Robert in person and this one didn't mean much to him, and as for Stannis... He was only a murderer of his own brother who follows blindly a red witch and burns people alive. I'm certain it was him who killed Renly. Among the things I regret of having left Westeros behind, it's the fact of having postponed my revenge against him. If I can, some day I'll find him and Stannis will regret having crossed paths with me," Brienne spat.

Sansa and Ser Barristan gazed at her with their eyes very wide and they exchanged a surprised look.

"Then... Do you ignore it, Brienne?," Sansa asked. The aforementioned looked at her strangely. "Stannis is dead. He and his armies were crushed by the Boltons in the battle of Winterfell."

Brienne opened her mouth, stunned. A wild flash crossed her eyes.

"For once, justice has been done. That rat didn't deserve to live. The only thing I deplore is that the damned Boltons have snatched the pleasure of revenge from me. And that they have consolidated themselves as the usurpers of the North. The killer of his own blood hasn't even been useful to prevent that from happening." She looked at Sansa and softened. "I'm sorry for my reaction and my impolite language, my lady. But I can't restrain my hatred against Stannis. I was happy as one of Renly's kingsguards. I felt so honoured with my vows as you feel with yours, Ser Barristan. Many didn't regard him as a king, but I would've served him without a second thought until the day of my death. And the dirtbag of his brother assassinated him in the first flush of youth. Renly might have conquered the Iron Throne and have made an effort to be a good king. But all ended, and I couldn't do anything. He died before my eyes. I hadn't felt so shattered since the day my brother Galladon drowned. And on neither occasion was I able to save them, I held their bodies which were still warm and wept onto them, and I felt the temptation to join that peace on their faces, to follow them to the hereafter. Without them, my life stopped having any sense. And in both occasions, a sensible and affectionate hand made me come back. My father's and Lady Catelyn's."

It will be better that for now she doesn't find out about what Stannis did to his own daughter. She's already too much filled with hatred, Sansa thought, shaken, remembering the little girl's horrible fate.

(Part 10 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 4. Day 29

"Well, he's already dead, Brienne. He can do no more harm," Sansa said, trying to offer her a little solace.

"If he died by the Bolton bastard's hands, I doubt there is a much worse way of leaving this world. Normally the rumours I've heard about him horrify me. But this time... I have to admit that I don't feel the slightest pity for Stannis. I'm sorry for saying those things in front of you, my lady. You see, Ser Barristan? Neither I am better than others. I've also failed the people I swore to protect. And now here I am, like you, and both of us serve the daughters like we served their parents. I hope this time things go better for us, Ser."

"Right now, things don't go very well as far as I'm concerned, Brienne. I can't protect a missing queen."

"But you look after the city she has fought so much for. That's the most you can do in her absence," Brienne objected.

"It's not much. And I wasn't present to protect her when chaos burst in the Daznak's amphitheatre. You see, Brienne. A knight's life is a series of failures and a few attainments which are not enough to balance the scales. There's not much more. This isn't like songs."

"I'm perfectly aware, Ser Barristan. This is not a bed of roses. But I, like you, neither know how to do anything else, or want to devote myself to anything else. I'm not a lady and fighting is my only talent," she sentenced.

"I wish you luck, my young friend."

"Thank you, Ser."

The two women and the old man bid farewell and he headed for the training area, where the clangour of the wooden weapons clashing with each other was hellish. The women went back to the pyramid and Brienne accompanied Sansa to her rooms. When they arrived, Sansa asked her bodyguard a favour.

"I haven't seen the sword, Oathkeeper, yet. Might I take a look at it?"

"Oh, of course, my lady. It's your sword."

(Part 11 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 564

Meereen: Month 4. Day 29

Brienne hastened to take it out of the sheath and handed it to Sansa carefully. This one held it by the hilt, hefted it and stared at it, turning it over several times. It was not so heavy as a sword made of ordinary steel, because Valyrian steel was lighter. Ice had been almost twice its size and, though it had to be wielded with both hands, it had been easier to handle than any other large sword. There was not a single imperfection on the blade, despite having been forged again, and it probably shone the same as when Ice was made thousands of years ago. Valyrian steel did not rust or rot.

Sansa studied the hilt with the carved ivory lion and the rubies, and she felt as if she had been punched in the stomach, because that hilt was Tywin Lannister's work and an exhibition of the power he had held, showing without the slightest modesty how he had wiped the Starks off the map. The usurped and reforged large sword was one more stab to add to the list of affronts and atrocities. It was as if he on his own had plunged the sword and had twisted it in the wound. And as for the blade... it had been used to behead her father. Sansa's hand shook when she reminisced the scene on the forecourt of the Great Sept and the sword threatened to fall to the ground, because suddenly Sansa lacked strength to grab it. Brienne held her by her arm, alarmed, and removed the weapon from her hands softly.

"Are you feeling ill, my lady?"

"It's nothing, Brienne. Suddenly I've remembered the large sword from which Oathkeeper comes, as well as the person who used to handle it. It's better for me not to hold this sword again. It brings me too much sad memories. I entrust you with it until some of my children is old enough to learn to use it," Sansa said, trying to joke, but she was pale. "Oh, for the gods. I think I'm going to..."

Before finishing her sentence, she bent in half and vomited on the corridor's floor. Brienne held her head, very concerned.

"Keep calm, this happens to me sometimes. You know, the morning nausea. These days I feel specially sensitive," Sansa explained, trying to play down the issue in order not to worry Brienne too much. Of course, it was useless. Her bodyguard was already very worried.

"Come on, Lady Sansa, get into the room and make yourself comfortable. I'll send word to the maester."

"Oh, no, it's not necessary, it's been only a nausea, it's starting to wear off, really. In a while I'll be alright. This is normal in the first months of pregnancy. We don't have to alert the whole pyramid, Brienne. And surely the maester does have truly serious cases to tend to."

"But, my lady, if something happens to you, I wouldn't ever forgive myself," Brienne insisted.

"Nothing happens to me. If I felt worse or I felt something else than a slight indisposition due to my pregnancy, I'd tell you by myself. Relax, all right? I'll lie down for a while and I'll feel as fresh as a daisy once more."

Brienne finally gave in, unconvinced.

"All right, but if you feel any strange symptom, call me right away, and I'll hear you."

"I promise. And now, you can go back to your tasks."
Brienne walked out and Sansa wrapped herself up in the blankets. The truth was that those days mourning Jon were taking their toll on her, as she was tired. In a few minutes she fell asleep and when she woke up, nearly at lunchtime, with Tyrion sitting by the bed reading a book and watching her sleep, she did not remember any of her dreams, and that was a blessing, because lately her nightmares hardly allowed her a moment of rest.
"It seems we're facing a possible epidemic," Maero declared in the private hall, where a Council meeting was being held. "My colleagues and I have spent three days tending to an increasing number of cases that, judging by the symptoms they show, point at the influenza. Those affected have symptoms of a bad cold with a high fever and muscle pains. Cold and agglomerations favour its propagation, therefore we should decree the state of emergency and suggest the population to go outside as little as possible and to avoid the crowds. If necessary, we should order a curfew. Drastic measures must be adopted or the disease will wreak havoc. I've been in other cities and I've seen thousands of people die in a matter of days because of epidemics like this one."

Tyrion and Sansa looked at each other, alarmed. The others were fidgeting about on their chairs restlessly.

"We should apply those measures from this very moment," Ser Barristan suggested. "The soldiers will make sure that only a reduced number of people get out of their houses and they'll control that those people do it to go acquiring basic products. All the shops which don't offer basic goods will be closed. From lunchtime to the next dawn, no one except for the soldiers, the healers and other authorized people will move around the streets. The school will remain closed too. The ordinary activity of the city must be paralyzed until the epidemic subsides." The knight gazed at everybody in the hall. "Believe me, I've witnessed several major epidemics. The last one I saw happened in King's Landing twenty-one years ago. Cholera took thousands of poor wretched from Fleabottom and other slums, but also rich merchants and members of several minor houses died. I urged King Aerys's Council to adopt measures like the ones I've just listed, but nobody save Varys the Spider payed attention, and by the moment they finally realized the gravity of the situation, in the bonfires lit outside the city the corpses of the deceased were burnt by the hundreds. I hope not having to look on helplessly whereas almost nobody does anything for the poor sick," the old man recalled.

"We are not Aerys, and we won't stay looking at our own navels and doing nothing," Tyrion said. "Ser Barristan, would you mind giving the appropriate orders?"

"Not at all, Lord Tyrion. I'll give them right now." The knight bowed and ran out in a haste.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 566

Meereen: Month 5. Day 7

"Well, let's hope that the measures proposed by Ser Barristan, with which I totally agree, manage to contain the epidemic. It's going to be difficult to avoid a great loss of life, but the number of deaths can be reduced if the situation is controlled. Once more, the army is indispensable," Maero said.

"The guy who said that the times of peace are the armies' worst enemy, was completely wrong," Tyrion joked, though to tell the truth, he felt very scared, but he did not want to convey it to Sansa. An epidemic was something against which he could do very little to protect her, apart from keeping her far from the possible outbreaks of contagion. "For having spent months without taking part in warlike activities, our soldiers don't look as if they've gotten very bored," he added, with his ironic hint.

"And now they're going to get even less bored. Let's hope many of them don't get ill. I'm not sure that it will really work, but I'm going to promulgate that everybody rub themselves with vinegar or alcohol, tidy themselves up often and cover their mouths and noses with pieces of cloth when they go out to the streets. Perhaps that will stop the spreading of the influenza," the maester suggested. "I've treated other epidemics and what I'm sure about is that proper hygienic conditions and try to avoid direct contact can make a difference between life and death." Maero stood up. "If you'll excuse me," and he walked out of the chamber as well.

"Tyrion...," Sansa murmured, squeezing his hand. "I'm frightened. I don't want you to go out."

"I won't unless the city falls apart, darling. And if I had to, I'll adopt the measures the maester has proposed. He's a sensible man and he has some idea of how to fight these plagues. But I'll do my best not to have to leave, because if I leave, I wouldn't get close to you afterwards in order not to infect you and I'd have to spend several days exiled from our rooms. That would be very hard to me, my dear," he said, trying to make his voice sound a bit mocking.

"No way. You won't move from my side." She grasped his hand, refusing to let him go.

"I won't," he assured her, softly.

In the meanwhile, Missandei was staring at her own hands and Oberyn, who had listened in silence until then, was observing them with his ironic grin. He made a face of exaggerated annoyance.

"For the hells. If I have to spend the next days locked here, try not to give me reasons to feel envious of you, lovebirds. One has also his feelings," he complained.

"How inconsiderate of us," said Tyrion, sarcastic.

"A lot. Here I am, going celibate, and you cuddling. I insist that it's such a pity that you are so stubborn with that nonsense of fidelity. If you wanted, the three of us might spend good times together."

Sansa got as red as a poppy and even Missandei felt embarrassed. Oberyn studied the Naathi girl too.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 7

"Well, the four of us, if you're up for it, my beautiful interpreter," the Dornishman offered. It was evident that he was having a great time provoking the others.

"You're very generous, my prince, but Sansa and I are old-fashioned. We prefer the unhealthy custom of fidelity," Tyrion declined.

"It's your loss. Well, I'm sure in the pyramid must be someone willing to have fun. Luckily, this mass is huge and full of people."

"Well, let's have a look at the other messages," Tyrion cut off. "With the subject of the epidemic, we haven't had time yet to see what other news we've received. My prince, if you're so kind to pass me the rolls of paper, which are closer to you." Oberyn gave them to him. "Thank you."

Tyrion unrolled one of the sheets.

"Roose Bolton is dead," he declared, very surprised. "Ramsay has divulged that his father has been poisoned by his enemies. Very suspicious, don't you think?"

"It sounds to me mostly like the bastard boy felt so much filial love that the heart of his beloved father hasn't been able to resist it," the Viper joked.

Tyrion was thoughtful.

"Roose's wife, Lady Walda, was pregnant, if I remember correctly."

"It's true. We read that report weeks ago, Tyrion," Sansa reminded him.

"What if she has given birth recently and the baby has been a boy? How do you reckon charming Ramsay has felt when his legitimate little brother has come to the world? Roose's first legitimate son, Domeric Bolton, died in strange circumstances when Ramsay was a young boy."

Sansa opened her eyes wide.

"Are you suggesting that Ramsay has killed his entire family?" However much she knew the Bolton bastard was a monster, that assumption was the height of horror.

"I'm certain of it. He has got rid of them so he has no one to dispute with over his position. Now he's the new Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North. Even it's very probable that he proclaims himself King in the North, he's boastful enough for that."

"But the North won't permit it! They can't accept that monster as their king!," Sansa rebelled, enraged.
"What can they do? It's winter, and Winterfell is a well garrisoned and supplied castle. They can't attack a well defended fortress, or can afford to besiege it. Stannis tried to conquer Winterfell with an army of several thousands of men, and look how he ended," Tyrion discarded, stroking her hand under the table.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 568

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year!

Meereen: Month 5. Day 7

"A killer of his own blood proclaims himself King in the North and no one does anything. That filthy rat of Walder Frey, who breaks the law of hospitality, is the lord of the Neck and of the Riverlands and no one does anything."

"Think that most people hate them as much as you. Many families lost beloved ones in the Red Wedding, and Ramsay has tortured and killed a good bunch of Northerners. I'm positive that they're so much frustrated as you, sweetheart. But they can do nothing. They have enough dealing with winter. They're weakened and discouraged after the war. They can't be asked for much more," Tyrion interceded.

"I know. But it's hard to accept that a monster lives in your house, sleeps in your bed, eats at your table, walks with impunity around all the places which are dear to you, tortures and kills innocent people, and gets his way."

"Yes, life often sucks, and is terrible unfair," Tyrion agreed. "Monsters use to get their way."

"Faced with that, we only have the pleasure of revenge," Oberyn added, with his harsh smile. "It's something almost as good as sex, I can assure you. I know a lot about both things."

"We don't doubt it, my prince," Tyrion replied, looking sideways at him. "Well, let's read the next message. Let's hope it's not even gloomier news than Roose's death. I supposed that few things could be worse than a Bolton as Lord of Winterfell, but indeed the rabid dog of Ramsay taking over is much worse. After that, I expect anything." He unfolded the message and read it. Immediately his eyes widened. "Sansa, you're not going to believe it. Jon is alive!"

She at first could not react. After some seconds, she managed to get out of her stupefaction.

"But... It can't be," she murmured with an effort, and her hands were shaking. "Was Varys wrong in his previous message? How could he make such a mistake? How could he make me believe my brother was dead?" She was beginning to become furious.

"No, no Sansa, he wasn't wrong. Your brother has been resurrected by the red witch who some time ago traveled with Stannis. Here, read it yourself." Tyrion passed the letter to her.

"He's executed his murderers, has exiled the red witch for her crimes and has quit the Night's Watch accompanied by Ser Davos Seaworth." Sansa was beside herself with awe.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
"Night gathers, and now my watch begins. It shall not end until my death. I shall take no wife, hold no lands, father no children. I shall wear no crowns and win no glory. I shall live and die at my post. I am the sword in the darkness. I am the watcher on the walls. I am the fire that burns against the cold, the light that brings the dawn, the horn that wakes the sleepers, the shield that guards the realms of men. I pledge my life and honour to the Night's Watch, for this night and all the nights to come," Tyrion recited. "Jon's watch has ended, Sansa. His death has freed him from his oath. Now he can do whatever he wants."

"Of course! He's not a black brother any more. Now he's a free man. Where will he head for? I hope it doesn't come to his mind to get near Winterfell."

"He must feel... out of place. Disoriented," Tyrion surmised. "He had got used to the idea that he wouldn't know other life apart from the Knight's Watch, and suddenly everything has changed for him. He's free to choose. What do you reckon he'd do in these circumstances, Sansa? You know him better than me."

Sansa scratched her chin and bit her lower lip, thoughtful.

"He's a Stark from head to toe, and he knows too well the desperate situation in the North. I'm certain he wouldn't abandon his people, those who are his friends. He's fought too much for the Free Folk to leave it behind without a second thought. That all those who have crossed the Wall have camped in the lands of the Gift doesn't give them immunity against the hatred of the Northerners, and the Night's Watch is too much weakened to protect thousands of refugees. I'm afraid that it won't be long before the Free Folk is seriously threatened. And my brother is aware of that."

Tyrion smiled at her admiringly, nodding.

"I couldn't agree more with you, Sansa. Jon won't leave the North, not for now. And that puts him in a very risky situation. Ramsay Bolton won't forget about him, or about his friends in the Gift, be positive about that."

While they were talking, Oberyn was staring from one to another. He looked quite bored due to the lack of action.

"The Bolton bastard will slaughter them. A few thousands of undisciplined wildlings, consisting mostly of children, old people and cripples and only of a handful of men and women capable of fighting, have nothing to do. Even a half-wit snot like that skinner can crush them in a few hours," the prince blurted. "I'm sorry for the harshness, my lady, but whichever way you look at it, if your brother stays in the Gift, he'll be so lost as his friends."

Very subtle, Viper. You're a natural-born diplomatic, Tyrion thought, annoyed. What Sansa needed less now was to be reminded that her brother might be close to die again. And this time there would not be any red witch to resurrect him.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 7

Sansa's face showed the truth of those words, but she recovered quickly. Only the trembling of her hands under the table gave away her feeling of unease.

"I know it too well, my prince. What would you do in his situation?," she challenged.

"Probably the same as your pig-headed brother. I wouldn't flee like a coward. And I'd try to ride roughshod over so many skinner's henchmen as I could." Oberyn softened his expression and addressed Sansa his gallant smile.

Sansa couldn't help smiling at him too. For some strange reason, the Dornishman's brutally honest answer seemed to soothe her a little.

"Well, my lords and ladies. What's the following message we have pending?," the Viper asked, moving on to the next matter. Tyion ignored if the Dornishman did it because he was bored and he was longing for changing the subject, or if the reason was that he wanted to distract Sansa from the anxiety caused by the message about Jon. Anyway, the prince made him feel uneasy and annoyed when he devoted more attention to Sansa than what was proper. But he could not agree more to the change of topic. He unrolled the piece of paper.

"Asha Greyjoy's fleet isn't coming alone. It's being accompanied by at least a hundred swan ships from the Summer Islands. More than two hundred vessels are sailing here."

Oberyn let out a whistle.

"It seems that our iron woman is a real woman, isn't she? She alone has been able to reach an agreement with the summer islanders. It's a pity I've never visited that place. I would've been in my element, as the people over there aren't prudish like in other places. I'd have had so much good times there, and all for free." The prince looked at them brazenly, and Sansa flushed as much as she could without turning a shade of purple. "Besides, those islanders are people who keep very much to themselves. In certain things, they're like us the Dornish. Our intrepid she-captain must have tempted them to ally with Daenerys."

Tyrion, as usual, pretended that he had not heard she sexual hints of the Dornishman.

"It's a very large fleet, and it suits us to have as many allies as we can gather. It will be the first time that a Lannister of Casterly Rock is going to find himself on the same side than a couple of Greyjoys from the Iron Islands. Normally, we've never been the best of buddies. That usually happens when your city is sacked and a handful of poor fishermen who were working like any other day are killed." Tyrion reflected. "I wonder if both Asha and the islander princes had heard the news about Daenerys's disappearance by the time the iron woman arrived at their coasts. Depending on the parts of the world, the news can be delayed for months, or never arrive. Perhaps they set sail from the Summer Isles ignoring the truth. If they travel across so many leagues over rough seas due to the bad weather, and after so many waves they find out that the queen for whom they've carried out the journey and risked their lives isn't where she's supposed to be... How are we going to cope with a lot of pissed off old salts?" He sighed. As he always did, he pushed to the bottom of his mind the fear that the Mother of Dragons would not come back.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 7

"I was under the impression that that's what you are best at, Lord Tyrion. Coping with a lot of pissed off people," Oberyn joked, amused.

*I see you're having a great time, Viper. I'm starting to regret having supported your marriage alliance with Daenerys,* Tyrion thought, tilting his head to the side and looking at the prince with irony.

"I'm even better at amusing people," he replied, returning the jibe.

"Oh, of course. I admit that you stand out in that," Oberyn laughed.

"Well, the question is that, if by the time they show up at our gates the queen is still missing, many aren't going to feel happy. It doesn't seduce me too much to imagine several hundreds of visitors disappointed because they were expecting to see the silver-haired conquerer beauty and, instead of that, they'll have to resign themselves to a Lannister dwarf who makes up for his short stature with other qualities, to the daughter of the man who held hostage Balon's youngest son, to the member of the Kingsguard who stormed the island of Old Wyk during the Greyjoy Rebellion, and to a Dornish prince they don't care a shit about, no offence intended." Tyrion offered Oberyn an ironic nod, and this one returned it.

"Well, if that's the case, they should join the line. Others have arrived before them. And it's good luck that my betrothal to the queen has been kept secret, or people would begin to compose very cute songs about The Dornishman who was left high and dry. Or they might call it The Dornishman's bride on the run. Which title do you reckon would be more catchy? It would be quite a funny song."

Tyrion watched him with the ironic spark that his pupils used to show.

"If my uncle Kevan and my nephew Tommen haven't found out this far that you're here, it must be a miracle. It's not that you go very unnoticed over here."

"You're right, I haven't been precisely discreet. Nonetheless, don't underestimate my brother. He has his means to intercept messages and slow down the dissemination of certain news. Your spider is not the only one to weave its webs, Lord Tyrion," Oberyn hinted, feigning a mysterious tone. "We're the first ones interested in the whole Red Keep to remain believing that my brother lacks blood in his veins. Let's be confident that Daenerys will return soon and that, when the moment comes in which the truth about the alliance between the Martells and the Targaryens is discovered, Dorne is ready. Or otherwise, we're screwed. We've bet a lot on this move."

"You're not the only ones, my prince," Tyrion said.

Oberyn nodded and glanced at Sansa's belly. With her winter gowns and the cloaks she wore, her pregnancy was not visible yet to someone who was not very observant. She lowered her eyes, as flushed as usual.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
"There are no more reports for the day. I suppose that means that things go wonderfully well in Westeros. Ramsay Bolton is the Warden of the North, the sparrows are still chirping, Euron Greyjoy can't make trouble from the Iron Islands without ships, Walder Frey is devoted to getting fat in his chair of The Twins, holding Edmure Tully prisoner, whereas his son Emmon Frey, married to my aunt Genna Lannister, is now the lord of Riverrun." Some days ago they had received that news. Kevan had compelled Walder Frey to appoint his son Emmon as the lord of Riverrun; he was also Kevan's brother-in-law. "Littlefinger's whereabouts are unknown, the lords of the Vale only look at their own navels as it was expected of them, the ones loyal to Stannis at Dragonstone and Storm's End refuse to surrender and hand the fortresses over to the Crown... A very promising outlook, before which we can't do much. Let's conclude for today, then. Right now the most urgent thing is to protect ourselves against the influenza epidemic." He turned to Sansa and held out his hand to her. "Let's get out of here now. The less time you're away from our rooms, the better." She got up and took his hand. She turned to the other ones in the hall. "Take care of yourselves. Follow the maester's recommendations, all right?"

"All right," Missandei nodded, with her dull smile. Oberyn addressed them a sardonic nod.

Before they crossed the door, Tyrion asked Sansa to cover her nose and mouth with her cloak, and she did. They walked at a good pace along the corridors without stopping or talking. Brienne followed them in silence, abreast of what was happening because Ser Barristan had told her. Tyrion opened the door of their rooms and urged Sansa to enter. While she was getting into, Tyrion asked Brienne to send word to Pod and Leena about the eventuality of the influenza, and to Mhyraz and Dara too so they could tell the other children that everybody must stay inside the pyramid, without going to the exterior.

When he walked into the adjacent hall, Sansa had already went to the bedroom. She was sitting on the edge of the bed, lifting her skirt to her thighs, and he stood there paralyzed, staring at her. His body reacted instantly. She looked at him, suggestive.

"Well, aren't you going to help me remove all this?," she asked, licking her lips.

He swallowed with difficulty. He had restrained his hunger for her for so many days...

"Are you sure, Sansa?" He got closer to her cautiously.

"I haven't been so sure of anything in many days. And now, shall you help me?" She had raised her skirt to her hips. Her long, white and silky legs were an invitation to paradise and Tyrion stepped forward towards them as if they were a life raft in the middle of the ocean. He placed himself between them and caressed the thighs upward, gazing at them in fascination.

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 573

Meereen: Month 5. Day 7

"Come on, remove my stockings," urged Sansa, encircling his waist.

"As my lady commands." He smiled with absolute lust, grabbing the edges of the stockings and pulling them down, until taking them off her.

"And now remove the undergarment. I want to feel you inside of me."

"Right away, my lady." He slipped the garment and the curls of her reddish pubic hair took his breath away. He had not seen it in an eternity.

"Come on, penetrate me." He unlaced his pants, freed his eager member and, despite the urgency that was consuming him, he introduced it slowly, to give her time to adapt to his dimensions. He had missed so much that abyss which swallowed him to its depths...

"Untie my bodice. Caress me." Oh, this is too much glorious. Control yourself, lustful dwarf, or you'll come before you both have even had time to blink. Tyrion loosened the laces and pushed the fabrics aside. Those round and full breasts caused him a spasm of delight.

"Touch me. Move within me. Take me to heaven." Sansa had lied down on the bed and had closed her eyes, with her legs around him.

"Oh, of course I will, my love." He began to push, very slowly, and brushed with his fingers the throbbing clit.

Sansa let out a small cry and grasped the sheets, arching her body. "That's it. Do it that way."

Tyrion went on pushing and caressing, adopting a steady pace. He was putting all his effort in not reaching the point of no return. He did not want to spill himself before she did and, after so many days without any sexual release, he was on the verge. Dangerously close. He focused on the small bud in the curls and he reduced to a minimum the movement of his cock in her.

"You like it, Sansa? It's alright this way?," he asked. He knew that his low voice, which desire turned hoarse, aroused her even more.

"Yes, Tyrion," she moaned, caressing her breast.

"You're gorgeous. Now you're more beautiful than ever. Go on like this, touch yourself. Watching you excites me a lot." Tyrion made his fingers spin on the tiny button, just like he knew it turned her crazy.

"Oh. I still believe that you men have very weird tastes. How can you think that a woman who is getting fat is prettier?," she laughed between groans.

"Any man who saw those divine tits would think the same as me. But it's their loss. Only our children will share them with me." He wanted to make his voice sound comically threatening, but he guessed he was not very convincing, as he was getting lost in her and it cost him an effort to think. He sped up the movement of his hand over her.

Sansa arched even more, threw her head back and cried out, squeezing him against her with her
legs. "Tyrion! Yes!"

He pushed a couple more times and came undone, groaning huskily while he spilled himself.

"Oh, Sansa," he gasped, careful not to fall upon her. He lied down next to her and Sansa drew him to her, satisfied.

(Part 9 of a longer chapter)
"It had been a long time. Thanks for your patience, Tyrion." She rested her arm on his chest and her head on his shoulder.

"Sansa, you already know that I don't want to do it when you don't want. You have nothing to thank me for, honey. It's me who has many things to thank you for."

"I'm so happy that Jon is alive...," Sansa sighed, smiling, with her face against his shoulder. "If some god has wanted him to come back from the dead, he must have a reason to have done it."

*Or perhaps the gods act exactly the same as us, out of pure whim, with no specific reason to do what they do, or for outlandish reasons.* But Sansa was happy and had passed him on that happiness, so Tyrion preferred not to tell her at that moment what he thought about the reasons why the gods did things.

"Perhaps. I myself have come out of situations in which I was out of my depth. I doubt that the gods queue up to resurrect me, but I don't intend to give them reasons to have to do it."

Sansa hit slightly his chest with her fist. "Oh, fool." And she kissed him at length, arousing him again. They had not had sex for two weeks and he, worried about her along all those days, had not even realized how much he missed the fire they shared. Now his body was responding with an insatiable vigor and the only thing he needed was to make her cry out and sink himself in her until losing his senses.

Sansa, in response to his eloquent body language, placed herself onto him, straddling him. She pulled her dress and the rest of her underclothes until removing them overhead and she remained naked upon him. Her full breasts, the roundness of her belly, the whiteness of her perfect skin, the shine of her red hair, the intense pink of her lips swollen by kisses, the dark circles under her eyes that gave away the depression she had suffered, in contrast with the light blue of her irises... She was so beautiful that he thought he would melt under her.

"You're a vision, Sansa. I'm afraid that at any moment you'll fade away and I'll discover that you've been a dream."

She mounted his member and descended until enveloping it completely.

"And now? You think that this is a dream?" She moved onto him slowly. "Touch me." He grabbed her breasts, hollowing out his hands around them. He could not cover them entirely and he slid the palm and the fingers, caressing all the surface and stimulating the nipples.

"It could be. I must have dreamed of you like this so many times...," he replied, looking at her as if he indeed did not believe yet that she was made of flesh and bones.

*(Part 10 of a longer chapter)*
"Do I do this in your dreams?" she asked, and pinched one of his nipples, digging her nails a little bit.

"Auch!", he exclaimed, and burst into laughter. "No, my wicked wife. In my dreams you don't pinch me nastily, naughty girl."

"Great. Then it's clear that this is real and I'm fucking you for real, isn't it? Or do you still need more evidence?" Sansa was moving over him and caressing her own spot of pleasure.

"Ummm, I'm not sure...," he murmured, pretending to hesitate.

She leaned forward upon him and grasped his hair with both hands, tugging its locks.

"And now?"

"Ummm, I think I'm not sure yet..."

Sansa bit his lower lip.

"What about this?"

"Try a little more, I'm not fully convinced yet..."

She sucked his lip and caressed it with her tongue. Tyrion rested his hands on her hips and encouraged her to resume her movements.

Sansa sat up again and revived her rocking over him, with her hands rubbing between her legs.

"And now?," she asked, closing her eyes.

"Not yet," he challenged, guiding her movements with his hands. "Come on, Sansa. You're very close. Go with the flow. Give me everything, darling."

She convulsed onto him and around him.

"Yes, everything, Tyrion!," she shouted, arching backwards. "And now, you think this is real?" She was smiling and looked him in the eye, with sweat making her skin shine.

"Oh, yes, very real," he moaned, coming apart once more in those burning, wet and enrapturing insides.

She dropped on him and rested her forehead on his, breathing heavily.

"I needed this so much in this very moment, Tyrion. I've also missed feeling you within me. With your baby in my womb and you in my flesh, I feel complete. I feel I have everything I want to have."

He slid his fingers in her hair, touched. "Me too," he whispered.

Sansa got off him and lied down at his side. He covered her with the bedcovers.
"So, what do you think we could devote the rest of the day to? Today you're going to stay here with me, remember? And tomorrow as well, and the day after tomorrow, until the epidemic tapers off." She smiled at him with shining eyes.

"I can think of a couple of things. I'm an imaginative man, Sansa. I know how to entertain a girl."

"Oh, I know it too well. But for the rest of your life the only girl you have to entertain is me."

"Of course, of course."

She hit his arm slightly with her fist, threatening.

"You'd better."

They remained silent for some minutes, smiling at each other.

(Part 11 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 7

"I don't know why, Tyrion, but I have faith that Jon will manage to survive this time. I don't want to say it very loudly, so as not to tempt fate. But I have faith that I'll see him again."

"It's very possible, beauty. He's so stubborn as you," he joked. "Moreover, remember I threatened him by letter with chasing him in other life if he made you cry. He's made you cry quite a lot. It doesn't suit him to be on bad terms with me."

"Don't be very hard on him," she asked him, cuddly.

"I won't, but only because you're asking me." He enclosed her with his arms beneath the sheets.

"I hope it doesn't occur to Arya to join him now. It's too much risky," Sansa pondered.

"Your sister doesn't avoid a good fight. And the fight in the North is promising."

"Then I wish you're wrong for once and that she's so far of those conflicts as possible. But above all, I wish she's safe, somewhere where someone is taking care of her. I'm aware that's too much to hope for." She pressed her face against his shoulder. "We haven't received news of her yet. Each time messages arrive, my heart leaps in my chest expecting that some of them tells about my sister. Fifteen days have passed since Brienne told us she had met her."

"Let's give Varys some more time. It's soon yet," he said, tracing circles on her soft back with his fingertips.

"It's very probable that he doesn't locate her, but you know me, Tyrion. I can't lose all hope." She rested her chin on his chest and looked him in the eye.

"I know," he nodded, smiling at her.

"And what do you think will happen with my uncle Edmure now that Emmon Frey has been designated as the lord of Riverrun?" Sansa's look hardened. "There's no doubt that your uncle Kevan has pressured Walder Frey to carry out that appointment, because his son Emmon is married to your aunt Genna Lannister, and of course the almighty house Lannister has to be everywhere, controlling everything." She did not hide the anger in her voice. "I'm sorry for you, Tyrion. I know you're not like them," she added, softening when she looked at his eyes again and tickling his chest with her nails.

His stare hardened too, though it was not fixed on her, but lost in the distance.

"I also acted in behalf of the almighty house Lannister, Sansa. When I was Hand of the King, I didn't act out of altruism or kindness of heart."

"You did what you could to counteract the effects of Joffrey's madness and improve the conditions of King's Landing, facing winter. You prepared the city defense against Stannis and you yourself got out to deal with an army which outnumbered you," Sansa opposed.

"Do you believe I did it for the brave knight I conceal inside of me? No, don't mistake me. I did it largely for the Lannister surname. That's the brutal truth. My father had been spitting at me for all my life how disappointing I was, how shameful I was for the family, and deep down I wanted to
show him that he was quite wrong. That I was able to contribute to the sacred family honour. It wasn't much more than the nonsense of searching for the approval of a man who would never give it to me."

She took his face in her hands.

"Eh, look at me." He did. "Your father was a complete ass, and forgive me for speaking like that. But he had no idea. Not the slightest idea. I do." Swiftly, she straddled him, surprising him. "And now, forget about him, about the Lannisters and about everything else. Now it's you and me alone."

And certainly, for a while he managed to forget about everything but her.
Larko was sick. Very sick.

Lying next to him on the bed, Brienne was watching over his restless sleep.

A few hours earlier, the young man had waited for her to finish her watch swift by Lady Sansa's door and, when Brienne returned to her own room, she found him sitting on the floor, curled up.

"What are you doing here? What's wrong?" She crouched down beside him, worried.

"I'm not feeling well. My strength has left me and I'm cold, very cold. I didn't know what to do and I came here to wait for you." Indeed, the chills were making him shake.

She touched his forehead. "You've got a fever. Come in, you have to get into bed. I'll take care of you, don't worry about anything, all right?" She pushed aside the anxiety that was starting to tug her stomach and she took charge of the situation quickly.

"But I don't want to deprive you of your bed, my room is close...," he protested weakly, shivering, while she was helping him to stand up.

"Nonsense. We've slept together before. I don't see any problem in you laying in my bed," she argued, disregarding his objections with a gesture of her hand. She made him enter and closed the door.

"I'm sick, Brienne. I've surely caught the influenza. Wouldn't it be better that you accompanied me to my room?"

"No way. You're staying here. To me it'll be easier to take care of you in my own room. And now I don't want to hear any more. Lie down."

He, too weak to keep quarreling, sat down on the bed and removed his shoes.

"The maester is too much busy these days in the city, but I know what I have to do. You're not the first sick person I tend to, did you know? I used to tend to my brother. All the time Galladon fell in bed with a sore throat. His temperature raised very much and I took turns with my father to stay with him. It's not anything new to me. Moreover, it's not the first time I take care of you."

"Oh, don't remind me of it. It seems that it's always you who ends up going to my rescue and not the other way round. You see what sort of knight I'd be. It's a good thing that I've chosen another profession."

The guild of stonemasons was evaluating his skills. All the applicants to the guilds had to go through a trial period and, if they were suitable for the job, they became apprentices until they acquired the required degree of experience and their new status in the guild was acknowledged officially. Then they were treated as any other colleague.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
"I agree with you in that, Larko. Cover yourself. I'll go to your chamber and fetch your clothes. Do you need me to bring you something else of your things?"

"How many things do you think I have? You've traveled with me. You know I don't carry precisely a king's baggage, Brienne," he joked.

"If you want to joke so much, you mustn't be so ill, do you?", she needled. "I'm going to fetch your things, and by the way I'll go to the kitchens to ask for a bowl of broth for you. Stay still in that bed and don't you dare moving from there. The influenza is not a simple cold that fades away in a couple of days, you understand? You have to take your rest very seriously. If you don't rest, it will be very difficult for you to recover." She turned to walk out of the room.

"Brienne," he called softly when she was about to get out. "Thanks once again. You're always there when I need you. I hope to be able to give back to you everything you do for me, if you some time allow me to," he said, with his smile a little downhearted due to his malaise.

She did not answer and turned to leave. She was glad that he could not see her face, or he would notice how red she had gotten. She cursed her own ease to blush for anything, specially, for some time now, for any kind hint Larko addressed her.

Larko's chamber was small, a single room like her own's. It was on the same floor than hers, but at the other end of the corridor. They had asked expressly for small rooms, because they did not need much space. Brienne was used to much less than that, or even to not having a roof or a bed. And Larko never had a hideout for himself alone. When he lived with his family, the children shared a pallet. The good side of that overcrowding was that the constant closeness of their bodies helped them to keep warm in the cold nights. Larko, like all those over the age of nine, had been born in winter and he knew well its icy claws. In Lys the bite of the cold was felt too. Some light snow had covered the island sometimes with a white mantle which gave it the deceptive appearance of a fairytale island.

Brienne picked up a change of clothes. There was not much more than the few garments he had, his weapons and several sketches of drawings and patterns in charcoal he was making for the guild of stonemasons. They were decorative motifs for the stones destined to the constructions and remodelings of different buildings of the city. Some other drawings, piled on the table, seemed to have been made out of simple pleasure, as they depicted landscapes or people. In one of them, Brienne was surprised to look at her own face, with her short hair, her reserved and surly expression hardly softened by the hint of a smile, as if she had just heard a funny remark. Her large eyes stared straight ahead, and chased her wherever she looked at them from.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 8

She felt touched and a bit guilty for having pried into his things. She put the drawings back in place and got out of the bare room, that as unique ornament had some of the drawings of landscapes he had pasted on the walls.

She walked along the corridor with the bundle of clothes on her shoulder and she returned to her own chamber to leave it there. She checked that Larko had fallen asleep in the brief lapse during which she had gone to fetch his personal effects, but his sleep looked restless. He had a furrowed brow and was shuddering. Brienne tucked him in better, because those chills undoubtedly were due to the fever that was rising.

She rushed to the kitchens on the fifth floor, which were the closest to her, and she asked for a bowl of hot broth for a sick person. The cooks had near the fire, to keep it warm, a large pot with broth made from meat and vegetables. They had prepared it in anticipation of the demand that there was because of the sick people, as they explained to Brienne. Larko was not the only inhabitant of the pyramid who had contracted the influenza.

She carried the broth covered with a cloth on a tray along with a glass of water, a piece of bread and a few dates. She hurried up as much as she could, caring not to spill the contents of the bowl.

Larko was still asleep when she came back. She felt sorry for taking him out of his rest, but there was no other remedy if he wanted to eat the soup still warm. She awoke him softly.

"I've brought you food. Take the broth before it gets cold. It'll make you feel good." He sat up, rubbing his eyes, and she placed the tray on the bed.

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm not in my best day, but I've had much worse. And it's not so bad here. I even have my own personal assistant," he joked.

"Don't push it, or you'll lose your assistant," she blurted dryly.

"You aren't thinking of leaving me alone in my sickbed, are you? Though, given your grumpy character, that wouldn't surprise me."

"Don't tempt me, bigmouth. Or do you believe that the biggest goal of my life is to endure you?"

"At bottom, you don't regard me as so insufferable, but there's nothing wrong if you admit it. Your reputation as a tough woman isn't going to be damaged by that, believe me."

"Come on, take the broth. I haven't carried it so carefully along the corridors making so much haste as possible for you to start chattering and leave it get cold," she scolded.

"Alright, alright. Deep down you care about me. You've just admitted it."

"Bah, shut up. You give me a headache." She sat next to him and began to give him the spoonfuls herself, because his shudders would not have allowed him to take the spoon to his mouth without spilling the liquid.
(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 8

When he finished the soup, she made him eat several pieces of bread and dates, and she saved the rest for another moment.

A while later, his fever had raised and he was not any more in the mood for jokes. Brienne drenched a cloth in cold water and refreshed his face. After a while, his skin was burning. She made him sit down, undressed him and rubbed all his body with the cold cloth. He let her do it with closed eyes, exhausted. She made him get into bed again and went out to request the first soldier she found to go to the kitchens to ask for a bottle of infusion. She knew that Larko needed to drink liquids to prevent dehydration. She also went to ask White Fly and Green Beetle to stand in for her at Lord Tyrion and Lady Sansa's door, and to present her apologies to the lady for not being able to fulfil her functions while she was taking care of Larko.

She returned to her room, removed her armour, of which she had not got rid yet until then (it was like another part of her body and she often forgot that she was wearing it), and she sat down next to the bed. Larko had fallen asleep once more, but the fever did not allow him to rest peacefully and she was groaning in his sleep. His skin was still very hot to the touch and, if after some time his temperature did not start to drop, she would rub his body again with the wet cloth. For the moment she put it on his forehead, caring not to awake him.

She got out once again, making the most of the young man's rest, and went to the Grand Maester's chambers, to search for a medicine that made the fever lower. Maero spent the whole day out, tending to the sick people, and he only came back late at night to sleep for a few hours and go out again at sunrise. Foreseeing that some people of the pyramid could catch the influenza, he had appointed one of the young Dornish maesters to replace him in the building. He had proclaimed that what could be done for the ill people was to keep the fever at bay with a medicine he administered and applying cold compresses and giving them tepid baths, in addition to make them drink abundant liquids so as they did not dehydrate, and offer them company and solace.

The young substitute of the Grand Maester received Brienne kindly and gave her a flask of medicine, explaining to her how she must administer the doses. She hastened to return to her room. She poured some droplets of the syrup in a glass and she lifted softly Larko's head so he could drink it. He complied mechanically, without opening his eyes.

Seeing that the young man was trembling and groaning, Brienne decided to lie down beside him to warm him up and make him feel he was not alone. She ignored how much time the syrup took to take effect, but for the moment the lad's condition was worsening and she could not stay there idly. She removed his wet shirt and got rid of her own tunic and her shirt to warm him with her skin. She placed herself behind his back and embraced him. She closed her eyes and thought about the many times she had done the same for Galladon, but Larko's body was not flabby and chubby like the boy's, but slim and sinewy, though his skin, scarcely covered with blond hair, was soft, nearly as much as her brother's.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 8

Little by little the young man stopped shivering and his sleep turned peaceful. Brienne had the impression that his skin did not burn as before and, relieved by the improvement, got relaxed and felt an inner peace she had not felt in a very long time. She was tired after those hours of anxiety she had been immersed in and she did not shun the sleep that was overcoming her. While she was falling asleep, she recalled the portrait he had made of her and her heart trembled slightly with joy and fear at the same time.

She did not know what time it was when she woke up after having slept more placidly than in many days. His closeness had given her a calm she had not felt since they had arrived at Meereen and both of them hardly had had time to see each other. He also looked calm in his sleep and his skin, though it was still hot to the touch, did not burn as much as before. She made an effort to shoo away the laziness that her feeling of well-being encouraged, as there was nothing she desired more than staying there, laying beside him, but she knew she had to get up to go asking for more broth in the kitchens, in addition to some dinner for herself, because she had not eaten anything since breakfast, and she also had to bring buckets of water to bathe Larko with tepid water in the bathtub she had in a corner of her room.

Caring not to awake him, she got out of bed, got dressed and went to fetch some buckets of hot water. She made several trips loaded with heavy buckets which many men would have had problems to carry without help. Afterwards, she went to fetch dinner in a haste. The broth was covered to prevent it from getting cold too much fast.

Brienne decided to wake him up to feed him and bathe him later, when the water was cooler.

"Ey, Larko," she said, touching his shoulder. He stretched, grunting, and opened his eyes with an effort.

"Mmm, you had to awake me. It only could be you," he protested, sitting on the bed.

"You're yourself again, I see you feel better. I've brought you your dinner. You think you'll be able to take some more soup? You have to feed yourself."

"Do I have any other alternative? Seeing as it's you, you'll make me swallow it anyway."

"You know me well. Come on, sit up against the pillow. You want me to help you with the spoon or you can hold it yourself?"

"I can, I'm not trembling now. I won't spill the soup."

She put the tray on his legs and covered his chest with a cloth so as he did not stain himself. Then, she took the stew dish which was her own dinner and began to eat sitting on the bed, watching him.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 582

Meereen: Month 5. Day 8

He slurped the broth with a lack of appetite, but he emptied the bowl and ate some pieces of bread that had been left over from lunch and drank sips of the infusion, until Brienne declared herself satisfied with it.

"Well, and now, I'm going to bathe you. That'll keep fever at bay." She collected the dinner utensils and placed them on the only table in the room, which was small and rough.

"Yes, my lady. Whatever you command," he recited, feigning a monotonous voice. He started to undress while Brienne was pouring the water of the buckets into the bathtub. "I feel like a baby who is carried back and forth. But I like it. I remember that my mother took care of me like that when I was very young," he confessed, with a nostalgic tone. "We were very poor and had nearly nothing, but my mother loved us, I know. She died too soon. I was only four. Later, my father started to drink and looked for a lover. That woman drank a lot too and never loved my siblings or me. All of us had to get by practically alone. We even felt compelled to beg. And then arrived that plague which killed hundreds of people in the island, perhaps thousands. And I ended up alone in the streets. Mama Cora found me and took me with her. But she wasn't like my mother." Larko was speaking with his gaze lost in the distance, naked, watching his own hands as if his memories had been gathered there. Brienne had turned around to look at him, and her face showed pain and something deeper. "I'm not comparing you to my mother, the gods forbid me, as I don't see you that way, but I'm telling you all this because you are the first person in many years who makes me feel I have something resembling a home, you know? Someone who cares for me and who doesn't seek to take advantage of me. Since my mother died, I've always felt desperately alone. But that has changed. Now, when I fall asleep at night, I'm hopeful." He lifted his stare to Brienne, and in his eyes there was much more than gratitude. No one had ever looked at her that way before and she felt her heart racing.

As each time that confusion and feelings which were boiling within her overwhelmed her, she clung to the familiarity of the simple acts, of the soothing routine. She finished pouring the water into the bathtub and walked close to him, offering him a hand to help him stand up.

"The water will get too much cold. We want your temperature to drop, but it doesn't suit us that you catch a pneumonia, does it?," she said, trying to joke, changing topic, but her voice gave away the emotion she felt.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 583

Meereen: Month 5. Day 8

Larko, smiling, took her hand and sprang forward to stand up. They remained holding their hands and he intertwined his fingers with hers. Neither of them let go of the other's hand. Their eyes met and in then there were only sincerity and understanding, the soul uncovered, a mutual knowledge which did not need words and an acknowledgment of what they felt and had not dared to bring to light.

Brienne, split between fear and a joy she had not experienced until that moment, pulled them both out of their state of mutual contemplation, returning to reality. She lowered her eyes and released his hand. Her face was burning, as if she also had a fever.

"Come on. Get into the bathtub," she murmured, without looking at him. He complied, with an expression of intimate satisfaction, as if he had achieved a little secret triumph.

She helped him bathe, soaped his scalp, massaged his shoulders and his back and felt instinctively how his body responded to the touch of her hands. She knew how men reacted when they became sexually aroused, and it was not the first time he was excited in front of her, though until then he had tried to hide it and she, embarrassed and frightened, had pretended that she had not noticed. But in that occasion, the air seemed to be charged with energy. With no doubt, he felt better and that bath was turning into something else than the simple care for a sick person. Brienne was very aware of his slender body and of the heat he gave off, not so much because of the fever but of the unmistakable sensuality that was floating in the room's atmosphere. She was behind him and did not dare to change her position, where she would have to look straight at him, for fear of what she could find in his eyes. Despite all, he took her hands, which were massaging his shoulders, and made them slide down his chest, inviting her to carry on with the caresses on that area. Brienne felt a suffocating heat suddenly and her breath sped up. An intense tickling sensation spread from the tip of the fingers to her belly, and she felt wet, a new sensation for her, as with Jaime she hardly had any chance to experience it. She knew that he did not desire her and that certainty had restrained her own desire. But now with Larko... It was as if she had a bonfire inside of her. And that attracted her as much as it scared her. She had no idea of what to do with all those sensations. She was afraid of taking a step she could regret later... But then she stared at the lad's wet hair, that had grown and covered the back of his neck, at his manly back, she felt his hands guiding hers over his skin, slowly... And she let herself think that loving him could not be something so wrong if he made her feel that way. She felt as a real woman for the first time since Renly took her out to dance during the party his father offered in Tarth to sound out some possible suitor for her. Larko looked at her as if she were beautiful... But then she remembered the times he had slipped out in search for some stranger woman with whom spending time, and her body got tense and her expression frowned again. She let go of his hands brusquely and stood up.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 584

Meereen: Month 5. Day 8

"You should get out of the bath and dry yourself, or you'll end up getting cold," she said a bit dryly, moving away to the small wardrobe to look for a towel. She did not want him to see her face.

Her change of behaviour did not go unnoticed, as she sensed his eyes fixed on her, but Brienne did not look at him directly. She gave him the towel and avoided his inquisitive stare while he stood up, naked and with the water dripping down his whole body. She could not help but swallowing.

"Brienne...," he whispered, so softly that his voice could be hardly heard.

"Come on, dry yourself," she urged, still not looking at him.

"Brienne, look at me. Please," he pleaded, taking the towel and using the gesture to hold one of her hands. The woman raised her eyes, hesitant, but she obliged. "You know what I feel for you. And I think you feel the same. I'm dying to make love to you this very moment," he admitted cleanly.

Brienne tried to set herself free.

"Like you died to make love to those other girls you've bedded along the travel?"

He then seemed to understand, because he smiled in relief.

"They only were a momentary pastime, because I knew you were not ready yet. But what I really wanted was to be with you. I've dreamed of it since the night I met you for the first time. I had never truly desired anyone. My body didn't belong to me. When I met you, I felt free and my body chose you. For the first time, no one was using me for his or her own benefit. But it's more than that, Brienne. As I've told you, you're like home to me. You're the person I want to live with. To me it's not a problem that you swore an oath to Lady Catelyn or that you're Lady Sansa's bodyguard, or that you dream of being a knight. I'm willing to accept the situation. Both of us have duties that absorb us, but at the end of the day it's nice to know that I can come back to your side. I've missed you all these days, since we arrived at Meereen, because it's been hard not to share a room with you, or seeing you so little, even at night. I know you've tried to stay away from me, as if that could extinguish our feelings. But, Brienne," he added, kissing her palm. She suddered. "If you accept me as your life partner, there won't be any other woman to me, because I was waiting for you, you understand? And if you stay with me, I won't need anyone else. And I'll do everything possible to make you happy. You don't have to answer me, or to say anything. I know what's in your eyes and in your soul. I'm aware you're afraid, but you care about me too. If you love me, here I am. I'm naked in front of you. In every sense."

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 8

Brienne felt the sting of tears and put a hand on his cheek. A sweet pain was piercing her chest and her heart seemed to want to escape. She moved her face close to his and stopped mere inches away, insecure. She never had kissed anyone. Larko came to her help and moved his face forward very slowly, until his lips grazed hers, with extreme gentleness, with no urge, without pressuring her so she did not feel forced. To Brienne it was as if someone had opened a door and then she put her other hand on his other cheek and kissed him fully, and she at last stopped feeling the crushing weight of fear and she did not care in the least about her own inexperience, all that mattered to her were those lips against hers. Larko responded eagerly and moaned, encircling her waist and drawing her to him. He shivered and his hard and erect member pressed against her crotch. Then Brienne, overwhelmed, moved aside with an effort, remembering that he had not even dried yet.

"You're going to get cold. You have to dry yourself," she whispered, as her voice hardly could pass through her throat strangled by her emotions. She was panting a little, as if she had done a very intense exercise. He was panting too and looked at her in silence, with his eyes full of desire and much more. He knelt to pick up the towel, which had dropped on the floor, and offered it to her.

"Do it yourself, please. I like how you take care of me." She suspected that he had said that little joke to calm her a bit. And the lad added, with more serious eyes: "I promise you we won't do anything you don't want to, Brienne. But don't be afraid because of me. I'm not going to get worse because we make love. And don't be afraid for you either. That we do it isn't going to change things so much between us. We'll only be doing something our bodies ask us to do."

He put the towel in her hand and she pulled herself out of her trance. She started to dry his head quietly and dared to look him in the eye. In them she saw the desire he did not hide, but also concern for her, and warmth. And, beneath all that, longing. A longing that was dragging her as much as it scared her.

She went on drying him downwards, and he let her do, smiling. When she reached the area of the lower belly and the lower back, she avoided touching his most intimate parts, which she did not dare even to look at. The male member was still erect as a mast, giving away his desire, and she, very reddened and feeling a hellish heat and her heart pumping blood to her own crotch, stepped aside and knelt in a way that his member was not right in front of her face, and put to the task of drying his legs, covered with such a light blond hair that it could be hardly seen.

(Part 9 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 8

She lingered as much as she could and, when it was evident that he already was as dry as he could be, she stood up.

"Get into bed. I don't want you to weaken or to get cold, and for that you must lie down and cover yourself," she said, without looking at him. "Besides... I don't want to take advantage of an ill man. You still have a fever, and don't think clearly." It can't be true what I've seen in his eyes and what I've felt with his kiss. As soon as he's better, he'll regret this, for sure. And I'd be a pervert. And later I couldn't look him in the face.

He sighed, as if he was summoning up all his patience.

"I'm thinking with absolute clarity, Brienne. Now I hardly have a fever and I'm not precisely delirious. I'm not a helpless child whose innocence you're going to steal." He made a slight gesture of a nearly comical resignation. "But, as I've told you, we won't do anything you don't want to do." He turned around and walked to the bed. She watched his beautiful back, his firm buttocks and his sinewy legs, full of confusion.

Oh, of course you desire to make it, stupid woman. What's stopping you? He's offering himself to you, he's offering his heart... That's what you want, no matter how much you insist on denying it. You want him to stay here with you every day. You've already lived together for months, you've shared almost everything but sex. Is there so much difference? The only difference is that there will be someone waiting for you at the end of the day, as he's said.

While he was lying down, she took her decision.

She walked to the bed at a fast pace and he looked at her, surprised.

"Larko," she murmured, jumping onto the bed and straddling him, determinedly, before the embarrassment for her boldness made her change her mind. As if I could change my mind right now, she thought briefly, flooded with the desire that was starting to defeat fear. "Of course I want to do it. You know it very well." He stared at her with a wild joy, placing his hands on her thighs. He sat up to embrace her and she enclosed his waist with her legs and his shoulders with her arms. They looked at each other for an instant before kissing. She let herself be guided by her instinct and the kiss became deeper. He introduced his tongue in her mouth, and she moaned loudly and grasped his hair to attract his head closer to her. His hands were running along her back and she felt chills, as if she also had a fever. Then, Larko moved his hands around her waist and upwards to her breasts. Brienne moaned again, rested her forehead on his and took his hands to press them onto her. Despite the pleasure that was filling her, she felt insecure.

(Part 10 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 8

"Larko, no one has seen me naked since I was a little child. I'm afraid that you don't like what
you're going to see."

"I love what I see, Brienne. I've never hidden to you that I like you very much, have I?" They both
smiled and he started to unlace her tunic.

"No, you've never hidden it," she admitted.

He stopped for a moment and looked at her with an inquisitive expression.

"Why, after having offered resistance to the eventuality that there could be a relationship between
us, you've decided to rush headlong into it now? I know you, you're very pig-headed and if you
feel that something is wrong, you don't do it. Maybe I'm a fool for asking you this question when
you're opening yourself to me, but I don't want us to do this now and you to regret it tomorrow and
behave to me in an elusive way. Why?"

\textit{Because I love you. Can't you see it?} But she did not say it aloud. She was not ready yet for
speaking openly about her true feelings.

"Because I've been afraid of losing you. I've realized that I need you and that my life is very empty
without you." That was the closest she was to confess her love to him.

He put a hand on her cheek.

"The same happens to me, Brienne. I need you."

She kissed him again, more determinedly, and that time it was him who moaned. He finished
 unlacing her tunic and removed it over her head, along with the shirt. Only her underwear
remained, very plain and aimed to hold her breast without making it jut out, because in the life of a
warrior woman there was not much room for coquetry. Larko untied it too and her breasts, small
and spotlessly white, were revealed. They were nearly childish breasts, as if they had never gone
beyond puberty. They looked incongruous compared to the breadth of her body. Brienne felt
insecure again. He gazed at them as if he had not seen anything more attractive in his life, and he
cared them as if they were something extremely delicate.

"I always knew they'd be lovely. I've never liked big breasts. Yours are perfect to me." He leaned
forward and kissed one, and then the other. Brienne moaned and held his head while he licked and
sucked. "They're divine," he murmured against her wet skin.

\textit{(Part 11 of a longer chapter)}
Chapter 588

Meereen: Month 5. Day 8

She had not imagined that some time she would feel that way. Many years ago she had given up on seeing herself between a man's arms. And now all that torrent of sensations was unbelievable.

When he moved aside a little, smiling, she knelt and he helped her to get rid of the rest of her clothes. She was as naked as he, and once more she felt exposed. It was not easy to leave behind an entire life of shyness in one night.

All her body was in view. The muscles of her arms and legs were very toned, as well as those of her abdomen. Her back was strong and even her buttocks were hard and not tender like other women's ones, who did not exercise like her. The hair between her legs was only a little darker than the pale blond hair of her head.

"You have the body of a true warrior. It's absolutely exciting to make love to a warrior woman. You know, Brienne? I never felt very attracted to ordinary women with ordinary bodies." She made a gesture of incredulous denial, smiling and very flushed, as if she could not believe his odd tastes. Without warning, he pushed her softly to make her lie down and placed himself upon her. He began to lick and suck from her breasts to her belly, and she grabbed his head again, sliding her fingers in his blond locks and closing her eyes in delight. When he was starting to reach her lower belly, she got tense and he did a pause to look her in the eye.

"You trust me, don't you?," he asked gently.

She nodded, with short breathing and a blushed face.

He then descended between her legs and all coherent thoughts left Brienne's mind all of a sudden.

She was not so naïve and she knew that some people engaged in that sort of sex. She had heard some crude remarks from men more than once, when they gabbled and boasted among themselves, and they mentioned, not infrequently, certain women's skill to please them with their mouths. Of course, they referred especially to the women in brothels. But what Brienne would never have expected was that a man did that to her. She did not even know that that could be done to a woman, or that it was so pleasant. She had never masturbated and ignored that her body could react that way. She had experienced sensations and tinges in her crotch, she had gotten wet more than once, but all that had been vague and undefined and moreover, she had felt embarrassed and a little guilty, as if feeling sexual desire was a sin. Anyway, she had never touched herself in an erotic way.

(Part 12 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 589

Meereen: Month 5. Day 8

And Larko's head was between her legs and she was sure she'd die in sheer ecstasy... She realized she was practically screaming while he went on and on, performing things on her she would have judged previously as completely indecent and even disgusting, but in those moments the only thing she could think about was that she wanted more, and that she did not want him to stop, and with her hands, which were acting on their own accord, she was keeping his head pressed against her, to prevent him from moving away... Suddenly, something like an explosion pierced her entirely and she cried out, unable to hold back.

Larko lied down at her side.

"Is it the first time you've felt all this, Brienne?"

She nodded silently, as if her absolute lack of previous experience was a reason why she had to feel a little embarrassed. He was Lysene and the sexual customs in his island were slightly different from those in Westeros. Any Westerosi man would've felt delighted with my virginity, she thought with sarcasm. At that point, she cared a shit about what most Westerosi men thought of her, but she really cared about Larko's opinion, as he was five years younger than her and nonetheless in certain aspects he had an experience she lacked.

He made her turn her face to look at him.

"I'm very lucky that you've chosen me. You're a beautiful woman."

"Do I really look like that to you, Larko? Aren't you lying to make me feel better?," Brienne asked, smiling with a skeptic expression.

"As you don't believe my words, trust at least the reaction of my body. Have a good look at it. What is it conveying to you right now?"

Undoubtedly, he looked... aroused. His male member was hardened and his body looked... ready for sex.

"You desire me. But you desire other women too. Or do you think that I didn't notice along our travel?" She had lowered her eyes and her tone gave away her pain.

He took her face again.

"Actually I desired you, but I couldn't have you. With them, I imagined I was with you, as when I worked in the brothel and I had to stretch my imagination to manage to comply with the clients. When I met you, I felt that for the first time I was the owner of my body, and I started to desire truly. To desire you, at all times. But I couldn't release that with you, because I didn't want to put a pressure on you. So I did what I did. But it wasn't enough. You were the one I needed. I'm very sorry for having made you feel jealous, Brienne. But now that you've opened yourself to me, I don't need anyone else." He smiled at her, hesitant, with an apology in his eyes. She returned his smile. Suddenly, taking him by surprise, she pushed him backwards and sat onto him, trapping him with her legs.

(Part 13 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 590

Meereen: Month 5. Day 8

"If I catch you with another woman, you'll end up like the Unsullied who patrol these corridors. Unless I decide to kill you before," she threatened, trying that her outburst of possessive jealousy sounded more like a jape than like a real threat. She trusted him and she did not consider him able to betray her, nor she saw herself fulfilling her threat, but she wanted him to know that she would tolerate no betrayal.

"That's one of the things about you that excite me. I suppose it would be worth taking the risk," he provoked, with a lewd smile. He grabbed her buttocks with both hands and made her move over his member, making her moan. "But you won't have to geld me, my fierce Brienne. You have me at your feet, don't you see it?"

"I hope so." That sounded like a moan. She rised a little and got ready to welcome his member in her insides.

"Do it slowly. It'll hurt you, and it's possible that you bleed. The first time is not very pleasant for women," he warned.

"I know," she nodded, and started to slip down. But, to her relief, she discovered that it did not hurt so much as she had feared. She groaned a little due to the uneasiness, but she did not feel anything tearing within her, as some women said that happened when the maidenhead was torn. Perhaps her tough trainings and her many hours riding horses had torn her barrier inadvertently. When she came completely down, she felt full, and she still couldn not decide if that plenitude was pleasant or uncomfortable, or both things. But it was something incredibly new, a sensation she had not believed she would feel some day. And now she was there, with Larko inside of her. She hardly could let it soak in.

He undoubtedly was enjoying it greatly, with the joy showing on his features, but at the same time he seemed to be worried for her. "How do you feel? Does it hurt very much?"

"No. It doesn't hurt so much as I thought. I've received many blows and had stiffness that have hurt much more than this." Brienne was still motionless onto him, getting used to his member in her interior.

She moved a little, tentatively, and at first she only felt discomfort. He was expecting it, and tried to help her. "Search for your own pace and keep it. Try out until you find the most pleasurable position for you. It can help you too that you touch yourself."

She followed his advice and changed her position. She did not feel so uninhibited yet as to touch herself in front of him, but she tried something. She leaned forward and rested her hands on the mattress. The change made that a certain area of her, the one he had stimulated with his mouth before, rubbed against him and she began to feel a very delightful tingle. She moved faster and he closed his eyes and moaned, grasping her hips. The pleasure he was showing encouraged hers. Larko opened his eyes and met hers. They looked at each other intensely until she started to feel the tension prior to the explosion. "Oh, Larko," she panted, with her eyes very wide. "Yes, Brienne. You're amazing," he whispered, encouraging her. Then the pleasure unleashed in her and she cried out, arching backwards, and he followed her. He did not shout, but a hoarse sound came from his throat and he shook and his hot seed spilled inside of her. Brienne felt his wetness in her womb while she was returning from her own ecstasy, and a wave of immense tenderness and wonder.
invaded her. She dropped onto him and kissed him at length. Larko returned her kiss smiling between her lips.

"I've always known that you're a real woman. An impressive woman from head to toe. That's been wonderful, Brienne. The most wonderful thing someone has gifted me. Thanks so much."

"My pleasure," she answered, kissing him again and moving aside. "I hope I haven't taken advantage of a poor sick man."

"Oh, yes, you've taken this poor sick man to hell." He slapped her butt. "Come on, don't think it over. You've given the best medicine to this ill man." They covered themselves with the blankets and he embraced her. She, relaxed between his arms, started to feel very sleepy. Grinning, she fell asleep a few seconds later, with his scent floating in her subconscious.
Meereen: Month 5. Day 12

Some knocks sounded on the door and startled Tyrion and Sansa, who were finishing their meal.

"My lord! My lady! It's the queen! She's back!"

The couple dropped the cutlery onto the plates, stunned.

"Tyrion...," Sansa muttered, hardly unable to react.

He ran to open the door. Brienne was awaiting.

"How has it been? Is she already here, in the pyramid?," Tyrion blurted.

"The dragons are overflying the city and heading here, my lord. People say that she's riding the largest one, Drogon," the warrior woman clarified. "But she isn't coming alone. A horde of dothraki are riding to the gates of the city."

"Then we have to welcome her properly. Lady Sansa and I will go to the main door promptly."

"Yes, my lord."

Tyrion turned to Sansa.

"Are you ready?"

"Of course, Tyrion. Let's not make the queen wait." She already had put her cloak on her shoulders and had fetched his so he could put it on.

Brienne greeted Sansa with a bow in the corridor and escorted the couple. Pod and Leena were waiting for them in the corridor and the five of them walked together as fast as they could. They were bewildered, still acting more by inertia than by reflection. Three months had passed since the queen had disappeared and Tyrion had not stopped fearing for a single day that the spirits started to waver seriously in Meereen and that finally chaos unleashed when Daenerys's followers gave up on hoping her return, and the Masters took advantage of the situation to try to break the fragile balance.

The feeling that prevailed in Tyrion was relief, both because she was alive, and because she had not left the city to its fate. He had always known that, if the queen was safe and sound somewhere, she would not rest until coming back. He neither doubted that the temptation to leave everything behind and start a new anonymous life in other place surely had crossed her mind. It would have been understandable. It was not easy to bear so much weight on the shoulders. But if she did not bear it, it would not be herself. Daenerys Stormborn had assumed her sacrifice along with the air she breathed and very probably only death would move her aside from it.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 12

The girls were talking, excited.

"At last! Tyrion and I told each other every day that she would come back. We had to, so as not to let ourselves be carried away by fear. When you have no certainty, hope is what supports you. That's what has supported Meereen along these three months. I don't know what would've happened if her absence would have been prolonged much more...," Sansa was telling Leena.

"Yes, the situation has been difficult. I was worried too. What would have happened to all of us if people had started to rebel and a war had erupted? We have babies in our bellies who deserve a decent life. Now they're the first we have to think of," Leena said. Her three-month-and-a-half pregnancy was beginning to become obvious.

"It's so difficult for any children to be born in times of peace... Who knows what will happen when ours are born. But we'll protect them at all cost. They deserve to know something more than a world in shadows." Sansa did a pause, and then she went on. "I had the immense luck of coming into the world in a time of peace and in a happy home. I want that for my child, but I also wish that he or she can enjoy that peace for many years, and not to see how the world breaks down before his or her eyes. You and I have known a lot of suffering, Leena. And though we can't protect our children from all the evils of life, we must do as much as we can. And give them the tools so they learn to get on. My parents brought me up for an idyllic life in a castle, without thinking that everything would blow up in front of our noses and that much of what they taught me was useless. All right, not everything has been useless," she added smiling, before Tyrion intervened to protest. "It's true that some of my skills of northern lady have helped me to survive and I don't stay hand in hand here. I'm very grateful to my Septa Mordane for her lessons of etiquette, sewing and embroidery, and Maester Luwin for teaching me to read and write and some knowledge about History, Geography and about the people who live in this earth. Even in the Old Nan's tales there were always important teachings, which I by then disdained because I considered that her tales were tall stories for young children. As if I was much older than that." Sansa shook her head with a grimace of disdain for her thoughtlessness of vain girl.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
"Many of the lessons we're taught when we are children don't truly leave a mark on us until the proper moment comes, darling. But they're there anyway. That's the great gift our elders make us. Even when they hate us, as my father hated me. But thanks to his cruelty I've learnt a few things about life, whether he likes it or not," Tyrion said, with his ironic smile. Sansa squeezed his hand.

In the parade ground a great crowd of soldiers and inhabitants of the pyramid were assembling. Everybody had gone outdoors to welcome the queen. But the most flamboyant figure was Oberyn Martell. Even the experienced Dornishman looked almost nervous facing the imminent arriving of his betrothed, for whom he had waited for weeks. Tyrion, his small group and the prince exchanged greetings.

"At last," the Viper said, with an excited grin. "Very soon I'm going to find out how a real dragon is."

Tyrion wondered if the queen would decide to conduct the wedding that same day or if she would prefer to rest and come to know a little her future husband before swearing her vows in the small sept of the pyramid. Sansa had started to attend there from time to time since she had found out that Jon was alive. Tyrion was glad that she was retaking some of her former customs and that she had not lost completely her faith in the old gods and the new. That was part of her and Tyrion, though he was not a believer, was sorry that she lost her faith completely. She still kept a lot of purity in her soul, a beauty not even the gods themselves had been able to snatch from her.

Missandei came running in that moment and joined the welcoming retinue, which had just been increased by Ser Barristan and Grey Worm. The Great Maester Maero was tending to the influenza patients in some part of the city and, though he had heard of the news, he would not have arrived in time. Kerro was busy with some of his many duties and the news must have taken him by surprise too. The Dornish septon was positioned at the other side of the door. The orphan children and the guests ran out in swarms and positioned themselves in rows. Mhyraz and Dara smiled at their guardians Tyrion and Sansa and they returned the smile. Ray was with the children and started to bark, frightened and enraged. Even from afar, the pup detected the presence of the dragons. Mhyraz held fast the leash to prevent him from escaping. The boy had been cautious enough to put it on the pup, as he new that the snow dog would get very nervous and he probably would try to commit some stupid act, like attacking three dragons which would tear him apart in an instant.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 12

Three dark shadows were becoming more and more visible in the sky. On the central shadow, a tiny figure whose silvery hair shone in the sun could be distinguished.

It was them.

The three monsters, considerably larger than the last time they had been seen above Meereen, slowed down over the parade ground and got ready to land. Many people screamed and ran away, at risk of dying crushed. Tyrion, Sansa, Oberyn, Ser Barristan and their companions were awaiting next to the main door, expectant. Ray was barking furiously and Mhyraz was having difficulties to hold him back.

The gigantic beasts landed on the ground with a thundering of wings, and Daenerys Stormborn, the Unburnt, Queen of Meereen, the Andals, the Rhoynars and the First Men, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Chains and Mother of Dragons jumped onto the ground with great agility and for a moment everything remained silent. The quietness was only broken by Ray's barks and by the distant trills of the birds.

Immediately, a group of twenty soldiers ran to surround her, following an order of Grey Worm, to form a protective cicle around her of about ten metres in diameter, and a clamour started: Mhysa! Mhysa! All those present in the parade ground, except for the queen's escort, knelt, repeating the Ghiscari appellative by which all Daenerys's followers knew her in Slaver's Bay.

Tyrion studied her appearance. As beautiful as he remembered her, with her hair even longer, falling down her waist and styled in the dothraki fashion. Her attire was dothraki too: a sleeveless dress made of horse skin, which reached her knees. On her shoulders she was wearing a cloak, also made of horse skin.

Her eyes wandered around the whole assemblage, that remained absolutely quiet again. She fixed her stare for some moments in her counselors, in Brienne, and in the children of the pyramid, all lined up in front of the main door. She observed the freedfolk who lived in the pyramid, the Dornish septon and several Dornish and Pentoshi families. Illyrio Mopatis's fleet had arrived a few days ago and, after taking a break, many of the captains would set sail to join the commercial and patrolling expeditions. At last, the queen looked directly at Oberyn Martell, her future husband. He was scrutinizing her with an appraising gaze, not lacking respect or courtesy, but in his dark eyes shone his usual amused spark. And it was more than evident that he liked what he saw. Daenerys's light-green eyes did not reveal a single emotion for the moment, aware that hundreds of people were looking at her.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
"Stand up." It was the first thing she said. Everyone obeyed. Tyrion knew her enough to detect by her voice that she was nervous, despite her solemn appearance. "I'm really glad to be back. I congratulate you. The city looks fine. I see you've been able to take care of it." She addressed her gaze again to her counselors and turned to the soldiers, and she gave the hint of a slight grin. "I'm sorry that my absence has been so prolonged. I wish I could have returned earlier. There hasn't been a single day when I didn't desire to be here. But the circumstances have prevented me from returning soon." Tyrion wondered what must have happened along those three months. It was obvious she had stayed among the dothraki. "I see new faces. I welcome the Dornish entourage. I'm sorry for not having been here to welcome you when you arrived. Prince Oberyn, I know it's a little late to tell you this, but I hope you feel at your ease in Meereen, and I'm pleased to have you in my Council."

The Viper addressed her a gallant bow and a naughty smile. She turned red.

"I'm pleased as well to be part of your Council, Your Grace. It's an extremely... enriching experience. And from now on, it will be even more," he said, with his constant touch between seductive and ironic. Tyrion did not know if he wanted to roll his eyes or smile. There were things that never changed.

Daenerys directed a nod to the Pentoshi. Their distinctive clothing, as well as the Dornish people's, made them easy to identify. All people born free had their own way of dressing, and they kept it wherever they went.

"I also welcome those who come from Pentos. I'm aware of the effort to leave the own land behind, and I'm very grateful to you for coming to support me. And others who have arrived from other places, be all welcome as well, and I wish you a happy stay." She turned once more to the whole audience. "Soon a horde of three thousand dothraki will reach the gates of Meereen. They've sworn me allegiance and have followed me from Vaes Dothrak. With them travel Daario Naharis, the captain of the Second Sons, and Ser Jorah Mormont, a loyal soldier. They haven't rested until finding me. You won't be long in knowing about the details of my turbulent voyage, when that tale spreads among you." She hinted a slight smile, aware that everybody was craving for knowing what had happened. Thus they would have an entertaining topic of conversation which would last for weeks. The long winter nights were suitable for gossiping huddles around the campfires. "Break it up, and go back to your routine. Thanks for your fidelity and for having waited for me. That's the best gift for me." The crowd bowed and began to walk in all directions. The queen walked forward, surrounded by her escort, to the main door. In that moment, she turned around and shouted a word in the ancient language. The dragons took flight, causing frightened screams to be released from many throats, and making everyone turn to stare at them, until they ascended and flew away, becoming small dark spots on the horizon. The people standing before the door moved to both sides to form a corridor through which Daenerys walked. She smiled at all her friends and favourites while she was passing by, and she entered the building, followed by the counselors, the septon, the children and the soldiers who patrolled inside of the pyramid.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
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She stopped next to the door to the private hall. "Well, I'll preside over my first Council meeting after three months. I imagine that many things must have happened during all this time. There are lots of new faces in the city." Again she turned her gaze to Brienne, who returned it impassive. "And you are...?," Daenerys asked, pointing to the soldier woman with her chin. Brienne knelt instantly.

"I'm Brienne of Tarth, daughter of Lord Selwyn Tarth. I serve Lady Sansa, Your Grace."

"I'll have to listen to that tale in another moment," the queen said, smiling. "But now, let's get in."

The members of the Council passed into the hall and took their chairs. It was strange that Daenerys's seat was taken again, after remaining empty for so many weeks. No one had wanted to sit on it.

The queen looked at Sansa, smiling. "I see that you finally have decided to be part of the Council, my dear friend."

Sansa felt heat on her cheeks. "My husband needed my help and the other members accepted me. But if you allow me, now you're back, I'd like to quit the post so as I can devote myself fully to other necessary tasks, Your Grace." She and Tyrion had talked about that matter lately. They had decided that, when the queen came back, she would resume her former activities: the lessons and her participation in the guild of seamstresses.

"Of course, my friend. You're exempted from attending to the Council meetings." Daenerys studied her more carefully. "I see that you have a compelling reason to take things more easily." She grinned widely. "You've changed. When do you expect it?"

Sansa smiled at her shyly. "In six months, more or less, Your Grace."

"Congratulations to you both. I'm very glad for you. I wish you luck with your new family."

"Thank you, Your Grace," said Sansa and Tyrion at the same time, and they smiled at each other.

Daenerys addressed all the people present once again.

"In the first place, I think it's fair to start by congratulating you for having contributed to carry Meereen off. I know very well the great effort it takes, and I also know that I wouldn't have been able to rule properly without your assistance. That's why I know the scope of what you've done, even if I don't know the details yet. I've watched the city from above and it has a good appearance. On the streets everything seemed to run normally. That glimpse has offered me the information I needed to know to be reassured. I've verified that you've managed well and the city hasn't collapsed. I've feared for all of you, as well as for the rest of my subjects, but now I see that my fear was unfounded and that my throne can last perfectly without its queen for some months."

Daenerys smiled and her light-green eyes sparkled. Her skin had got a slight tan, undoubtedly due to the long hours of sun exposure, and the tanning accentuated the silver lustre of her hair.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 597

Meereen: Month 5. Day 12

She glanced at Oberyn and he returned his stare of seductive rogue, making her blush. "And before you bring me up to date about what has happened here and in other parts of the world, I'll tell you how I've spent all this lapse of time. It hasn't been exactly a holiday, and I want you to know that there hasn't been a single day when I didn't want to come back. Well, I'll start at the beginning." She drank a sip from the Dornish wine Oberyn served her in that moment. She accepted the cup with a smile. "I haven't tasted this wine for three months. The dothraki usually drink fermented mare milk, unless they raid a caravan with goods or some city regale them to prevent trouble." She looked at everyone. Drogon took me to the dothraki Great Grass Sea. I tried to tell him to stop and turn around, that we had to go back, but he didn't listen to me, as usual. We flew for hours and when at least we came to a halt in the plains, I was frozen with cold and stiff, and hungry. The dragons lied down to rest, ignoring me, and I had to resign myself to sleep on the grass, under cover of one of Drogon's wings, and to eat pieces of burnt meat. I lost the notion of time until I started to hear the murmur of thousands of horse hooves. I know well that sound. The dragons had disappeared since dawn, as they did sometimes, so when a khalasar got close to the place where I was, I found myself completely alone and helpless. In that moment it occurred to me to drop my ring in the grass, the one that the guild of metalsmiths gifted me when I became the queen of Meereen, so it could be useful as a trace. I had the hope that, when my men searched for me, they'd find the ring and know that I was there." She then kept silent to drink another sip. "Khal Moro's khalasar surrounded me. They tied my hands and forced me to walk along many miles, while they mocked me and said obscene things to me. They didn't know who I was and they thought I didn't understand the dothraki language, but although they had known I understood it, they would've cared the same. They led me to the khal and I revealed who I was. Moro laughed at me and told me that I was only his new bed slave. Then, I revealed I was the widow of the deceased Khal Drogo. As you know, the widows of khals are untouchable, but he announced that I must be carried to Vaes Dothrak, where from then on I'd reside in the dosh khaleen together with the other khals' widows."

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
"I had no idea of how I was going to get rid of this quagmire, and there was no trace of my dragons, but at least I had the reassurance that no one would rape me. Every day I hoped that my children would materialize, or that someone who was looking for me would locate me. Moro, his bloodriders and his captains were lucky that my dragons didn't give signs of life, because otherwise a horrible death would've awaited them. Some weeks passed and we arrived at the sacred city. I was escorted to the temple of the dosh khaleen and I found there women of all ages and conditions. The High Priestess, who is the oldest widow, took me under her guardianship. She was kind to me, and she confessed that, as I had committed the sacrilege of not joining the dosh khaleen immediately after Drogo's death, the khals must decide my fate. Soon they'd meet in the city and then they'd take their decision. Some more weeks passed, and one of the times I was allowed to go out of the temple to relieve myself (every time I went out, a young Lhazareen widow accompanied me, who was one of the scant friends I had there), Daario and Ser Jorah came out from the darkness. They wanted to rescue me taking advantage of the night, but I proposed them a better plan I had been conceiving for several days. I told them to hide and wait. They were reluctant, they feared that something could go wrong, but I persuaded them. My friend Ornella witnessed everything, I knew I could trust her, because the girl had detested her khal husband, he had kinapped her from her Lhazareen village and had forced her to marry him. She was pregnant and she also hated the life in the dosh khaleen. She was very unhappy there and most of the other widows despised or ignored her. Daario and Ser Jorah mistrusted her, but I convinced them to give her a chance. Ornella and I returned to the temple as if nothing had happened, and we continued with our routine until the day of the meeting of the khals. I was summoned in a tent where that pack of arrogant and insulting men thought that they had the right to decide my fate. Then I knocked down the burning braziers and the tent caught fire in a few seconds. I walked unharmed among the flames while those bastards were burning alive."

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
"When I got out, a great crowd of dothraki, attracted by the fire and the cries of agony, was there, and in front of them were Jorah and Daario. Everybody knelt and I reminded them who I was and I promised them that if they followed me, some day they'd help me to conquer Westeros and they could share out the riches of the lords who refused to bend the knee. We got going to Meereen and one day the dragons came to meet us. I discovered that I remembered many more words in the ancient language and that allowed me to gain more control upon them. From that day on, they didn't disappear again in a long time. I went on traveling on horseback in order not to leave my people behind, but when we got close to the gates of Meereen I rode Drogon so as everybody could see my arrival. And here I am." She looked at Tyrion, with a smile of apology. "Now there are three thousand more people in Meereen, but at least we don't have to find them accommodation inside of the city. The dothraki don't like to live indoors. And they have excellent horses we can use. Here the dothraki won't need them very much, except for training in horse fight."

Tyrion rolled his eyes comically. The truth was that so many people at once were not a triviality in the already packed city. Luckily, the merchant fleets were at full capacity, increased thanks to the Dornish and Pentoshi vessels, and business thrived, especially by sea. At a slow pace, but the benefits were noticeable. The trade among Meereen, Yunkai, Astapor and other cities was strengthening. And the regular arrival of products to Meereen meant that the guilds could work normally and that the shops and the market offered not only first need products, but also other high quality goods and with a certain level of luxury could be seen in greater quantity.

"Well, and now I have to catch up with all that has happened since I left. I've seen many new faces," she said.

"And you're going to see more, Your Grace. We are awaiting a new fleet that has been spotted for a while now, heading here," Tyrion explained.

(Part 9 of a longer chapter)
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Daenerys opened her eyes more, very interested. "How many are they? And, where do they come from?"

"Around two hundred ships. A half of them are longboats of the iron fleet, and the other half are swan ships of the summer islanders. Asha Greyjoy escaped from the Iron Islands when her uncle Euron assassinated Balon and persuaded the Kingsmoot to elect him as the king of the islands, defeating her, who stood as a candidate as well. She, who is no fool, understood that her life was in danger, so she made contact secretly with the captains of nearly all the fleet, who are loyal to her, and they fled, sheltered by the night. Of course, Euron got empty handed, begging left with hardly any ships, and the ironborn are nothing without boats. Asha has delivered a strong blow to him. Her brother Theon is traveling with her. He managed to escape from Ramsay Bolton's clutches. On the way here, they made a stop at the Summer Islands and Asha convinced the princes to ally with her and with you." Tyrion studied her reaction. It was obvious that, like most people, Daenerys did not like the ironborn. The stories she had heard about them since she was a little child did not make them look nice precisely.

"What do you know about Asha Greyjoy?" she asked, to find out something more about those people with whom she soon would have to make deals with and that she would have to admit in Meereen.

"She's a clever woman, and a good captain. All the men who follow her accept her as their leader without blinking, and that's something that has been seen very rarely in the Iron Islands, and even less with a woman. She's not innocent of committing pillages and attacks in the past, but nevertheless she's not a bloodthirsty savage, and I'm sure that she'd have been a reasonable lady of the islands, better than her father anyway. She takes care of her people and wouldn't sacrifice them foolishly for lost causes or for insane dreams of grandeur. Her qualities can be very useful to you, Your Grace." Tyrion had collected that information both through the stories he had heard of her in Westeros, and through some messages Varys had sent so they could form an impression of how was the woman who in short would appear in front of the gates of Meereen.

The queen reflected loudly.

"If she's coming here, so far from her land, to offer me two hundred ships of excellent quality and veteran captains who have sailed across so many seas, it's because she wants in exchange my help to throw Euron out of the Seastone Chair. Certainly, I can't reject the two hundred boats she's going to offer me. They're too much valuable. If I have to promise her that I'll give her back her beloved islands, I will. And regarding the summer islanders, they're no fools either. It suits them to ally with me. They bet on the dragon's blood. Well, we'll welcome them solemnly, and I hope that most of them are willing to live int their ships, because we hardly have any room to accommodate them within the city." She sighed. The lack of available space was still one of the biggest problems. "By the way, I've noticed that the freedfolk's camps have disappeared. Did they all move into the city?"

(Part 10 of a longer chapter)
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"Yes, Your Grace. All of them were relocated, not without difficulty, but they already live indoors," Tyrion said.

"Great. That was one of our main goals, that they could spend the winter protected from the elements, and you have fulfilled it in my absence. Good work." Daenerys smiled at everyone. "I wish I had been here. It must have been hard to push all this forward. I know it very well."

"It's been, Your Grace. That gives us the measure of the burden you bear," Ser Barristan added, looking at her with affection. The old knight had missed her as if she was his daughter.

"I admit that even I have lent a hand. This damned city is too much work. I suppose it's a good training to me," Oberyn joked. "The true ruler in my family is my brother Doran, much better than I'll ever be. But I'll do what I can. Perhaps having more responsibilities will do me well. It can't be said that I haven't enjoyed life, so perhaps it's time to settle down a little." He again hinted his seductive smile. "And speaking of my brother, he sends you all his regards and wishes of prosperity. He's always supported your family secretly. Dorne is at your feet."

The prince's smile and his gallant tone had an effect in Daenerys, as Tyrion noticed, amused. She felt attracted to charming rogues like Daario and Oberyn. Poor Jorah, with his stern character, never would have had many chances. She made an effort to regain her composure. "Dorne will be rewarded for its support, my prince." She evidently addressed him that appellative without second intentions, but he seemed to like how it sounded in those lips, because he looked at her with more intensity and her face reddened. "But before that happens, I have to rule this city for some more time and then I'll march on Westeros. You can understand it's a very difficult business. I'll only be able to achieve it with all the help I can obtain. Even the help of a prince without much experience in ruling."

"I'm delighted to oblige, Your Grace. Here you have a more than willing server."

(Part 11 of a longer chapter)
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She again turned red as a poppy with the double meaning of that sentence. She caughed a little to hide her stifling sensation. "Well, I have to catch up on a few more things. To start with, how is it that Lady Brienne has come here no less, to serve Lady Sansa?"

Sansa told the story of how Brienne had sworn to serve Lady Catelyn after Renly's death and how later she accompanied Ser Jaime to King's Landing in exchange for taking her and Arya back to their family. She talked about how things had become complicated, but in spite of that Brienne continued with the mission. She also mentioned with excitement the fleeting encounter with Arya, the woman's decision to travel to Meereen ad how on her way she had met Larko, her loyal traveling companion and currently her sentimental partner.

"She's a great warrior, Your Grace. She's even better than many men when it comes to fight. And you won't find anyone more honest or stubborn than her. She commits herself through to the end." And after a pause, Sansa added: "The dream of her life is to be a knight. In Westeros it was an impossible aspiration for her, but here the situation is different for women." Sansa got silent and smiled. She had dropped the insinuation that one day Daenerys herself might appoint Brienne as a knight. Probably it would be the first time in history that something like that would happen.

"I'll be pleased to know her and witness her skills. I like that more and more women are feeling encouraged to perform professions that traditionally were exclusive of men," Daenerys said, with a nod of approval. "You've said that Lady Brienne encountered briefly with your sister, and that the girl escaped from her due to distrust. Is it known where she is now?"

Sansa's face darkened slightly. "No, Your Grace. But every day I hope to receive news about her whereabouts."

"At least you know that until recently she was still alive. It's very probable that, if she's managed to survive for so long on her own, the situation hasn't changed. If she's in a place where she can be spotted, we'll find her," Daenerys assured.

"Lots of thanks, Your Grace. It would mean a world to me."

The queen smiled at her and went on to another subject. "What happened with Littlefinger?"

(Part 12 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 12

"He vanished, Your Grace. We think he had accomplices who helped him to escape, but we're not sure of anything. Until now, we haven't received any more news from him. We fear what he can be planning in the shadows. He's very rich and can buy wills easily. Perhaps he's fled to Essos and is planning to ally with the merchant princes, the triarchs, the archons or any powerful oligarchy. Or perhaps he has resorted to the Iron Bank of Braavos to fund an army or to persuade Tycho Nestoris to stop granting loans to the Iron Throne, or to demand the return of the huge debt into which the Crown has incurred. Who knows? Littlefinger is capable of everything, even of triggering another war to sow more chaos. In fact, that option is the one I feel most inclined to," Tyrion expounded.

Daenerys nodded. "He's extremely dangerous, and the worst thing is to ignore where he is and what his next movement is going to be. We have to locate him at all costs."

"We're working on it, Your Grace. I've set in motion all the possible resources. Or he has disappeared into the earth, or sometime he'll have to be discovered," Tyrion said.

"Let's hope it's not too late when that happens. Well, for now we only can wait. What else has happened?"

"Menelan died," Missandei said suddenly, with clouded eyes. Her stare was always sad since she had lost her son.

Daenerys trembled and rested her hand on her loyal friend's one. "I'm very sorry, Missandei. He was a charming boy."

"He was, Your Grace."

"That's why, among many other things, I won't ever yield in my determination to abolish slavery. So that no other child has to suffer what Menelan suffered."

Everybody kept quiet for some moments, in memory of the deceased boy.

"But there's good news," Ser Barristan added. "Kerro and Jalima's eldest sons came from Yunkai, safe and sound. The family at last has been reunited."

The queen smiled in satisfaction. "That's wonderful. I'll see them soon, and I'll get to know the two lads. They must have a very interesting and hard tale to tell." She got serious again. "And the Sons of the Harpy? Has there been any progress?"

Tyrion answered: "We caught and executed nearly four hundred of them, Your Grace. Hizdhar's mother has helped as a lot in that matter. Her son died in Daznak's amphitheatre, just when you disappeared on Drogon's back. He drank a poisoned wine intended for you. The authors of the conspiracy were some Astapori wine merchants, accomplices of the Sons of the Harpy. Hizdhar's mother discovered them. Since then, she's worked as a spy for us. I don't trust her very much and I'm keeping an eye on her on my own, but she's been very useful until now. She's a woman moved by her wishes for revenge because of her son's death. That seems to be the only thing that supports her currently. Due to that, she's very dangerous. Some other members of noble families have been murdered in suspicious circumstances. The authors might have been vindictive ex-slaves, or some Sons of the Harpy that had escaped from the raid and who try to go on sowing confusion and
death. Or Hizdhar's mother. In any case, we must be careful with her," Tyrion warned.

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Daenerys was impressed. "Nearly four hundred? Did you execute them all together?"

"Yes, Your Grace. It wasn't a pleasant show. And we've had to maximize the surveillance and resort to the priests and priestesses of the different religions practised in the city so they offer spiritual comfort. The Graces, the red priestesses and even the septon have been quite busy and, thanks to them, to the armies, to the citizen collaboration and to the timid prosperity of the city, despite all the problems, we've managed to stop another war. But the balance is precarious. We can't afford to face disasters or more murderers in the shadow."

"We'll do what we can, like we've done until now. The truth is that, when I was coming here, there were moments when I came to fear what I'd discover at my arrival. But I see I underestimated my subjects' ability. Though only for short moments of doubt, for the record," Daenerys said, joking a little. "Meereen is like a wild horse. You never can loose the reins or it will bolt. Any other news?"

"My brother Jon was murdered by several of his black brothers because he allowed thousands of people from the Free Folk to cross through the Wall, so they could settle in the lands of the Gift." Daenerys got startled, with very wide eyes. Sansa calmed her with a hand shake. "Wait, that's not all. The red witch who accompanied Stannis resurrected him, because she had escaped to the Wall after Stannis and his armies of sellswords were crushed by the Boltons. Do you know what that woman did? She persuaded Stannis to burn his own daughter, Lady Shireen, as an offering for the Lord of Light, believing that the sacrifice would ensure their victory. It wasn't so and that girl killer sneaked out like a rat. The only good thing she's done has been to resurrect my brother, but he later exiled her for her crimes. Jon resigned from the Night's Watch, as death freed him from his oath, and left with Ser Davos Seaworth, who was also at Castle Black because Stannis had sent him there to ask for the Watch's help. But it seems that Ramsay, who now is the lord of Winterfell and the Warden of the North after the suspicious death of his father (and we reckon that his stepmother Lady Walda, who was pregnant, has died too, though we haven't received any news confirming it yet), has sent a threat to Castle Black, declaring that he'll finish off the crows and the people settled in the Gift. We suppose that Jon will stay to defend his friends, and I'm afraid for him."

(Part 14 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 605

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Daenerys absorbed quietly that information.

"The situation in the North is even worse than I thought. If Ramsay is ready to attack the Night's Watch, then he's completely mad. Jon Snow and his allies don't have many chances, do they?"

"Not many. Unless a miracle happens."

"And the Northern houses?," Daenerys asked.

"The ones that have their castles next to the Gift hate de Free Folk. That's what happens when one lives near the border. For millennia, they've been fearing invasions and suffering sporadic attacks from tribes that climb the Wall on unguarded areas or that go into Westeros by sea, using fishing boats. Several of those groups, more peaceful, only intend to escape from the winter and to pursue a better life, but others more violent have made trouble along the centuries. It doesn't help either to improve the diplomatic relations between both continents the fact that a Wall of more than two hundred metres high is telling you that you're not welcome in the South, and that the Night's Watch chases you like a rat because you've been born to the north of that Wall. And as for the rest of the Northern houses, they must be taking care of themselves. It's hard to face the winter after a war, as well as a lord of Winterfell who devotes himself to flay, geld, torture and kill out of fun," Tyrion said.

"I understand how frustrating it is to be here without being able to do anything." Daenerys looked at Sansa with a flash of sympathy. "Today I'll send a raven to probe the situation. We can't allow Ramsay Bolton to get his own way. It's very much what's at stake. Not only a lot of people would die, but there would be no one left on the Wall to stop the White Walkers."

They got silent, with an air of despondency. Except, of course, for Oberyn, to whom all that seemed to inspire more fun than anything else.

(Part 15 of a longer chapter)
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"Funny meeting, don't you think? Here we are, a group of quite peculiar people. You, the Mad
King's posthumous daughter, the sister of the Dragon Prince who started a war for abandoning my
sister to run with Lady Sansa's aunt. You and I are the aunt and uncle of those poor children killed
by order of Tywin Lannister, whose youngest son is here too, chased for regicide, a crime common
in House Lannister lately, as Tywin's big son stabbed his sword into the back of your father the
King Aerys while my sister and my niece and nephew were being slaughtered. As for me, you
already know my great feats. Im many places people would ban me from entering if they could, or
they'd try if they dared to. Besides, we have here an ex-kingsguard who served your grandfather
and your father and later went over to serve the usurper, and who now has sworn his sword to you.
And a young, smart and prudent lass who was abducted by pirates and sold to a Good Master, and
who has ended up being part of this Council." Ser Barristan looked at Oberyn with irritation, and
the others looked more surprised than angry by his brutally sarcastic speech. "With all this I'm
trying to say that all of us are here because each of us wants something. The Iron Throne, revenge
(what involves crushing those who have screwed us over), get back what was lost, glory, pleasure
and fun...," he continued, glancing at Daenerys. "We all have our reasons. But, whatever they may
be, we agree in one thing: we want to see our queen in the Iron Throne. And to achieve that, she'll
need Westeros to keep on existing when she claims that ugly chair made of swords. So we'll have
to give a helping hand. For my part, Dorne can contribute weapons and supplies by sea to the
campaign in the North in case that this one decided to rise up against the Bolton bastard. As for
armies, I'm afraid that Dorne for now needs all its soldiers, and moreover the Southerners aren't
used to the Northern weather and they don't know the lands. But I can ensure that the assistance
arrives by other means. As long as the North makes up its mind to react at once."

(Part 16 of a longer chapter)
Daenerys looked at him approvingly. "I appreciate it a lot, my prince. That could make a big difference in the war."

"I hope so, my queen," he said softly. "As I've told you, Dorne is at your feet."

*And something more than Dorne*, Tyrion thought, observing the game of glances between the queen and the prince. If Daario saw it, he'd become positively jealous. Not to mention Jorah. It seemed that Daenerys did not dislike her fiancé at all. But in those moments, Tyrion only paid a superficial attention to that dalliance, as a few ideas were hanging around his head.

"Your Grace... What do you think about the Alchemists' Guild?" he asked suddenly.

Daenerys stared at him, surprised. She took at least half a minute to offer an answer.

"They produce a very dangerous weapon you yourself used in the Battle of Blackwater. They lost their prestige and influence after the fall of my dynasty, and became very unpopular during my father's reign, when he often ordered to use the wildfire to execute those he believed to be his enemies." She kept silent for some seconds, gathering her memories about all she knew of that substance. "I think that, well used, it can be a very useful weapon, as you showed, but its use and storage involve many risks." She stared at Tyrion. "Are you suggesting that I might create my own Alchemists' Guild, Lord Tyrion?"

Everybody turned to look at him, with varied degrees of approval, disapproval and bewilderment reflected on several pairs of pupils.

"Exactly, Your Grace. I'm sure that some pyromancers wouldn't dislike to serve the Dragon Queen. Their order prospered with your dynasty, and the magic of the dragons increases the power of wildfire. I doubt it will cost us much to convince some of its members to serve you. And we need all the weapons we can gather," Tyrion pointed out.

*(Part 17 of a longer chapter)*
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"If you let me give my opinion, Your Grace, those pyromancers always have made me suspicious and wildfire is too much dangerous. Besides, how would we transport tons of flammable flasks along thousands of leagues?," Ser Barristan opposed.

"It wouldn't be necessary to transport them. They wouldn't move from King's Landing. The pyromancers don't have necessarily to come here to serve the queen," Tyrion suggested in his conspiratorial tone, with a smile. "It simply would be a question of changing their loyalties a little. Actually, they only serve themselves and who pays them well to carry out their experiments and to manufacture great amounts of their precious substance. Kevan distrusts them, not wrongly, and he doesn't hold them in higher esteem than Robert did. I doubt that he shows interest for them, or that he'll offer them a higher price than us."

An flash of excitement shone in Daenerys's eyes.

"It would be a very powerful weapon, and we can't manage without anything which helps us in our campaign. Excellent proposal, Lord Tyrion. From now on, the pyromancers from King's Landing will work for me. I'll make sure that they'll produce wildfire for my reserves and that these remain a secret."

Ser Barristan pursed his lips in disapproval, but he did not add anything more. Oberyn was smiling at Daenerys openly, enjoying the situation.

"And there's something else I'd like to add, Your Grace. I've been thinking vaguely about it for a couple of weeks. One day, when I was in the market, I chatted with a merchant of a caravan from Asshai. The man sold utensils, ornaments and weapons made of dragonglass, which as you know it's also known as obsidian. This material is obtained in large quantities in the Lands of the Shadow. And it's one of the scant known materials capable of killing the White Walkers. We might bring supplies of dragonglass from Asshai." Tyrion had commented that idea with Sansa the day he had crossed paths with the merchant. He had purchased a pair of dragonglass daggers. They were not cheap, but it was worth to have them. He had given one to Sansa, and he kept the other one for himself.

(Part 18 of a longer chapter)
"Definitely, you haven't remained idle during my absence," Daenerys joked. "We'll start the talks with Asshai so they provide us with dragonglass regularly. Any other idea that has gone around your head, my prolific friend?"

"For now, that's all. But don't doubt that, as soon as I come up with more ideas, you'll know promptly."

"Good. And the rest of the matters in Westeros?," she asked, changing topic.

"Riverrun was retaken by Ser Brynden Tully, but my brother Jaime was sent along with some Lannister troops to mount a siege and force the Blackfish to surrender. He offered resistance, and the castle was taken by force and all its defenders died fighting. Now the castle has been given to Emmon Frey, who is the husband of my aunt Genna Lannister, sister of Tywin and Kevan." Tyrion supplied that information with reluctance and glancing sideways at Sansa with an expression of apology.

"I'm sorry that your relative is dead, Lady Sansa," offered Daenerys as condolences. "But it was a lost battle. And Edmure Tully?"

"He's alive. He's kept as a hostage in Casterly Rock and he's been allowed to live there with his wife and his son. Walder Frey wanted to oppose to that and force his daughter Roslin to go back to The Twins with the baby as a hostage, but she refused and Kevan neither agreed to the old rat's demands. So at least Edmure lives peacefully with his small family. So peacefully as one can live in the enemy's house, of course. But believe me, the rest of my family are normal and quite decent people. Some of them are more conceited than others, but they're not bad people. And there are three or four of them who you would frankly like, Your Grace, like my aunt Dorna and my cousins Daven, Cerenna and Joy. My aunt Genna is a clever and reasonable woman. It's her who has really run Casterly Rock while Tywin was absent. They're all Lannisters, but not monsters like my father, Cersei and Joffrey. They'll treat the Tullys well."

Daenerys nodded. "And how are they coping in the capital with the sparrows? Are they still expanding?"

(Part 19 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 610

Meereen: Month 5. Day 12

"It looks like it. According to what it's said, Tommen and Margaery have converted devoutly to the Faith. They keep long private meetings with the High Sparrow and now they even dress modestly, wearing plain tunics and without making ostentation of jewelry. They make generous donations to orphanages and to the poor and visit the slums. I ignore what the young Tyrell's true plans are, but I'm sure that they don't involve spending her life praying and wearing burlap tunics," Tyrion said, ironic.

"I'm sure of that too. I've always had the impression that she's an ambitious woman. I doubt that her aspirations end there," the queen corroborated.

"And she has her grandmother. Lady Olenna is a woman worth keeping in mind. She's one of the smartest and less conscientious people in the Seven Kingdoms. I don't believe she likes very much to see that her beloved granddaughter has to put up with a wave of religious fanatics who slow down her aspirations."

"It's true. The Tyrell old woman is a formidable character," Daenerys agreed. "And a formidable enemy."

"She is," Tyrion affirmed.

"Well, soon Daario, Ser Jorah and the dothraki will arrive. Now, I'd like to retire to take a little rest. It wouldn't be bad to lie down on a mattress again, after months sleeping directly onto the grass or on horse skins. And later, I'd like to meet Kerro and his family, and to speak with the Grand Maester and the septon." When she said that, she looked at Oberyn, blushing, "I suppose we have a wedding to organize, though only those present in this hall and few more know about it."

Oberyn stared at her with caressing and sparkling eyes.

"In that you're more experienced than me, Your Grace, as it will be my first wedding," he joked. "It's a shame I can't regale my fiancée publicly, as she deserves, but I'm not bad at it privately, either."

The bright red on Daenerys's cheeks reached its highest point.

"When the dothraki arrive at the gates, we'll go out to receive them and we'll also welcome Ser Jorah and Daario. Ser Jorah will be part of this Council, like he was before he was exiled. He has gained my full trust again. He's shown most clearly his unwavering loyalty to me, and an experienced and wise voice like his will be very necessary around me, as much as yours are, my dear friends. Once more I congratulate you for everything you've done. Now retire and soon word will be sent to you to go to the city gates to welcome the newcomers. I wish a good day to you all."

"The same for you, Your Grace," some of them responded at the same time.

Daenerys left, taking hold of Missandei's arm and escorted by Ser Barristan and Grey Worm, and followed by the rest. Oberyn smiled brazenly in Tyrion's and Sansa's direction. Tyrion wondered, slightly amused, if from that day on the sensual prince would reduce the frequency of his visits to the brothels, or if he would continue with his usual frenzied promiscuity. Undoubtedly, a significant change in his behaviour would draw attention, and the secrecy of his marriage to
Daenerys must be kept at all cost. For the time being, the queen would have to content herself with sharing him with part of the courtesans and with the ephebes of the city with licentious customs.
Chapter 611

Meereen: Month 5. Day 15

Tyrion and Sansa got up very early. It wasn’t dawn yet, but the queen had established it that way to keep the secret, so they made the effort and got out of bed reluctantly when White Fly knocked discreetly on the door, waking up Ray, who with his growls alerted his owners that it was the time. They had went to bed before usual, in anticipation of the early hour at which they would have to get up in order to attend Daenerys and Oberyn’s wedding. To help themselves get relaxed and fall asleep, they had a particularly intense sex session, using a pair of erotic toys, because they knew that that was a very effective way of ending up worn out. Not even Tyrion had great difficulty to get to sleep soon after a climax which almost seemed to tear him apart due to the intensity with which it pierced through his small body.

They got dressed quickly, without choosing anything special for the occasion, such as the queen desired. Their appearance must not draw attention if they were spotted. Sansa combed her hair on her own with simple braids Dara made to her when she fancied styling her hair in the Northern fashion, and she had decided that that day she would wear it that way. She had not wanted to awake the girl so early, and though she had lost practice since she left Winterfell, she had not forgotten her mother’s lessons. A Northern lady can manage alone when the times are specially hard and people don’t have time for trivialities. Once, Sansa had complained for having to style her own hair, alleging that that was the handmaidens’ task. If your child was very sick with a fever because of the cold, would you leave him or her alone to go combing the hair of a conceited little lady? That sentence had made her hush and reflect that, obviously, if she could choose between taking care of her own ill child and tending to a healthy and whiny girl, she would not hesitate to choose the former option. Over time, Sansa learnt that not all the servants had that choice, and that in other houses they were treated much more severely. But her father used to say that no one must do to the others what one did not want for oneself, and he fulfilled it strictly in all aspects of his life. The result was that Eddard Stark was one of the most respected lords in the Seven Kingdoms, and that many of his liegemen followed him out of devotion, not simply out of duty. Sansa had witnessed all that and, though in her futile and blind illusions she dreamed of being like the Southern ladies, she admitted inwardly that she had not met anyone so sincerely admired as her own father. But, to tell the truth, she hardly had ever met any Southern lord until Robert and his family had visited Winterfell, so her rebellious inner voice told her that in such green and benign lands where the sun shone strongly and life was less harsh and more romantic, the lords and knights inevitably had to be more gallant and charming, and it was very difficult not to love those gentlemen.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 612

Meereen: Month 5. Day 15

If she had opened her eyes then at how foolish it was to believe all that, she would have realized immediately that a monster hid behind Joffrey's delightful smile. Her siblings had noticed that instantly, but she had taken months to admit the truth. Sansa sighed surreptitiously before the mirror, while she was styling her hair for the queen's wedding. Years ago she would have been scandalized to attend a royal wedding without wearing her best finery and without all the splendor and pageantry the occasion required, but now that circumstance made her almost indifferent. It had been a long time since pomp and brilliance had stopped fooling her and impressing her, or disguising the fact that under a beautiful dress the most treacherous dagger could be hid, or a broken heart, or simple and pure ambition.

A chill ran through her. Joffrey had the wedding he wanted. And see how he ended up. It was the wedding he deserved, she thought, studying her ironic smile in the mirror.

She remembered how Tyrion had looked at her the day he promised that one day they would renew their wedding vows in front of the heartree of Winterfell. A warm feeling invaded her spirit. Even if that was not possible (who knew if by then there would be something standing in Winterfell, or even in the North), the fact that he was determined to offer her that made her heart dance.

Tyrion got close to her from behind, already dressed. He embraced her by the waist and kissed her neck. "Ummm, it's a pity that you can't wear the gown you made for Pod and Leena's wedding. You'd be divine in it, and I'd be mad for taking it off you," he murmured against the extremely soft skin.

Sansa burst in laughter.

"You could also take this one off me," she said, mischievous, tilting her head to give him more access to her neck.

"I've removed this dress many more times. It's not the same." He bit her softly, grinning.

"Ah, no?" she replied, pretending to be offended. "Then you disguise it very well. I didn't have the impression that it displeased you very much each time you were in such a hurry to remove it, my lord." She slid her hand through his hair and closed her eyes, letting herself be carried away by the feeling of his lips and his tongue on her. She was aware that they must not be late, but that game was irresistible...

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 15

His hands grasped her waist and Tyrion moved them upwards, until cupping her breasts.

Sansa moaned.

"You think it will be high treason to arrive a few minutes late at a royal wedding, my hot wife?," he asked in whispers against the wet skin, biting her earlobe.

"It's likely. We might be sentenced for making the queen wait," she sighed, with her eyes closed and her fingers sliding in his hair.

"It will be worth taking the risk, don't you think, gorgeous? Maybe she'll forgive us. She knows you're too much beautiful and therefore I can't resist your charms, and she understands how I feel," he murmured, walking around her until placing himself between her legs and he caressed her thighs.

"Sure that you'll find a way to convince her. You're able to convince a stone, my love."

Tyrion, smiling, took her hand and led her to the bed. He pulled down her undergarment to her ankles, put her legs on his shoulders, undressed from the waist down and penetrated her with an eager moan.

"Be careful not to wrinkle my gown, my ardent lord. Though I'm not wearing my best finery, I neither want to look untidy," she said, smiling while he was moving inside of her.

"You'll be impeccable, as usual, sweetheart," he asserted, driving her quickly to the edge and feeling himself as well on the edge of the abyss. "In default of wine, there's nothing like fucking a beautiful woman so as being able later to bear other people's weddings."

"Now I understand perfectly why you got plastered during our wedding, my romantic husband," she joked, panting and arching backwards, closing her eyes once more.

"Go on like that. Oh, Tyrion!," she cried out, convulsing and feeling shortly afterwards his shudders and his warm seed spilling within her, as she heard her own name in that low and strangled voice which enraptured her even more.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 614

Meereen: Month 5. Day 15

They took a couple of minutes to come back from their summit. He got out of her, washed her up a little with water of the washbasin and put her undergarment back in place. Then he washed himself quickly and pulled up his breeches and trousers. They both smoothed their clothes and hair and got ready to go out, flushed and radiant. When the ceremony ended, they would have breakfast with the newlyweds, Missandei and Ser Barristan (who would act as the bride's guardian) in the queen's chambers, and that would be the reception of the wedding. For obvious reasons, Daario and Jorah would not attend the nuptials, both because it would be an extremely uncomfortable situation, and because the queen wanted to prevent frictions or run-ins between her new husband, her lover and her eternal hopelessly infatuated friend (Tyrion found all that mess specially funny, and Sansa felt slightly shook up, as her Northern spirit dictated to her that that anomalous situation could not be morally right. But after a few months of stay in Meereen, the yeasty sentimental life of the young Targaryen woman seemed almost normal to Sansa if she did not stop to think very much about that). Daenerys had announced the previous day casually that the next morning she fancied to share a breakfast with several of her royal counselors, pretending for show that she would do it to know Oberyn better. A while later, Tyrion and Sansa received in their rooms Mhyraz's visit, who conveyed to them in a low voice Daenerys's true plans. The queen trusted fully the discretion of the clever kid. She could not find anyone more quiet, faster or less suspicious to convey a message like that to Tyrion and Sansa, with the exception of Dara and Brienne, but Daenerys had only known Brienne for a couple of days and she did not trust her yet. Who knew if she was not a spy? Sansa had spoken on her behalf and the woman certainly did not look as a traitor, but Daenerys had already suffered enough betrayals in her life, including people she loved, like Viserys and Jorah, so she had become much more cautious. Some more time would have to pass until Brienne's honesty would be proven in the queen's eyes. Hence they would take advantage of the fact that at that early hour of the morning, when it had not dawned yet, it was usually White Fly, Green Beetle or Makkhan who stood guard by Tyrion and Sansa's door. Since Brienne had admitted Larko as her partner, she used to spend the nights with him, and Sansa herself refused categorically to allow the woman to devote most of her nights to patrol, far from her lover. It would suffice that she sometimes took turns with the other Tyrion and Sansa's escorts in the night guards.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 15

That wedding was going to be atypical, not only for the secrecy with which it would be carried out, but because Daenerys had announced that she did not want presents. Of course, she could not stop Oberyn from lavishing her like he fancied, as the prodigal Dornishman had his own personal fortune and he could afford to spend as much money as he wanted. But the others had limited resources and those resources depended on the prosperity of Meereen, so she refused to accept their gifts, alleging that she did not need anything. She joked saying that with her dragons, her subjects, her allies, her armies, her fleet and the future reserves of wildfire and dragonglass weapons, she was satisfied.

Tyrion and Sansa walked out to the corridor dressed like any other day and with empty hands. The only little concession Sansa had allowed herself was her snowflake brooch, which she wore sometimes and thus it would not draw attention. Ray was with them, because they did not want to leave him alone. They exchanged a greeting with White Fly and the soldier followed them. Tyrion asked him to take Ray to the children's rooms afterwards, so as they took care of him. The Unsullied nodded, and Tyrion thought he almost saw the faint shadow of a smile. With no doubt, he was fond of the puppy, like practically everyone who knew him. Ray was nearly five months old and had grown a lot, so much that when he stood on his hind legs, he already was taller than Tyrion. The children were training him well and he had learnt to obey a few orders and to relieve himself exclusively in the sand crates which served to that purpose when he could no do it outdoors. He was also a naughty and vivacious dog and he loved playing and running everywhere, unless he was commanded to stay still. Before going out to the corridor, Sansa had addressed him a sign which meant "be quiet", and he was walking silently before them, sniffing from time to time at some area of the ground that he found especially interesting.

"It's strange that neither Leena is present. She would have liked to attend, if she had known about this. She's also a queen's friend," Sansa commented. "But well, all this is for being extra careful."

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
"It isn't going to be an outrageous display of pageantry. I think it's going to be the second wedding, together with Pod and Leena's, that I won't detest," Tyrion said, looking sideways at Sansa, between teasing and guilty. Each time he recalled the nightmare he had put her through during the fateful day of their own nuptials, he felt ashamed. He caressed her hand. "You were the only thing I didn't detest in that farce our wedding was, Sansa," he said sincerely and with no trace of mockery. "You were the only reason why I didn't end up collapsing unconscious in the middle of the reception, with the head stuck in a barrel of wine. Though it's difficult for you to believe, I restrained myself and drank much less than my body was crying out for. I knew that I couldn't lose my senses completely, or I wouldn't be able to protect you." He grimaced in self-loathing. "For the good it did. I wasn't able to protect you from Joffrey. Or from myself, what was even worse. In the end, it was Tywin, gentle knight-errand, who came to the rescue. Ironies of life." He was aware that Sansa was about to protest, so he continued in a conciliatory tone. "I know, I know, you don't want me to blame myself. I'll leave it be, don't worry. I feel too much happy today by your side to punish myself a lot." He slid his fingers in hers, shooting her a mischievous expression.

"Great. That's the spirit I want to see," she said.

"And don't forget that the deal works both ways, darling." They smiled at each other.

A room had been fitted out on the ground floor, that previously had been a storehouse, for the sept of the pyramid. The guild of carpenters had offered the carvings for the seven altars which represented the aspects of the deity. As the room was rectangular (it was impossible to have a heptagonal room), the altars had been distributed along three of the four walls, two on each side wall and three on the bottom wall. The altars of the Father and the Mother, before which the weddings were held, were on the left side of the room. They had been made with stone of the quarry. The temple lacked almost all ornamentation, except for the carvings, soberly crafted, which still smelled like freshly painted, and a fresco on the wider wall which represented a huge seven-pointed star. There had been no time to do anything else, and no more money than the strictly indispensable had been invested in the temple. The mere mortals need the money more than the gods, Tyrion had said in the meeting held a couple of months ago to discuss the matter of the new sept, right after the arrival of the Dornish people. His evident lack of attachment for the Faith had scandalized the young septon, who was still inexperienced and, for what Tyrion noticed, was a little fussy. The priest tried to complain, but the others agreed that a stripped-down sept would suffice in a city which could not afford wastes. Therefore, the young man had to close his mouth and tolerate things the way they were. After all, no one had assured him that Meereen lived in luxury.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 617

Meereen: Month 5. Day 15

They had agreed with Daenerys that everybody would go in small groups or separately. If they were spotted, they could allege that Sansa was going there to pray before devoting to her daily tasks, and that Tyrion was accompanying her because he fancied it. She visited the sept from time to time and it wouldn't be so strange. As for the queen and Oberyn, she most probably must be there already, because in order not to arouse suspicion they had decided that each one would go on his or her own, leaving a time interval between one and another. The prince surely had not liked very much to have to get up so early, though the most probable was that he had not even gone to bed yet that night. The Viper rarely went back to his rooms before the early morning or sunrise, when he went back, which was not always the case.

Daenerys and the septon were already in the temple when Tyrion and Sansa entered, but Oberyn had not arrived yet. They at least had not arrived late, like they had feared. If we had known that Oberyn was going to oversleep, we might have cavorted a few more minutes. Tyrion smiled, facing the fact that the unruly prince could arrive a little late at his on wedding with the pretext that he would be less conspicuous if he did not walk along the corridors holding his betrothed's arm.

"Good morning to everyone," said Sansa and Tyrion almost at the same time, with a bow.

"Good morning, Lord Tyrion. Lady Sansa," Daenerys responded. She was wearing a white dress with laces on her neckline, very fit for the occasion, but which was not particularly suspicious because the queen had worn it more than once.

The septon addressed them a quick formal smile from the altars of the Father and the Mother.

Ser Barristan, who was accompanying her as her guardian, witness and protector, greeted them as well. The tension on his face showed his disapproval towards that marriage. Obviously the old knight opined that the Dornish prince was not good enough for her, but he had resigned himself to the inevitable. With no doubt he would have maintained some father-daughter talk with Daenerys to expound clearly what he thought of the groom, and she for sure had listened to him patiently and afterwards would have made clear that the decision was already taken and was irrevocable. They could not lose Dorne's full support.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 15

The other wedding attendant was Missandei. The young interpreter and the queen's best friend got near them to greet them and Sansa and she held hands and smiled at each other. Since the loss of Menelan, the young woman's eyes always had a hint of sadness.

Around five minutes later, Oberyn arrived. He greeted the ladies gallantly and kissed the queen's hand. She, as usual, could not help a blush on her cheeks. He was carrying a large cloth bag on his shoulder. He opened it and pulled out a beautiful velvet cloak with the colours and symbols of House Martell: orange bottom and a red sun pierced by a yellow spear. Judging by its appearance, that cloak had been made recently, and Oberyn must have brought it in his voyage from home. The old family cloak must be destined for Trystane as the future lord of Dorne.

"Well, let's start," the septon announced. "It will better for us not to lose time." He positioned himself in his place and Daenerys and Oberyn took up theirs, she on his left.

The rites, sermons and speeches recited in a low voice were carried out, as well as the joining of hands, the kiss (which was extended for more seconds than it should, with the queen almost stumbling awkwardly)... In general the development of the event was shorter than an ordinary ceremony, what Tyrion was grateful for. He did not like to spend hours standing without being able to do anything more and watching a ritual which at best seemed empty to him, if not really insufferable.

In the end, the newlyweds turned around to receive the congratulations of their limited audience. Oberyn put the cloak away in the bag again and the attendants walked out in turns, allowing a few minutes to pass between them. The first ones to leave were Daenerys, Missandei and ser Barristan, and later Sansa, Tyrion and Oberyn would go out.

"Congratulations. I guess it's time to start calling you Your Grace in private," Tyrion said to the Dornishman as they were waiting that a reasonable amount of time had passed to leave the sept.

"It doesn't sound as bad as I feared. I might get used to it quickly," the new king replied. For the time being, in order to dissimulate, he would go on being a prince for everyone who ignored that he was now the queen's husband.

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 15

"Oh, I don't doubt it, Your Grace. Your new title suits you better than it seemed."

"Of course, and coming from her, it suits me even better. I believe that now I'm handsomer than before," Oberyn joked. Tyrion rolled his eyes and Sansa giggled. "I hope that it has made me be cleverer, though I'm afraid that that doesn't come with the title, or otherwise most kings wouldn't have been true dimwits. Well, the prudential time has passed. Let's go celebrating that now I'm a happily married man."

They climbed up the ramps towards the fifth floor. The men adapted themselves to Sansa's pace, who was starting to feel that it cost her more than before to set out for the ascent. "I'm afraid that within three or four months I'll have to go up crawling," she commented, with a resigned smile.

"If it's necessary, I myself will be your carrier, my lady. I've already carried pregnant women in my arms and I've done it with pleasure," Oberyn offered.

Tyrion felt the burning of his wounded pride. "It won't be necessary, my prince." While they were in places where they could cross paths with other people, they must go on addressing the Viper with his former title. "Sansa and I will manage," he added, sharply.

"Dear me, such a jealous husband. But I understand your old-fashioned mentality. If I were you I also would watch over my wife zealously. But believe me, you live better my way. I'd feel flattered if my wife received so many attentions."

"Well, unluckily, I'm not like you, my prince. I prefer my old-fashioned mentality."

"And I prefer mine," Sansa said. "We'll manage without your help, my prince. But thanks for the offer." Like every time that the seductive Dornishman made some gallant move with her, Sansa knew how to stop him, but Oberyn did not feel offended, quite the opposite, he took it as a funny game. Sansa knew that he respected her and that he would never make any gestures which could insult her, or anything that she did not allow him. Tyrion thanked his wife inwardly, like other times, for holding her ground and for showing that she was immovable with seduction games.

(Part 9 of a longer chapter)
"You're welcome, my lady." A few metres ahead he said: "Elia's health was frail and her two pregnancies were a tough test, but she said that she had never been happier than when she had her children in her womb. She often wrote to me to tell me how she felt. She was never fooled with Rhaegar, she knew that he wasn't in love with her. There was no passion in his way of treating her. He felt affection and respect for her, but not fire. Elia was all right with that and accepted the situation. She wasn't a a fool, and didn't demand from him more than he could give her. So they managed to find a balance together, and Elia was happy. Especially when she got pregnant and gave birth. She told me that she was conscious that Rhaegar's heart would never be hers, but their children made her feel complete and made up for what she lacked in her marriage. It was hard that the maesters announced her that she mustn't conceive again, so she threw herself into Rhaenys and Aegon." He hushed for some metres. "When he abandoned her, my sister blamed herself. She told me by letter that she hadn't had sex with her husband for a long time. She was weak and he didn't want to hurt her. She was sure that it was that what had distanced them definitely and what caused that he eloped with the Stark girl. Elia lamented her lack of health and her inability to satisfy Rhaegar. I answered her replying her that she was not to blame for anything, that he was the one to blame. My sister got worse and the children were her only solace. She resisted for them, but I didn't fool myself. She was fading away, though she did as much as she could to disguise it. Anyway, Rhaegar was responsible for everything that happened. Even in the case that Elia hadn't been brutally murdered, she would've died with her heart broken not long after. But she loved the children." The harsh stare of the new king of Meereen was addressed to those memories which chased him restlessly and Tyrion and Sansa exchanged a compassionate look. If those dark eyes had ever spilled tears for Elia, they had dried a long time ago, but the pain and hatred for her loss remained intact. "Take good care of what you have, my friends. There's nothing more important than family. Is it not what the Tullys use to say? At least in that they're fully right." Oberyn recovered his ironic spark.

(Part 10 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 15

"I agree, but I assure you that, when you grow up in a family like mine, the Tullys's words seem to laugh at you in your own face. I was tired of hearing from my father's lips that there was nothing more important than family. And you see how the one where I was born has ended up. Tywin's notion of a perfect family was the one that offers an image of excessive pride and power. His concept of family was limited to that. The golden Lannister lions roaring from the top of the world. I'd laugh readily on my father's grave. Even unwillingly, he taught me many useful things, amongst them the sort of father I didn't want to be by any means."

"I'm very glad that you've been to him like a horsefly on a horse's ass since you were born," Oberyn said. "He was always too much comfortable on his golden pedestal. When I saw you in your crib, though I felt disappointed because you only were a puny baby with a big head, I knew that after all Tywin Lannister was a mere mortal like everyone else. That made me smile. I had never liked him, not even then. Too much serious and stuck-up for my taste. And he had a special liking for slaughtering children. I was glad that in the last moment he considered that us the Martells weren't worthy of cleansing his ass, if you will pardon my language, my lady. My sister and I escaped from marrying into the Lannisters, no offense intended to your husband. You don't choose where you're born."

"You're forgiven, my prince. I can't agree more," Tyrion coincided, with his sarcastic smile.

Oberyn changed topic. "This marriage promises to be an interesting challenge. The truth is that I feel excited like a green boy. I've met hundreds of beautiful women of every kind and age. I've bedded old women who might give lessons of seduction to many lasses, young women timid as mice and middle-aged ones wanting to have fun. Single and married women and widows, rich and poor, noble ladies and whores, merchants' wives and maidservants, peasants and even women of faith... A few septas and priestesses of varied worships have surrendered to my charms. And I don't get tired of discovering what there's in each one of them. In every woman there's an inner goddess waiting for being uncovered. I like what I see in Daenerys. I like her ferocity. She carries the fire in her blood, and the Martells share a bit of that blood. The fire calls the fire."

(Part 11 of a longer chapter)
"And because of that, it doesn't hurt that we stay at your side to keep it under control, my prince," Tyrion joked, not without a certain tone of warning. It wasn't going to be easy to control the fire of that match.

"I wish you luck in that venture, my friend. Fortunately to you, winter is here with its icy hands to cool down the flames."

"Yes, very fortunately."

They went on with their climb, with Sansa resting on Tyrion's shoulders as he encircled her waist, helping her to move forward. The baby undoubtedly was growing fast, because Sansa was starting to feel that her belly was heavier, though it wasn't much yet, and that slowed her down and made her get tired more easily. She ate a little more than before and slept more as well, and needed to relieve herself more often. It was Tyrion's first experience with the pregnancy of a woman he loved. The brief moments when he had fucked pregnant prostitutes did not count. By the things he had heard women tell since his early youth, he knew that all the signs Sansa showed were normal, but he felt the anxiety of first-time fathers, accentuated in his case by his fear that the baby might be like him, though he had not externalized that fear again. He envied Oberyn a bit. He did not endure any physical flaw to bequeath as an inheritance to his offspring, and he had had in total eight healthy daughters whose mothers had given birth without much trouble. As usual, Tyrion made the effort to cast aside his apprehensions.

(Part 12 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 15

Around the table in Daenerys's rooms, the six eaters fitted perfectly. There were no special decorations or anything that gave away any event out of the ordinary. Of the children who served the queen only the orphans were fully abreast. Daenerys could not take risks with the guests, who after all belonged to the noble families of Meereen and surely passed to them information about what they saw or heard. She could not help that at least a few of them were still loyal to their relatives or that they were coerced by these anyway, and she even had acquired the habit of making them taste the food and the drink they took to her, in case that their beloved relatives had induced them to poison it. Obviously, if the food or drink was poisoned, the children would show themselves scared or reluctant to taste it and that would be enough to know the truth. That sent a very clear message and, if some Meereenese noble person had thought of getting rid of her by those means, he or she had had to give up, because that person would have betrayed himself or herself immediately and would have to pay the consequences.

The queen had disposed the children’s shifts so the noble children tended to her only along the hours when there was no risk of finding the Dornish prince (and now king of Meereen) in her chambers. And moreover, soon there would be something that would make it easier that the newlywed couple was not caught redhanded. Kerro in person was opening since the previous day a secret door that would connect their rooms, and that way Oberyn might visit her any time, preferentially at night, and go back to his own chambers without being noticed. The builder would arrive in a couple of hours to continue with his work.

(Part 13 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 15

The orphans who attended to the Mother served the simple wedding breakfast, consisting mostly of dates, dried fruit and nuts and apples, all of them coated with honey, and to accompany the frugal meal was, how not, the Dornish red wine. For Sansa there was a jug of must, a soft drink Sansa had never tasted before.

"I've acquired several barrels this unfermented juice, thinking of you and Leena, so you have something more than water to drink. It's a special favour for two of mt best friends," Daenerys explained to Sansa, smiling. "You can drink without fear, I've made sure that this drink arrives by safe means to avoid poisons. After what happened to Hizdhar, we must extreme precautions. I'm glad that our traders, suppliers and merchant captains have established safe means for the acquisition of their products. I suppose that we have to be grateful to our general supervisor for the effort to incite them to extreme precautions," the queen added, addressing her smile to Tyrion. Sansa tried the must and nodded. "It's sweet. It tastes delicious," she said. Daenerys smiled at her as well.

Tyrion said:

"I only did what must be done, Your Grace. After the regrettable sabotage carried out by those Astapori wine merchants who sold us a poisoned cask, we couldn't trust any supplier. I commented that problem with Sarik and with the merchant captains so they chose with full care the sellers whose products were intended for consumption by the inhabitants of the pyramid, to lessen the risks." Tyrion drank a gulp of his wine cup and winked, as if showing comically with that what he had just expounded.

(Part 14 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 625

Meereen: Month 5. Day 15

"Then it seems that the measures have been effective. There hasn't been more incidents like that of poor Hizdhar, right? That day they wanted to dispose of me before the eyes of a great part of the citizens of Meereen, in Daznak's amphitheatre. I'm sorry that Hizdhar had to die in my place. I didn't feel a great esteem for him or trusted him, but I'd never had wished him such a death. The Sons of the Harpy deserved the fate they met on the executioners' swords." Daenerys also drank and ate a date, licking her fingers sticky with honey afterwards. She only allowed herself those gestures, which Septa Mordane would accuse of being contrary to the etiquette, when she was among friends, and Sansa smiled thinking about that. She herself was also licking her fingers while she was enjoying her breakfast, a little license that, like the queen, she only allowed herself in private and in front of friends.

"But let's not talk about sad things today. We're celebrating my wedding and our new king's and I want it to be a joyous event. Since I've had to discard a public wedding, I at least want to spend a pleasant time."

"Well said," Oberyn approved, lifting his cup. "Let's toast to the pleasant times. That and the people who matter to us are all the good we obtain from this life."

(Part 15 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 15

"To the pleasant times," everybody said at the same time, clinking their cups and emptying them in a gulp. Ser Barristan was one of the least enthusiasts in his toast, and his surly expression persisted. Missandei also seemed to toast more out of politeness than out of enthusiasm, though she was sincerely glad for the woman who had removed her from slavery. And as for Sansa, for once, she would have wished to be able to toast with something stronger than must. Sometimes her worry for Jon overwhelmed her, and that was one of the occasions when her heart flew towards him. She could not help but think that she was there enjoying life whereas her brother was threatened with death by Ramsay Bolton. It was only a matter of days or weeks that the usurper of the North got going to the Gift and... Tyrion sensed her concern and, though he did not give her false hope, he squeezed her hand and addressed her that look that meant: I wish I could rescue him for you and take him here safe and sound. She returned the squeeze and tried to recover, telling herself that she would not sort out anything by starting to howl by the corners.

Oberyn, always alert, did not miss the different moods around the table, but he chose not to make remarks. He understood the pain for someone loved, and at least in that he could empathize with the young redhead pregnant lady and the brunette ex-slave who was mourning her dead foster son. "Well, if you'll excuse me for a moment," he said suddenly, standing up, while the rest of the small gathering looked at him with curiosity. He set aside the large tapestry of House Targaryen which covered the secret door Kerro was building. That tapestry had been ordered by Daenerys before her disappearance, and when it was finished no one had made his or her mind to hang it in absence of its owner, so it had been wrapped in linens and put away. She, shortly after her return, had ordered to hang it on the wall of the secret door, an ingenious way of hiding it without the issue of having to drag a heavy piece of furniture each time the door had to be used. On the side of Oberyn's rooms, they had placed a wardrobe to which he ordered to add small unnoticeable wheels behind the legs, in order to move it more easily and quietly. A small handle had been affixed to its rear as well, so the king could pull it when he went across the door and move the piece of furniture back to its original position from behind. There was no need to move the wardrobe a lot, just enough for Oberyn's body to pass through, as the door opened to Daenerys's side.

(Part 16 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 627

Meereen: Month 5. Day 15

The Viper returned carrying a small package in his hands.

"A present for you, my queen," he said with silky courtesy and a wide smile, handing the package over, which was actually a small wooden rectangular box with decorations, to its addressee with a bow. She turned on her chair to him with clear surprise. Perhaps she was waiting for another sort of a more... intimate gift, Tyrion thought with amusement.

Daenerys took the small box and opened it. Inside of it, between fluffy red velvet walls, there was a necklace. She pulled it out and watched it in the light. It was made of obsidian stones chiseled as rhombuses and, in the middle of every black rhombus, a perfectly round red ruby was embed. Each obsidian stone was attached to the next one by a solid silver link and the clasp of the necklace represented a tiny three-headed dragon, made of silver as well. It was a magnificent jewel, with the red and black colours of the Targaryens' blazon and the silver that reminded the hair tone which had characterized so much the dynasty of the dragon kings along the centuries. Moreover, the dragonglass used in the stones neither had been chosen at random. The Viper has done the same as I did: to give his wife a weapon to fight the White Walkers if necessary. The edges of the rhombuses could be stabbed into the flesh of any of those monsters and destroy it in an instant.

It was patently obvious that Daenerys was very pleased with the present, but she kept her composure when she thanked her husband formally. He took the necklace from her hands and signaled her to turn around, so he could put it on her. She set aside her hair to facilitate the maneuver. Tyrion thought that the Dornishman had pursued a triple goal when he ordered that jewel: to regale his wife with a cute gift which would emphasize her beauty, to offer her an extra protection against the enemies that lurked in the darkest of the winter she would have to face one day if she wanted to be the queen of Westeros, and to take delight in the sensuality of something so simple as she moving her hair aside and offering him her ivory neck to let him put the necklace on her. The prince did not do anything without expecting a recompense in exchange, especially if that recompense consisted in some sort of delight for his senses. Daenerys left the necklace on for the rest of the morning affair. Later she would have to put it away again until a proper occasion to wear it came.

The wedding reception ended soon, because each one of them must start work. Tyrion that day must do his round around the city, and Sansa had her lessons with the orphans of the pyramid. They both went back together to their rooms and Brienne was already waiting for Sansa by the door. The bodyguard was surprised to see her arriving, as she had thought her lady was inside the chambers, but Tyrion and Sansa offered an excuse they had made up and the woman frowned without saying a word. They entered, Sansa relieved herself and freshened herself up in the washbasin, Tyrion tidied up a little his dishevelled blond hair and they kissed goodbye at length before going out to their duties.
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

The sea darkened by the horizon, where the fleet of Asha Greyjoy and the Summer Isles was moving toward the coast. The large patch, or rather the set of patches which were spread throughout the greenish and blue waters, could be clearly seen from the Great Pyramid, as well as from the Skahazadhan's bay, where the camps of the Unsullied, the Second Sons and the dothraki were settled. They had been the first ones to raise the alarm, but in the city some people were waiting for them since before they were spotted. Within a few hours they would dock in the harbour and the disembarkment of hundreds of people would start. Daenerys sighed, feeling tired beforehand. For caution, she had reinforced the presence of soldiers on the ramparts, around the area by the gateway to the city, and the dothraki, who were the most exposed, were ready to take their defensive positions just in case. Daenerys had offered to all those who could not fight (women, children and old people) to take shelter in the meanwhile within the city and to head for the parade ground of the Great Pyramid, where they could ensconce themselves to wait for the confirmation that they were not in danger in their camp with the arrival of the new visitors. Moreover, the ships which were not on a commercial expedition were placed strategically along the entrance to the bay. And Drogon, Rhaegal and Viserion were flying nearby, in case their mother could need them. She only would have to whistle at them in a special way she had practiced during her return trip from Vaes Dothrak, and they would be ready for battle. It was better to take precautions and not to be trustful, because although in all probability that fleet was coming in peace and seeking an alliance, they must be ready for a trap.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
After years being called Mother by so many people, and despite that word made a chill of emotion run down her back, Daenerys still felt often overcome by what that name entailed. To be the mother of all those people was much more overwhelming than she would have ever thought. To start with, some years ago she would not have envisaged herself in such a situation, not even in her most hare-brained dreams. She was the little sister of Viserys, the lawful king of Westeros. He was an idiot and only an orphan, exiled and beggar lad who was everything Dany had in the world, and she loved him in spite of his brutality. He was not always bad with her, and in his own way he had taken care of her when they were running from one city to another. She still called herself Dany often, because her brother called her so. Some nights she dreamed of him, and in the sweet dreams he rocked her and told her tales about the Seven Kingdoms and their parents. He described Aerys and Rhaella. She envied what he had had the chance to know, and she listened to him with her soul in his words. But when they were nightmares, Viserys tormented her, pinched her tight or twisted her arm and threatened to sell her to Illyrio himself or to someone who could provide him with an army large enough. That was the girl's greatest fear, what used to keep her awake most nights when sleep eluded her. Dany knew that it was her fate, to be sold like a mare to a rich lord who she envisioned as a fat and disgustingly perfumed man like Illyrio. She got sick just imagining that future husband fondling her body which by then had hardly begun to bloom. Every day she prayed to the gods to free her from that fate. She did not need lots of things. She only wanted to live in peace in a small house with a red door at the entrance. She perhaps would raise her own flowers, breed horses, play some instrument like the lyre or the harp and would read books about her ancestors. Maybe she would have a couple of children to love, so that she would not feel so lonely. But to come to that she would have to get married... And of course, Viserys would never allow her to marry who she wanted. When she reached that point of her dreams, tears ran down her still childish cheeks and she tried to cast aside furiously her fantasies, because they were useless. But she could not help but cling to them.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

The girl she had been only dreamed of having a home, and of finding people who loved her without expecting anything in exchange. She dreamed of not being so scared every day, and of not feeling so terribly lonely that even her soul hurt.

Her life had taken so many turns since then... And she found new dreams, but new chains also. What would have never lived up to her expectations was what she had now. She would have laughed at anyone who had dared to hint at it in the past. She, a conquering queen with thousands of freed slaves and other ones to free, thousands of mouths to feed, thousands of souls to shelter, thousands of bodies to dress? Yes, she would have laughed in the face of anyone who had told her that. But if she was afraid even of a fool like Viserys... How was she going to take the reins of something inconceivable? How was she going to become a breaker of chains?

Now the only chain she could not break was her own, but that was her price. Each one bears a chain. That's the price we must pay for staying in this world. Life itself already imposed enough chains. Misfortunes, pain, hatred... So she had the intention to free the human race from those which men imposed on the others by force. It was too much sometimes. She often wondered if it was worth it.

But then she thought of Eroeh, the Lhazareen girl the dothraki had raped to death because they believed they were entitled to possess her. Even of Daario, also sold as a slave when he was twelve. Of Kerro, Jalima and their children, separated by cruel masters. Of Leena, sexually abused since she was eight. Of Ornela as well, kidnapped and forced to marry a khal who mistreated her. Of herself. She had ended up loving Drogo, but she could not ever forget how she felt the day she was married to him.

And millions of other cases of slavery.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

She smiled when she thought of Ornela, her new friend. The young woman had bloomed in the trip to Meereen, and she seemed to be light as a feather, despite her advanced pregnancy. Once free from the *dosh khaleen*, she gave free rein to her cheerful and expansive nature. After her confinement in the widows’ temple, which she hated with all her heart, to be in the open air again was intoxicating to her. She came from a peaceful village of shepherds accustomed to coexist with nature, and she had endured very badly to remain day and night in an enclosed space, surrounded by women who did not stop telling her how she had to live. Not to mention that her marriage had been a torture. Because of all that, Dany understood that Ornela had refused to move to the pyramid, or even to any of the houses of the city. To stay indoors depressed her enough to make her prefer to go on living side by side with the dothraki who had decided to follow the Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea voluntarily. Now that she was free and she did not belong to the *dosh khaleen* any more, having had the chance to escape from there, and in addition her neighbours left her alone, Ornela felt exultant in the limited space her portable tent took up in the camp, which offered her a superb sight of the Skahazadhan's Bay. She had everything she wanted to feel happy. Dany would have loved to have her close, because she had become a great friend. She even had offered her to be one of her royal counselors and sit with the others around the table of the private meeting hall, so she could represent the dothraki in the Council. But she had turned it down, not without showing her gratitude for the offer. The dimensions of the pyramid intimidated her, because the only buildings made of stone she had seen were the small Lhazareen temples. Therefore, she stayed in the dothraki camp, settling next to other women who thought the same as her and wanted to be independent. According to the latest thing Dany had heard, those women had asked the soldiers from the adjoining camps to train them, because they were determined to learn to defend themselves. Most of their dothraki neighbours were too much proud and, however they had followed the Mother and had accepted to be a woman's subjects and even follow her beyond the Poisoned Waters, they would not have debased themselves to teach some simple women. There were things very difficult to change, as Dany knew very well.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 632

Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

Who had accepted to occupy the seat in the Council on behalf of the dothraki was Khotto, who along the trip from Vaes Dothrak had proven himself a man with enough leadership skills to be the spokesperson of Dany's new khalasar. He also had offered her to be her bloodrider, and she had agreed. She had lost her former bloodriders, Aggo and Rakharo, in the Red Waste and Qarth, and since then no one had occupied that position of honour. Besides, Dany suspected that the young warrior liked Ornela. He had ridden next to her and to the dragon khaleesi day after day and he shot lots of glances to the Lhazareen girl, but the fact that she was a khal's widow was an obstacle which not even in that peculiar khalasar could be forgotten easily.

Then, thinking about Khotto's guilty love for Ornela, she remembered her own nights with Oberyn and her cheeks burned. Since their wedding day, both had lied with each other under the sheets every night and she could verify the reputation of the ardent Dornishman. She had wide experience and was not shy regarding sex, but her new husband took her to limits she had not experienced even with Daario. They had made love in every possible way a couple could do it, and he was tireless and sweeping. His sensuality knew no brake. He led her to ecstasy so many times in a row that she lost count and the next morning she woke up with her crotch joyously sore and each muscle of her body protesting sweetly. She even realized that she almost had stopped thinking of Daario, and that saddened her. If she had needed so few days to start to forget about him, did that mean that she loved him no more? Was the Dornish prince and king consort succeeding in sneaking in her heart? It was very soon still and she did not believe it was love, but Dany felt very excited and she waited for the upcoming nights eagerly, because her hot dragon's blood ignited when her body got in touch with Oberyn's. But she did not want to get her hopes up and resisted to hand over her heart. She knew that he did not deprive himself from visiting the brothels of the city from time to time, though for the moment being he devoted the nights to her. Dany resigned herself to the situation, did not ask questions and at night she managed to forget about everything in her husband's arms, what she was grateful for. What did she need more for? He would never give his heart entirely to a woman who was not Ellaria, so it was better to be practical and not want impossible things.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

The bad thing was that she could not stop thinking of him, and the fact that she did not miss Daario worried her a little. On the other hand, her mercenary lover had not showed up at the pyramid since her wedding day, but she did not reproach him for it, nor did she have the intention to compel him to go on taking his seat in the Council. For now, she would let him be, until she cleared up her mind regarding her own feelings and by the way she would give him time to accept that from then on they would have to lead their relationship more discreetly if they wanted to keep on with their romance. Oberyn had told her without beating around the bush that she could bed her lover when she fancied and that he was open to form a threesome. It was possible to carry out threesomes where the men did not have to touch or fuck each other, but simply devote themselves to pleasure the woman and receive pleasure from her. Dany had responded him that she would think about it, but she was not very sure that she would propose it to Daario. She did not believe her lover would like the offer very much.

What had definitely made Dany blush to the roots of her hair had been another of Oberyn's ideas, about forming a ménage à trois with another woman. She had had some experience with women. Doreah, the Lysene slave that Viserys had bought to be his personal bed warmer and Dany's maidservant (and who had betrayed her in Qarth by plotting with Xaro the theft of her dragons), had taught her a few sexual practices to please Drogo. And later, when she was widowed, Irri, her loyal dothraki handmaiden (who had been killed by Doreah), had pleasured her in silence some nights, when she could not sleep and she missed terribly her dead husband. It was not the same as lying with a man, but it had given her some relief.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

One way or another, Oberyn stirred up her senses and she found herself having a hard time to focus on her many daily duties, which required all her attention. She made the effort to push her husband to the bottom of her mind, because she had more urgent matters to think about. Everything was ready to welcome the iron and summer fleet. From the terrace of her chambers, she observed her children, that were just tiny spots in the distance, but she felt relieved that the did not fly very far from the city boundaries. They must be hunting or chasing each other to pass the time. She felt a new chiver of emotion in her spine. Those three magnificent creatures were hers. Dragons had been reborn for her long after they had been considered extinguished definitely. She still felt amazed when she recalled how it had happened, in the funeral pyre of her first husband. She had the impulse to put the eggs on the embers while the fire was consuming Drogo's remains and she watched how the man she had loved was being reduced to ashes. The flames had not even licked her skin, and the burning heat had not affected her during her voyage through the Red Waste to Qarth, the way it had affected the people who accompanied her. The only thing she had felt were the effects of dehydration because of the alarming shortage of water they suffered, but the implacable sun was not a problem for her, and therefore she did not dehydrate as quickly as the others.

After spending the whole night sitting in the pyre, watching over Drogo's ashes, amid the crackling of the embers she heard sounds coming from the eggs. When she looked at them, they were breaking up, to her infinite surprise, and shortly afterwards three pairs of tiny claws emerged from the broken shells, and then the rest of the small bodies covered in scales which shone in the dim light with iridescent sparkles. They immediately recognized her as their mother and climbed on her shoulders. Dany was marveled and felt invaded by love for them, as if she had given birth to them, and from that moment she knew that that night as tragic as astonishing would change the world. Her new children, the only ones she would ever have, made her reaffirm herself in her idea that she must become a conquering and liberator queen, and that her great goal until the end of her days must be fight without respite to free from oppression as many slaves as she could and sow the seed of rebellion in them to overthrow that corrupt system where the powerful kept their power at the expense of the disadvantaged. Perhaps all that was madness, an utopia in a cruel world ruled by the law of the strongest, but Dany wanted to believe that things could be changed and that she had the opportunity and the duty to do it. Her dragons had reinforced her more than ever in that resolve.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

She had received reports about massive revolts of slaves even in such important cities as Volantis, Mantarys and Tolos. The masters were trying to crack down on the uprisings and had established an alliance among all the cities which still remained as slavers, and there were rumours that they were forming a large sellsword company, whose men were recruited through high sums of money, to send them to lay siege to Meereen. That news had worried her, but she tried to calm down with the fact that she owned a large fleet (enlarged with the two hundred ships that were about to arrive at the port) and three deadly dragons capable of destroying an army or a whole enemy fleet in a matter of a few hours. Anyhow, she must get ready for an eventual attack by the cities which had formed an alliance against her. She was not sure if she could rely on the help from Yunkai or Astapar, which were in bad conditions and were being rebuilt slowly by the new freedfolk, so she must cope with the fact that Meereen was practically alone to face the danger.

Dany sighed and plucked up courage once more. She had to summon her strength, like she always did. It did not matter that the iron and summer people were coming as allies and she needed desperately those alliances, she had already forgotten how it was to spend a single day without anyone asking her for something. They would offer their conditions and would try to obtain as many benefits as they could, and she would have to make the concessions which best satisfied both parties.

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 636

Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

She had dressed for the occasion with a black gown with red embroideries on the neckline, on the long sleeves and on the rim of the skirt. The jet black colour of the fabric made her pale skin look almost translucent in contrast. Kali, the orphan girl who styled her hair and helped her to choose the dresses she wore in each occasion, had made her some braids which surrounded all her head, leaving only a few curls loose. Her hair looked like a platinum crown, and that was exactly the impression she wanted to give. The only jewel she was wearing was her necklace made with obsidian, silver and rubies which Oberyn had gifted her, matching her attire. Dany had ordered Cloe that gown so it went together perfectly with the necklace and, by the way, she would make the new allies be clear that she was Daenerys of House Targaryen, the lineage of the dragon kings. Of course, only very few people knew that the necklace was a wedding present. No one had considered strange that the rich Dornish prince had given the queen such a magnificent gift, and she allowed herself to show it off in the special occasions like the current one.

Once she was satisfied with her appearance, she headed for the audience hall, where she received for the whole morning the usual queue of petitioners who in alternating days showed up in the pyramid. If some scatterbrained had not heard yet that that day a great fleet was going to arrive at the city, with no doubt the sumptuous appearance of the queen raised murmurs and everyone kept in mind that the future prosperity of Meereen also was going to depend to a great extent on those foreigners, but many showed concern and complained. They did not trust those hundreds of outsiders who were coming in a large fleet, well armed and who had a reputation of being implacable warriors. Even in Slaver's Bay the reputation of the ironborn and the summer islanders was known, though it was just from hearsay, through the travelers' and the sailors' tales. Dany did her best to try to calm things down, but it was not easy. Her people were nervous, and she did not reproach them for it. She felt worried too.

(Part 9 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 637

Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

After the audience, she retired for lunch. She had sent word to most of her counselors to eat with her, because she needed their presence around her and finalize details for the arrival of the foreign fleet. Apart from Oberyn, who would attend of course, would be present others like Missandei, Ser Barristan, Tyrion, Sansa (though she had decided to quit her own seat in the Council, that was not a Council meeting technically, but a meal, so it was normal that the young lady accompanied her husband in a social act), Kerro... And Jorah. Her old friend knew about her marriage to Oberyn, of course. She herself had conveyed him the news of her betrothal to the prince during the trip back from Vaes Dothrak. He had clenched his jaw and since then he kept more sullen and quiet, staring ahead stubbornly. He had not moved far from her for a single moment while they were riding and had stood guard around her together with Daario and Khotto at all times, fulfilling his duty rigorously. But the poor knight was unhappy and she would have given anything to see again any of the shy smiles he addressed her in the past, when he was, along with Drogo, the man she trusted the most in the world. Dany sighed for the umpteenth time. She knew that Jorah was loyal to her until the end and that he would do anything she asked him to, but she could not rule her own heart and moreover, she would never had been able to give Jorah what he really longed for. He wanted her as his lover. He wanted her as his wife. None of both things was possible, both because she did not love him or felt attracted to him, and because she would never marry a man from a minor house. She had to be pragmatic and, if she really wanted to have any chances to conquer the Iron Throne, she needed a husband like Oberyn. Besides, even on the assumption that she felt sexually attracted to Jorah, he was too much proud to play second fiddle and share her with another man.

Anyway, her faithful knight would swallow his pain and would be present at the lunch. His sense of self-restraint had been reinforced, resigning itself to what could not be changed. Dany trusted that he would not pounce on Obeyrn's or Daario's neck, if they did not overstep the bounds in her presence. Fortunately, Daario was too much busy getting the Second Sons ready, and she had spoken to her husband previously and had asked him to prevent any affectionate display toward her when they were at the lunch. She could not expect her unruly Dornishman to behave only because she had asked him to, and he was too much unmanageable and wicked. He probably would fancy needling poor Jorah, and in that case it was not much what Dany could do to stop it, apart from appealing to his capricious sense of gentlemanliness.

(Part 10 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 3. Day 23

She and Missandei were the first ones, as usual, to arrive at the private meeting hall, where the table was already set for the eight commensals.

"My dear Missandei. We've hardly had time to talk since my arrival. Everything has been absolutely crazy, and I've missed the chats we usually kept."

"I'm also responsible for that, Your Grace. Since Menelan's death, I'm not a great company for anyone. Grey Worm is really patient to me. Sometimes I wonder how he manages not to get exasperated when some nights I fall asleep crying in his arms."

"It's natural to feel that pain, dear. He was your son." I lost my only son too. My Rhaego. I didn't get to see his small face, or to hear his voice. But it hurt me so much that at the beginning I wanted to die to follow him. Him and Drogo. It'd have been so easy to leave one night in the shadows and curl up in the grass, where no one could find me. And let the days pass languishing, until fading away completely... And later, the consoling nothingness. And, with a bit of luck, perhaps I could meet them again... The sharp pain of memory pierced her once more, like the old scar of a bad wound which leaves sequelae and bothers dreadfully with the changes of weather. She made the effort to push it aside. She wondered if any time, when she was a tired old woman (if she got to live for so long), the pain of memory would be too crushing to still have the strength to set it aside, and if she simply would let herself be carried away by it. If she would stop fighting.

She shook her head. She still was young and strong, and she could not allow herself that weakness. Many people depended on her will to keep on fighting. If they, who had lost as much or more than her, found the strength to go on... She could do it as well. They needed her, as much as she needed them.

Missandei looked at her with a sad smile, as if she wanted to apologize for not having got past her grief. "I know that he was with me just a for a short while, but it already felt as if he was part of me."

"I know, dear. We love our children from the first moment they enter our lives. It's a feeling as strong and uncontrollable as a flood. Nothing can hold it back. There's nothing greater than feeling love for our children."

They smiled at each other, and the weight of their losses floated between them.

(Part 11 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 639

Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

In that moment Ser Barristan entered, followed by Oberyn, Tyrion and Sansa. All of them must have run into each other on their way. Her husband shot her a suggestive smile and undressed her with his eyes. Dany returned the smile, framed by the rosy flowers of her pale cheeks, and exchanged greetings with the rest of them. Only Jorah and Kerro were missing, but they appeared just a couple of minutes later, when the others had not finished settling themselves on their chairs yet.

Jorah's entrance caused a palpable tension in the air. The northern knight leaned forward in a deep bow in front of Dany and said "Your Grace" with the extremely respectful tone, almost adoring, that was only aimed to her. Just then he addressed the secret king a more rigid and cold bow and uttered "my prince" (in order to dissimulate before the children who served them and who were waiting patiently in a corner of the hall) with icy courtesy. No one missed the exchange of looks between both men. Oberyn's was mocking and challenging, whereas the knight's was proud and stubborn, with a flash of warning which seemed to shout from the rooftops: *If you hurt her, you'll have to deal with me.* All that amused the prince-king a lot, undoubtedly, what did not much to improve Jorah's mood. This one seemed to remember suddenly that there were more people in the hall, because he murmured a half-hearted "good afternoon" aimed to them. Afterwards he sat down on an empty chair next to Ser Barristan. On his part the old man was beside Missandei. The Naathi young woman, as always since Dany had freed her from Good Master Kraznys, was sitting to her right. Oberyn was to Dany's left, Tyrion was the next in the row and, near the other end of the oval the table formed, was Sansa. Kerro would sit on the chair which was still vacant, by Jorah's side.

The Unsullied at the door let the builder go in, and it was obvious that he had come running. He hardly must have had time to change his workwear into a more formal attire and tidy up his dark hair streaked with grey, which he wore in a thick ponytail.

(Part 12 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

When everyone was seated, two orphan girls and a guest boy got close to the table and began serving food and drink. When all the dishes and cups were filled, Dany thanked the children and signaled them to leave and come back half an hour later with dessert. She had no doubts regarding the loyalty of the orphans, but she could not take many risks with the guests. Though they were only innocent kids, she ignored to what extent they still kept loyal to their noble families and if these somehow made them act as spies to stay informed about what happened in the Great Pyramid. She could not controll all their movements and, though all the children in her care had been forbidden to go out of the pyramid alone (they only could do it after prior notice and accompanied by trustful men, who must not lose sight of them for a single moment), it was not so difficult that any of them slipped away from time to time, camouflaged among the crowd who went in and out of the building daily. Of course, if any of them dared to sneak off to meet secretly members of their family, he or she was very careful to be back punctually. Dany had spread the warning that, if any of the noble children disappeared, she would lock up in the dungeons the main members of his or her family until the boy or girl in question was returned. She could not risk that the Masters defied her by snatching the little hostages from her.

Along the first weeks of the guests' stay in the pyramid, Dany had taken the utmost precautions discreetly, because she did not want to put them on notice. She had ordered their belongings to be inspected stealthily, to check if they had hidden some poison or weapon. They did not find anything suspicious, but Dany kept them under surveillance and she sometimes made their things be searched, while their owners were at school. It was not very improbable that their families tried to use them to make an attempt to kill her, if they believed her to be so stupid that she would let her guard down and forget about caution.

(Part 13 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 641

Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

Since her arrival at Meereen, Dany had eyes and ears in many strategic places, but in a city where at least half of the population hated her or did not have her in a great esteem it was very difficult to control and contain the enemies' movements.

Everybody started to eat and Dany used that instant to begin the conversation. "Ser Jorah," she said. The knight stopped his fork halfway, staring at her as if there was not anything as wonderful as her in the whole world. That stare always moved and saddened Dany. Probably no one else would look at her that way, ever. "It's an honour to have you back in this hall." With that greeting, she made clear for the others that he had been readmitted with full right and that she would not tolerate criticisms or objections. Of course, taking into account that her husband had the good sense to behave reasonably well.

"The honour is mine, Your Grace," he responded with a trembling voice. He exchanged a slight smile with her and they both resumed eating. The silence lingered for a few seconds, until Dany tackled directly the topic by which all of them were there.

"What must we expect from these new visitors? What must I tell Lady Asha Greyjoy if she, in exchange for her help, asks me to make her the queen of the Iron Islands? One doesn't need to be very clever to realize that that's what she probably covets. Must I trust an ironborn, even though it's a woman who seeks revenge against her own uncle? And, if my goal is to be the queen of all Westeros, how can I allow any of my kingdoms to proclaim itself more independent than the rest? If I permit a queen to be in the Iron Islands, won't that offer the other kingdoms the impression that I'm giving some of them more privileges than the others? Won't it make my authority be questioned, and it'll be sufficiently questioned without the help of these ironborn?"

Dany was contrary to allow the gaps between the different kingdoms of Westeros to be worsened even more. That only achieved that each kingdom only respected and obeyed truly the lord of its own territory, and weakened the power of the king. Yes, all the houses in Westeros owed fealty to the king automatically, but lots of them cared a shit about an Iron Throne which could be hundreds of leagues away and about a king they had never caught sight of. Dany intended to redress that. She would not be limited to lounge in the sword throne. One of the many advantages of having dragons was that there was not a faster means of transport than them, and she had all the intention to take advantage of them to make herself be seen everywhere.

(Part 14 of a longer chapter)
Tyrion was the first one to intervene.

"Definitely, that's what Lady Asha wants. The Seastone Chair. I don't really know Lord Balon's daughter, but according to the information I've gathered about her, she's cleverer than her father, and she's not a vulture thirsty for blood and power like her uncle Euron. She's an ironwoman after all and she knows more about pillages and skirmishes than most of us, but it also seems that she only seeks to claim what belongs to her and to take care of her people. Neither I believe that you must promise her a crown, but you could give her the ladyship of the islands."

"And what about the Old Ways?", Ser Barristan added. "Must we allow them to continue plundering the coasts, killing the poor fishermen and kidnapping women to make them their salt wives?"

"No," Dany denied emphatically. "Of course not. That's a term I'm not going to give in to. I'll abolish the Old Ways."

"Are we going to snatch the candy from their mouths?," Oberyn said, ironic. "It'll be interesting to see how the dogs react without a bone to bite." He hinted his mocking smile.

"Asha is a woman, and I am too. I think that's an advantage in my favour, as she'll be more open to negotiate from woman to woman. Anyway she can't take salt wives and I doubt she enjoys a lot the abductions of women and the rapes they're subjected by her ironmen."

"It's also rumoured that in bed she's more inclined towards the female sex than the male sex. That's what you can make use of, my queen," Oberyn pointed.

Dany turned red like a poppy. That man always managed to make her flush to the ends of her hair. It was something exhilarating, but annoying too. However, what her husband had just suggested was not absurd. Asha would not be immune to her charms, if the information about her sexual tastes was true, and Dany could play that trick. She did not think she would have to go as far as to bed her (and moreover, she was certain that she would never do that, to debase herself to use sex to get what she wanted, all her being repudiated that possibility. And no one would respect her if she adopted the custom of laying with the Westerosi lords to ensure their loyalty. She would hate herself for that more than the cuckolded wives would). But she neither must disregard completely to use her appeals to a certain extent. Dany was, among many things, a practical woman. She had learnt to be like that, living with the poor fool of Viserys and running from one place to another to survive.

(Part 15 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

Once that point was settled, she looked at Sansa. Dany knew that her young friend was who had the worst time with all that. She had many reasons to hate the ironmen, and Theon Greyjoy particularly. Her face was tense, and she kept quiet, staring ahead of her. Tyrion occasionally turned to look at her with tenderness and concern and he surely was caressing her hand beneath the table. Dany could not see the sweet gesture, but she imagined it. She sometimes envied the love they felt for each other, because it made her empty heart hurt as if it was being stabbed with a knife. Stopped chasing pipe-dreams, Daenerys Stormborn. Drogo won't come back. Rhaego won't come back. Once more, she shook her melancholy. She could not let it devour her. Not yet.

"Lady Sansa," she murmured with a soft voice. "I'm sorry that you have to go through this rough time. You're not required to attend," she offered again. She had already assured Tyrion previously that his wife was exempted from going to the parley with the Greyjoys.

Sansa stared at her with her blue irises. The determination Dany saw in them pleased her. "I want to look at the eyes of the man who destroyed my home and killed people I loved, people I'm sure he loved. I want to see by myself if he felt pleasure when he did it, if he felt as a real man for betraying the house that had treated him with more respect than his own iron father would have ever shown him."

Dany nodded, strengthened by her friend's bravery. "I reckon that forming an alliance with the enemy must be very hard, but I'm glad you understand that sometimes it's something necessary, Lady Sansa. Anyway, it's not Theon we're going to negotiate with, and his sister seems to be a much more smart and reasonable person. Moreover, it's said that he's no longer who he was. I doubt that there's much left in him of the man who destroyed Winterfell."

Sansa nodded silently, with tight lips and a flash of deadly hatred in her gaze. Dany thought, almost smiling in spite that the situation lacked humour, that Asha would rather watch her brother closely if she did not want to find him with his throat cut.

(Part 16 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

Dany decided to change the topic. "The summer islanders are a less complicated question than the iron ones. Their islands aren't part of Westeros, they're very proud and independent people and are far enough away from any other settlement to be a major threat. I suppose we can grant them what they ask us, as long as some of those requests don't involve expansionist desires. I can't gift them territories I don't own, nor am I going to hand them over a single square milimetre of Westeros."

Missandei raised her head, alarmed. "My native island, Naath, is not very far from their reach. What if they decide to claim it as their own?"

"I won't allow or support that, my dear Missandei."

"The summer islanders never in their whole history have been interested in other territories," Tyrion said. "On the other hand, we know full well that human ambition knows no bounds. The current moment would be very favourable for them to start to covet things that were not appealing to them before. Why then are they seeking to form an alliance with the Dragon Queen? It wouldn't be the first time they establish an alliance, but now they're betting more heavily than ever. One hundred swan ships and three hundred among the best archers in the world? Nobody sends his best treasures simply to help a foreigner queen to free slaves and conquer kingdoms, without getting his share."

"Of course nobody does. Perhaps, like Missandei suggests, they want to gain new lands and expect me to back them. As I've said, not a single bit of Westeros will be theirs, nor am I going to help them to invade other places, or to allow them to use me in order to expand... Unless they have the intention to declare war on some slaver country."

There was a thoughtful silence and then Tyrion spoke.

(Part 17 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

"We'll guarantee them that they'll have free access to all our ports and that the trade with their products will be tax exempt, and that they in turn can acquire Westerosi goods at a good price. We'll also give them a generous gift in gold and gem stones from the mines of Casterly Rock, large enough for their greed to be reasonably satisfied, and we'll favour the cultural exchange between our nations. You can admit a few children of the islander princes as your wards, and send some of your own favourites to be guests in the isles. I doubt that any Westerosi house, except for Dornish houses and little more, is willing to send its own children as wards of people they regard as naked and indecent boors, but I imagine that the islanders will be content with the fact that a handful of noble kids (and of others you esteem though they're not of noble birth) stay under their tutelage. In addition, we'll provide them with protection and support in case that they're subjected to threats or attacked by other powers. And, like you say, we'll back them only if they start a war with a slaver country. We'll send them a small part of our Westerosi fleet as a reinforcement for their own fleet. I hope they content themselves with that offer, which otherwise is not negligible in the slightest," Tyrion proposed.

"Add to the batch that the warm and friendly Dorne will welcome with open arms their visits and that their customs will be appreciated there. They can taste for free our wines and other pleasures. And in the Dornish brothels they'll be offered a cheap price." Oberyn's lips were curved in a perpetual mischievous smile and the naughty sparks shone in his black eyes. Dany felt hot on her cheeks and it was evident that the other women in the hall felt the same. Tyrion was smiling too, amused (he and Oberyn shared a sense of humour often sarcastic and rough that embarrassed, irritated or amused the audience, depending on the joke, on each one's character and on the degree to which they were accustomed to that language. Dany thought that at that point she already should be more than accustomed, but her cheeks still kept betraying her). It was obvious that Ser Barristan and Jorah disapproved such a plain-spoken language in front of the ladies. And as for Kerro, he did not look offended by any of that, but just slightly enjoying it. The builder had not uttered a single word. He was prudent when it came to express his opinions. That probably was due to the circumstance that he was not an expert in politics and he felt unconfident in that field, but Dany valued his contributions, because he was a sensible man though he did not know a lot about the intricate world of the powerful.

(Part 18 of a longer chapter)
"And you, Kerro? Do you have something to say about that?," asked Daenerys.

"I'm only an ignorant former slave whom his own little children are teaching to read and write," he said, smiling. "I didn't grow up in elegant halls learning the art of pulling the strings. But if there is something I understand well, it's human nature. I know that who loses what's his, wants to get it back and take revenge on those who have snatched it from him. And I also know that who has many things, wants more than he has. So I'm sure that Lady Asha won't stop until recovering her Iron Islands, and those summer islanders want more than what they've had up to now. That's why they're coming here. If there was a bidder better than you, they would be heading for him and not for you."

"No one might have summarized it better, my friend. It's me who has the dragons, so I'm the best bidder they're going to find, and they'll have to cave to my conditions, which are quite advantageous for them. Nobody would offer them more beneficial conditions."

The children returned with dessert and for some minutes they all ate the caramel-coated fruit. Afterwards, Dany declared the meal finished.

"Be ready when the moment comes. They'll probably enter the harbour within a couple of hours at most. As soon as you're sent word, go to the audience hall, except for you, Kerro. You'll be more needed to keep the freedfolk's calm. They trust you."

The builder nodded and left for the city. The others melted away too. Dany went back to her rooms to take a little rest, wondering what her husband was using that time for. Sighing with relief, she thought that that afternoon he had no enough time to relax in a brothel, in other people's arms. Shaking her head skeptically, she reprimanded herself, telling herself that she already had enough with her usual worries, to add jealousy to them. Perhaps, if it were not such an important afternoon and Daario was not so much busy getting the Second Sons ready, she could call for him to seek compensation for Oberyn's absence... But she would not. She did not want to use Daario that way. She knew that if she required him, he would go by her side and would pleasure her without holding it against her that she actually was bedding him due to spitefulness and because she felt empty, terribly empty. He would not hold it against her that she needed to cry out with pleasure in his arms because it was all she could do in those moments in order not to burst in tears.
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

The queen, Oberyn (Tyrion still had trouble remembering that the Dornishman was the king of Meereen, though his new title had to be kept secret. Anyway, Tyrion deep down never thought of him as the king, but simply as Oberyn, the Dornish prince or the Viper), Missandei, Ser Barristan, and Jorah were already in the audience hall together with the Unsullied who were standing guard at the door, at the foot of the staircase and along the perimeter of the hall. Tyrion and Sansa were stepping into there nearly out of breath, especially her. They had just had a sex session particularly barnstorming in its intensity, as Sansa, in her rage due to their impending meeting with the Greyjoys, practically had devoured alive her obliging husband and had ridden him with a wild fury until they both cried out the release of their tension upon the carpet. For weeks now, she had been usually more cautious in their sexual encounters because of her pregnancy, which by then made her belly bulge visibly, but that afternoon she let herself be carried away with no restrictions by the passion of the moment, taking him with her before he even had time to complain (he always was concerned about her condition; Sansa sometimes joked saying that the baby was not made of glass and it was not necessary for her to live inside a bubble). He could not help that. But that afternoon, the concern that always throbbed in the back of his mind was stifled by the flames of the wild pleasure that burned them as if it were dragon fire. Sansa muffled his apprehensions as soon as she rode him and started to move as if she was imagining that each charge on his guiltily entranced cock were a stab in Theon Greyjoy's heart. He had no other choice but let her do (as if he had had other option, Tyrion thought with a satisfied smile which in that moment must make him look like the most stupefied of men) and follow her in her fury. He loved the uncontrolled and fierce she-wolf she became when she gave in completely to passion, to the instinct of possessiveness towards him and, sometimes, to the wrath for how much she had suffered and against all the ones who had torn apart her family and her happy world before war. Tyrion was glad for being able to provide her with a venting way through sex, as it was a tremendously exquisite means (and his favourite one) of helping her to appease.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

He practically would have helped her to seek a payback for her rage and her sorrows in any ways she had required. If Sansa any time had had the impulse to throw objects at the wall, Tyrion would have given her anything within reach and would have stared in awe how she smashed it, while she imagined that the impact area was the face of any of her alive or dead enemies, of everyone who had hurt her in one way or another. Littlefinger. Joffrey. Robert. Cersei. Tywin. Ilyn Payne, her father's executioner. Meryn Trant, the arse-licker and girls' batterer. Pycelle, the useless and stupid dirty old man who had insulted her family in front of the whole court. Walder Frey. Theon Greyjoy and the iron men who had accompanied him during his attack on Winterfell. Roose Bolton. Ramsay Bolton. Olenna Tyrell, who Tyrion was convinced that had used them both as scapegoats. The black brothers who had killed Jon. He himself, Tyrion, of course, who at first had contributed to make her unhappy for marrying her, though Sansa already had forgiven him for that. Jaime, if it was him who had pushed Bran, although she ignored it and Tyrion wanted to believe that he had nothing to do with the boy's fall. And other nameless faces that had added more blows to her misfortunes by any means.

But Sansa never had gone so far as to crashing the furniture in a fury fit (that sort of reaction was more becoming Cersei), though if she had done that, he would not have felt much impressed or bothered by it. He had done far worse things out of hatred, wrath and fear.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

Tyrion would never forget how much useless he had felt in the times when he could not practically do anything to comfort her, or he had not striven enough. Now he would do anything for her, even, or rather especially, prevent her from falling in the poisonous spiral of revenge. He had tasted some times the flavour of that poison, which could be one of the most addictive things in the world. For some people, it was more addictive than everything else. Tyrion always had been afraid of becoming the vengeful monster his father had been. Though he often recognized features of his sire in himself, he needed to believe that he would never be able to fuel the composition of other songs similar to *The Rains of Castamere*. He had always detested that damned song, which had no other purpose than to serve as a veiled threat against anyone who dared to question the Lannister power, or as a warning in case that someone came to even sneeze in the presence of a sacrosant member of the Lannisters of Casterly Rock.

He must draw Sansa away from that poison. He must keep her and their children safe, far from the darkness, and only then he too would reach true peace. There was nothing more important from then on. As far as he could, he would not allow his family to get covered in mud. He would dive into the mud to his eyebrows for them, and he would it to serve as a shield, so the dirt stained just him and did not touch them. He would not do the same as Ned Stark, who had fallen because of his naïve sense of honour and had swept along his family with him.

Once more, his determination made him feel much more calm, while Sansa and he were climbing up the staircase of the audience hall. He helped her to sit down on the bench to the left of Daenerys. The bench on the right was, as usual, Missandei’s seat. On the other side were, standing by Missandei’s right, Oberyn and Ser Barristan. Tyrion was glad that Jorah had the good sense of no placing himself next to the man who bedded every night the woman he loved.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 650

Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

Everyone awaited in an expectant silence. The only one who looked like he was there for a simple stroll was Oberyn, who seemed completely relaxed, as if that was just a meeting among old friends. Sansa clenched her jaws almost unconsciously and Tyrion did not let her hand loose for a single instant, conveying his strength to her so that she did not give out.

At last, the delegations of the Iron Islands and of the Summer Isles were announced and they entered the hall, escorted by a group of soldiers. Tyrion felt Sansa's shudder. Theon was there. He had got skinny nearly to the bare bones and his hair had turned practically grey. He walked like a crippled and hunched old man, with his eyes fixed on the ground, so the others could not make out his facial expression. The ruined lad, formerly arrogant and pompous, looked like he lacked energy and any trace of courage to look up. But then, with a colossal effort, he lifted the pupils of his lifeless eyes and sought Sansa's. Only hers, as if the rest of the hall did not exist and he depended exclusively on that gesture to go on breathing. Suddenly, the air ran from Sansa's lungs and for an instant it seemed to be refusing to return to them again. Her heart was beating wildly in her chest and her sight got clouded. She thought she was going to faint, but forced herself to stay in one piece, because she did not want to give that vile man the satisfaction of seeing her collapse. She grasped Tyrion's hand to gather strength and he squeezed it softly and caressed her knuckles with his fingertips.

Theon lowered his beaten eyes, where was not left even the slightest shadow of pride or insolence of the iron boy who had been forced to live in the house of the man who had defeated his father. In the house of the man who had been more his father than the one who had sired him. Theon now offered her his overwhelming guilt, as if he was hoping-as if he was longing for-the punishment she wanted to impose on him. He offered himself to her limb and broken, and Sansa, despite the exacerbated hatred she felt, so strong that she could kill him right there with her own hands, realized that the young mutilated and aged man who hardly stood standing before the stairs was already carrying on his extremely thin shoulders the weight of everything he had done. Maybe he was hoping for her to yell at him, to curse him, to slap him, to stab a knife into his heart to put an end to his suffering. Yes, perhaps, in his cowardice, he wished for her to be the one to stop his torment.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Sansa knew it then. And that certainty made her blink with doubt, confused. No, she could not feel pity for that beast. She shook her head, closing her eyes to try to clear her mind. When she stared at Theon again, he had lowered his eyes and looked exhausted. Only then Sansa noticed that the queen was speaking with Lady Asha. She was a very tall woman, not as tall as Brienne, but almost. She was wearing men's clothes (once more Sansa felt a stabbing pain remembering Arya) and her light-brown and quite short hair was back in a ponytail. The shape and the colour of her light eyes were the same as her brother's, but hers were full of life, of passion and laughter, and they were also intelligent, astute and calculating eyes. Theon had never been intelligent, as he had shown when he attacked Winterfell. He had not been much more than a brainless, joker, haughty and lustful lad who Ned had forbidden definitely to seduce the wenches and maidservants of the castle to prevent him from bringing shame and dishonour to the family. But Sansa in due time discovered that he spied on the girls whenever he could and hid to watch them and masturbate. She thought that was revolting and did everything she could to avoid him. Jeyne told her secretly that nearly every day he sneaked off to the town to bed the women of the brothel. Sansa ignored what a brothel was until Jeyne explained that to her. She had not feel more embarrassed or more scandalized in her life. She had no idea that many women sold their bodies in exchange for money, and she did not understand how they could endure to accept any men to touch them. By then she hardly had any idea of how sexual intercourse was, but just imagining a stranger invading her own body caused her a spasm of revulsion.

Surprisingly enough, Jeyne liked Theon. Sansa did not understand why, unless it was because he winked at the girl brazenly and sometimes whispered racy things by her ear when he crossed paths with her. His incessant provocative smiles were the most irritating thing in the world, but they undoubtedly had an effect in poor Jeyne.
Sansa returned to the present once more, feeling the burning of the tears when she remembered her dear friend. What would have happened to her? Did she die when that boastful lad she liked so much invaded the castle which had been his home as much as Sansa’s and Jeyne's?

The queen was still talking with Lady Asha. Next to the Greyjoys, there were several men with very dark skin, hardly dressed in loincloths and caps and capes decorated with feathers of many colours. Their bare and muscled chests shone as if they had been smeared with oil, and their robust legs looked like stone columns. Sansa made an effort no to blush, but it was useless. She resisted the urge to turn her head to look away. She knew it would have been a disrespectful gesture and she kept her gaze ahead of her, but avoiding looking at them directly. She had seen lots of peculiar things in her journey and during her stay in Meereen, but she felt uncomfortable in front of people who wandered everywhere almost naked as if nothing happened. She was aware that that was the gala attire of the summer islanders and she must respect it as such, but she had spent her childhood among people whose only visible skin, nearly always, was that of the head and the hands, and even that was that way only when they were inside the castle, because outside normally the only exposed part was the face.

Daenerys was explaining to Lady Asha that in Westeros there would be no other queen than herself, but that she was willing to give the iron lady the ladyship of the islands. The fierce so-called lady was frowning and seemed to be calculating quickly the benefits and the disadvantages of the deal. She must have come to a positive conclusion, as she nodded and accepted the condition of forgetting about a crown to simply be the lady of the islands, what after all did not make a big difference. Her frown remained after hearing that she would have to give up henceforth on the Old Ways, and to forbid all her people to carry them out, at least with regard to Westeros and its antislavery allies. Daenerys explained to her that she would not tolerate violent acts of any kind and that the kidnapping of women to turn them into salt wives would be strictly prohibited. Sansa had expected more resistance on the woman's part, but she in the end gave the hint of an acquiescent smile and nodded. Her blue eyes were gazing at the young Targaryen queen from the foot of the staircase with admiration and something more. It was not a secret that Lady Asha had a predilection for the people of her own sex and Daenerys was a woman capable of making anyone responsive to beautiful females sigh.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 653

Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

When the negotiations with Lady Asha finished, apparently satisfactorily for both parties, the iron woman ventured a more searching gaze at Sansa. Her expression in those moments was inscrutable. It did not reflect haughtiness or disdain, but neither cordiality. It only seemed to convey a warning: *I won't permit you to hurt my brother, I don't care what he has done.* Sansa lifted her chin and returned her stare coldly. *If he wanted to be as much of a man to attack my people and kill my brothers and my childhood friends, then he should be now as much a man to face my hatred.*

As if she was reading Sansa's thoughts, Daenerys said: "Once clarified the terms of our deal, my lady, unfortunately there's another matter I must tackle with you and with your brother." Asha hardly moved or blinked, but the posture of her body showed that she was on her guard and her stare hardened. She seemed to have been waiting for that moment, with great reason. The queen looked at Theon with icy eyes.

"You, Theon Greyjoy, betrayed Robb Stark, who was like a brother to you, after having pledged allegiance when he was proclaimed King in the North. You lied to him under the pretense of going to the Iron Islands to persuade your father to join his cause. The king trusted you, and he made a terrible mistake because of that, as you not only deceived him, but you moreover attacked his castle while he was fighting a war against the bastard king Joffrey; in addition you caused serious damage or the death of innocent servants, executed the master-at-arms and burned and hanged Robb Stark's and Lady Sansa's younger brothers. I've been reported that your sister tried to dissuade you from all that madness about being the lord of Winterfell and convince you to go back to the Iron Islands when you were still on time, what you didn't do. She proves to have much more common sense than you. Why should I trust you? Why do I have to believe you won't keep on delivering stabs in the back, to me or to any of my friends or subjects? You don't have much more to lose, as far as I know. A man who doesn't have practically anything to lose can be more dangerous than one who does, because there are few things he cares about," Daenerys blurted coldly.

Theon looked like as if he had shrunk, but he made the superhuman effort to lift his eyes to the queen.

*(Part 7 of a longer chapter)*
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

"You're right, Your Grace," he admitted, with his raspy and uncertain voice, as if his vocal chords had become old too. "I'm a shame to my Greyjoy blood and to the only true brother I've had, Robb. I'm a shame to whom was my true father, Ned. I'm a shame to Lady Asha, who I caused pain to." Theon turned his tortured gaze to Sansa and she returned a glance which seemed a slap. Next to him, Asha looked at him with great sorrow, as if she wanted to protect him uselessly from a suffering she had not been able to prevent and which nothing could erase. "I've come with my sister because she's the only one I have left, and I'll devote the rest of my life to support and help her. I have nothing more to offer, neither am I asking for a forgiveness I don't deserve. I'm much beyond any redemption. But there's something I can offer Lady Sansa."

"I want nothing from you, Theon Greyjoy," Sansa exclaimed suddenly, standing up, speaking with a voice oozing with hatred. "I only want to know if you laughed very much when you turned your back on Robb. If you had a lot of fun while you were attacking the place where you had lived, while you were threatening people who had tended to your needs, while you were forcing Bran to surrender the castle, while you were beheading Ser Rodrik, who taught you to fight, and while you were burning alive two little children who loved you."

Theon was about to stumble with that venomous tone he had never heard in Sansa's sweet voice before.

"I didn't burn them, Sansa. I didn't kill them. They escaped and I couldn't find them. I caught the two sons of the miller and passed them off as Bran and Rickon," the young man revealed, who looked exhausted. "That was what I wanted to offer you. To make you know that your brothers possibly are still alive."

"Why do I have to believe you?," she asked, with her eyes wide open and gasping. She had to sit down because her legs did not hold her up. Tyrion squeezed her hand tightly.

"I'm responsible for everything else, and you have every right to blame me. I deserve all your hatred. But I didn't kill Bran and Rickon. What I did instead of that wasn't better, because two innocent boys died for my foolishness and my cruelty. But your brothers were smarter than me. I've never been more than a conceited idiot, and I'll pay the price until I die." He held Sansa's gaze a little more with his tormented eyes, and afterwards he lowered them, as if all his scarce energy had been consumed. His shoulders were stooped like those of a hundred-year-old man. His sister did the same than Tyrion had done with Sansa: she took his hand and squeezed it. Sansa hardly had time to register that consoling gesture in the midst of the turmoil that was stirring within her.

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 655

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"Dying would be too easy for a traitor and a creeping killer like you," the young Stark girl spat, with her voice full of contempt. "I hope you live many years with guilt gnawing at you day after day, night after night. I hope you see in your nightmares Robb's face, Ser Rodrik's face, those poor peasant boys you burned like the coward you are. I hope you ignore what it's like to feel a single minute of peace."

Theon closed his eyes. "Your wishes will be fulfilled, Sansa. I see their faces every night, and I don't know what peace is."

"Then, maybe there's a little justice in this world after all." Sansa looked at Asha, who was standing next to her brother protectively. "You mustn't worry, Lady Asha. On my part, Theon won't suffer the slightest damage. I'm not going to deprive him of the life of atonement he deserves." Both women held their gazes. There was too much animadversion between the Starks and the Greyjoys and Theon had not contributed to improve things. "Do not think I have forgotten that you attacked Deepwood Motte, Lady Asha, taking advantage that my brother the King in the North was absent, fighting a war against Tywin Lannister. You Greyjoys are good at those things, at killing helpless fishermen and attacking when the true adversaries are with their guard down."

Asha smiled scornfully, without feeling intimidated. That woman was accustomed to hearing things much worse than that, with no doubt.

"And you Starks are very good at making yourselves be killed because of your stupid honour, my lady," replied the iron woman.

"Enough," Daenerys cut off. "I'm not going to tolerate tauntings or clashes between my allies. Now all of us must have a single goal and fight together to achieve it. Dissensions only will weaken us, and we can't afford any weakness. If you want to recover your homes, you'd rather bury your resentments and focus your efforts on helping me to conquer Westeros." The firm tone of the queen silenced Sansa and Asha, who went on glaring at each other with hostility for a few more seconds and then they looked away. "Once more, I welcome you. Enjoy several days of rest and afterwards, Lady Asha, we'll discuss the question of the new patrol work of the iron fleet. I hope it's not uncomfortable for you to live in your own ships, due to the lack of space we suffer within the city, my lady. Though I can provide accommodation for those of your men that may want it, I'm afraid it won't be a very comfortable or a very private lodging."

(Part 9 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

"You mustn't worry about that, Your Grace. Our ships are our true home. We spend much more time in them than on solid ground. I speak on behalf of all my men and I assure you that none of them really feels at ease sleeping under a stone roof," Asha guaranteed, with a soft smile.

If it were not because Sansa felt so uneasy before the Greyjoys, Tyrion would have smiled when he noticed the flash of desire in the eyes of the iron woman while she was looking at the queen, and when he perceived the almost caressing tone of her voice. Tyrion turned to watch discreetly Daenerys's reddened cheeks.

"As you wish, my lady," the queen nodded.

Then, it was the turn of the summer islanders. The negotiations went according to plan, and the present captains seemed to be pleased. A spark of greed pierced their dark pupils when they heard of the rich gifts they would receive and of the abolition of taxes on trade between them and the Westerosi harbours and other exemptions they would enjoy in the Dornish territory. With which they were more reticent was with the prohibition of attacking non-slave lands, but they seemed to placate when Daenerys promised them support in possible campaigns against cities which did not give up on abandoning slavery. As for their lodgings, the representative captains affirmed that most summer islanders would move to the camps, where they would build their collective housing. Neither liked they the perspective of living in small houses with stone roofs and between stifling walls. On the other hand, the bareness and aridity of the Meereenese landscape was not specially stimulating to them after their lush tropical islands, but they had no other choice than to adapt to that new scenery.

Once settled the conditions and, after assuring Asha and Lubos Xhi, the summer captain chosen as the main spokesperson of his people, that they had at their disposal seats in the Council on behalf of their respective nations, the newcomers dispersed. Asha shot a last suggestive glance at Daenerys before turning to leave.

(Part 10 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

*This is even more promising. Asha seems determined in her intention to seduce the queen. That woman doesn't look like surrendering to the first obstacle.* Tyrion held back his smile, because Sansa, in her altered state, might interpret it negatively and choose to stop talking to him for at least a week.

But if what Theon had revealed was true, then Bran and Rickon might be alive, with which Sansa's hopes would grow fourfold, as many times as possible alive siblings she had. But either would grow her worries, as one of her siblings was threatened with death by Ramsay Bolton and the other three were nowhere to be found, and only the gods knew what dangers those poor kids were facing. They had heard no word about Arya and Theon had admitted that the two youngest Starks had escaped him, and he did not seem to be hiding information, so the most likely was that he ignored where they had fled to. Tyrion did not get his hopes up regarding their survival, but it was true that he had believed Arya dead and nonetheless Brienne had bumped into her, long after the girl had vanished from the Red Keep. Yes, the Starks were hard nuts to crack.

It had been a long day and Sansa was showing signs of tiredness and accumulated stress. She and Tyrion took their leave of the queen and walked to their rooms. Tyrion felt her agitation through her cold hand. He rubbed it to make it get warm.

"You think it's true, Tyrion? You believe my little brothers are alive?"

"Theon is a destroyed man, Sansa. I tend to think he's told the truth," he admitted.

"But, how did they do it, as Bran can't walk? Rickon is too much young to carry him. Someone must've helped them."

"That overgrown man who didn't speak and carried Bran when I asked for hospitality at Winterfell after my return from the Wall... What was his name? Perhaps he escaped with the kids." Tyrion remembered the affable and mentally disabled giant of more than two metres in height who had become Bran's legs.

"Hodor. He was a sweet and innocent soul. He wouldn't hurt a single fly. I suppose it makes sense he ran away with my brothers. But, how did they do it? Bran and Rickon are just two boys and Hodor has the mental capacity of a baby and is too much big to go unnoticed."

"They surely did it overnight, taking advantage of a distraction of the guards. We know that the ironborn don't stand out by their discipline. They're very good at attacking by sea, but on dry land their skills leave much to be desired. Maybe the kids waited until the guards were drunk or enjoying female company. Any way, they sneaked out." Tyrion could not help a small smile. "I imagine that that escape left Theon even in a worse place than the one he already was. Beaten by two little boys in front of his nose. Humiliation must be great, not soothed by the many snubs and jibes he certainly bore."

Sansa walked several steps quietly, reflecting.

*(Part 11 of a longer chapter)*
"If they had headed for Castle Black, Jon would know. If he hasn't told me anything, that's because they didn't go to seek shelter at the Wall. Why didn't they do it?"

Perhaps because they never arrived. Tyrion did not dare to show his apprehension. Though the Starks were hard nuts to crack, Bran was ten years old when he disappeared, and Rickon was about seven. However much Northerners they were, winter was too harsh for two kids.

"If they had decided to go to the Wall, it wouldn't be long before the news spread that they were there. And at the time it was known, the Night's Watch would be in a risky situation. The Starks were enemies of the Crown. Winterfell had fallen. The North was in chaos. The Watch already had enough with the threats beyond the Wall. Bran was still very young, but he's a very smart boy, Sansa, you know that better than me. Perhaps he didn't want to endanger the Watch more than it aready was. And anyway, if they had gone there, they couldn't stay there indefinitely. Perhaps they hid elsewhere."

"But, where? In the North you freeze if you don't find a good shelter quickly, and it's very difficult to hunt game in the snow. Not to mention that Hodor can't look after himself, and neither can he provide for anyone's needs, and my brothers are too young to have learnt to hunt. Bran didn't even know yet how to shoot with the bow properly. They couldn't have gone far without help." Sansa's voice sounded disheartened.

"Unless they didn't escape alone," Tyrion conceded, as he did not want her to sadden more. "They know the harshness of the North. What for were they going to escape toward a more than certain death? At least in Winterfell they were more likely to stay alive, although they were prisoners. Theon could use them to his benefit and while they were useful to him, he wouldn't hurt them. He pretended to kill them only after they fleed, because of the humiliation. He must think that in that way he would amend his many daft deeds and that he'd make the others respect and fear him. He couldn't be more wrong." They were coming to their rooms and Tyrion took out the key. "Bran isn't a fool. Perhaps he knew what he was doing." Or perhaps he was just a frightened boy who did something desperate.

"I hope so, Tyrion. This is the same as what happened with Arya. Someone has told me that they were spotted and that they vanished afterwards. It's hopeful and distressing at the same time."

"I know, darling," he said, opening the door and stepping aside to make way for Sansa.

(Part 12 of a longer chapter)
"And moreover, I'm very scared for Jon. He doesn't count on enough people to have many chances to survive facing Ramsay's army. They at least have made a smart move, taking temporary possession of the castles abandoned by the Night's Watch."

Indeed, they had received a message from Varys in which he told them that Jon had mobilized all the Free Folk in the Gift to take shelter in the castles, from where they would have an excellent defensive position and where it would be practically impossible to attack them, and totally impossible to besiege them, because there was a considerable distance between the castles, and Ramsay's army would have had to stretch out along lots of kilometres, something they could not do. Sansa had felt relieved when she got the news, but she was still restless because, as long as Ramsay lived, he would never leave Jon alone and neither him nor his people might leave the Wall or settle in the Gift. Ramsay would make things as difficult as possible for them. The only thing they could do for the moment being was to resist.

On the other hand, nothing was known yet about the northern houses, and that was even more disturbing. Has the sense of loyalty already been lost? They haven't needed much more than believing that my house has been massacred to forget about it. The North remembers, Sansa had said with bitter sarcasm. Memory is fragile, however the North asserts otherwise, Tyrion had commented, with his half smile. Neither him deluded himself. At bottom, the northern houses were not different from the others when a specially hard winter like the current one came. Everybody minded just their own business.

And as for Arya, not a single trace. Varys's little birds had no songs about her.

Tyrion knew that Sansa was making a great effort of will to try to be optimistic, and she fulfilled it at times. But other times, she felt worried and sad for her siblings. He respected her mood swings and sensed when she needed him next to her and when she preferred to be alone. In that case, she stayed in the bedroom, lying back in the bed until she fell asleep, and he sat down to read in the adjacent hall or went to take a stroll along the pyramid. Sansa normally asked him to remain with her embracing her quietly or she requested one of his stories, because his deep voice lulled her into calmness. Both of them usually fell asleep in the end. But other times they ended up getting aroused and he comforted her through sex, like earlier that afternoon before the arrival of the new allies.

They had already got into their rooms and Tyrion closed the door.

(Part 13 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

"The castles of the Wall are a good defensive post and besides, they've been uninhabited for too much time. It was time that they were used. Jon's had a great idea." He took Sansa's hands. "He's Lord Commander no more, but he has experience in leading and protecting people and he won't give up."

Sansa smiled at him sadly, squeezing his hands.

"I know he won't. That's what I fear most sometimes." They looked at each other quietly. Tyrion led her to a chair, so she could sit down. He sat next to her. "How must a man feel when he comes back from death, Tyrion? May that man remember what he's seen on the other side?"

He too had asked himself those questions, but he doubted that the answer was very uplifting.

"I reckon that one must feel very weird. Lost, as when we realize that we've sneaked in the wrong place by mistake. Afraid. Or perhaps one hasn't even realized that he had gone and thinks he's just woken up from a dreamless sleep."

"Why precisely him? Why did that lord of light decide to resurrect him?"

"The gods' ways are inscrutable," Tyrion recited, slightly mocking. "I have no idea, Sansa. Many years ago I stopped wondering about the reasons why the gods do things." He did a pause and his eyes shone, between amusement and embarrassment. "I've never told you that for a while I wanted to be a septon, have I?"

"What?," she asked, really surprised. "When?"

"When I was fifteen and I found the mystical streak. I read *The Seven-Pointed Star* from beginning to end and learnt it by heart. By then I believed that my vocation was to be a septon. I envisioned myself in the Great Sept of Baelor, with the High Septon's crystal crown pierced by the rays of light. That crown would make me look taller and no one would dare to mock the highest authority in the Faith of the Seven. Luckily, that religious fever lasted little. And moreover, I didn't fully come around to the vow of chastity. I realized that it was impossible to combine my lust with my duties as a priest, though we already know that many septons aren't too much celibate. But I still was quite idealistic and naïve, you see. And any pretense of entering the holy life vanished as soon as... Well, as soon as I met Tysha." He coughed a little and smiled to conceal the strike of bitterness.

(Part 14 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 661

Meereen: Month 5. Day 23

"I always learn something new from you. It'd have never crossed my mind that you had considered seriously to be a septon. Are you ashamed of it?"

"It was just a teenage nonsense. As I didn't have access to most of the things normal men aspire to, it occurred to me that that could be quite a dignified occupation for me. Well, anyway, even if my first love hadn't crossed my path to make forget about my delusions of holiness, my father wouldn't have allowed me to become a priest. His dwarf son, a septon? So I could embarrass the family and Tywin Lannister even more with my eccentricities? No, he'd rather have locked me in Casterly Rock for the rest of my life than letting me devote myself to something I liked or that exhibited me to the public eye." Like each time he tackled an incident of his childhood in Casterly Rock, except for those in which he played with Jaime or committed mischiefs together, Tyrion displayed his sarcastic smile, which was his shield against his bitter past.

Sansa rested a hand on his cheek, grinning. "I can't say it upsets me that you in the end didn't follow the ecclesiastical career, my love, or otherwise I'd have missed the best husband in the world. Do you consider me evil for harbouring such sinful thoughts?," she asked, recovering her naughty mood.

He felt relieved for having managed to cheer her up. "I certainly do, quite a lot. How can I permit my wife to harbour such impious thoughts?" He took the hand on his cheek and kissed the palm with all the gentleness he could muster, aware that it was an extremely sensitive spot, but trying as well not to turn it into an intrusive gesture, in case she didn't fancy having sex.

To his joy, the caress of his lips over the greatly soft skin worked.

"I've behaved very badly, my lord. How are you going to fix my fault?," she asked with her sensual voice, shooting up his erection. She stroked his lips with her fingertips and introduced them in his mouth. He sucked them with delight while still looking into her eyes, with fire in his own pupils.

"I have a very effective way of achieving it. Come, unruly wife," he commanded with his hoarse voice, and held out his hand to help her stand up from the chair. Sansa accepted his help with a wide excited smile, willing to obey. Tyrion led her by the hand towards the bed and made her sit onto it. "Lie down. That's it," he murmured, placing his hand between her legs beneath her skirt and touching her sex, which was drenched under the garment. She moaned when she felt his hand. "My lady, a pious lady, shouldn't be so much wet and hot, neither should she moan like that," he reproached teasingly, sliding his fingers over the increasingly soaked fabric, touching directly the still covered slit. Sansa let out a giggle and he sped up the movement of his fingers and pressed them more against the mind-blowing intimate flesh. Her laughter mingled with a throaty whimper of pleasure.

(Part 15 of a longer chapter)
"I see I'll have to take more effective measures, my lady," he warned. He grasped the edge of the undergarment and slid it over her legs, until he removed it. He threw it to the other side of the bed. As always, he released a sigh when he saw that avid, shiny and swelled sex, reddened by desire. "You never have enough, do you?" He moistened two fingers in the fleshiness and introduced them in the cavity, which absorbed them with the usual familiarity.

"Oh, no, never, my lord," she gasped, opening her legs more and resting her feet on the bed. Tyrion lifted the skirt above her bulging belly and placed it just under her breasts. "I think I still have a lot to learn," she said.

Tyrion caressed the roundness of her tummy as if it were the most fragile treasure in the world and Sansa felt herself burning beneath that infinitely tender and sensitive hand.

"You have a lot to learn still, indeed, my wife. A lot." Tyrion leaned forward and laid a myriad of kisses onto the protuberance, stopping to toy with the navel. Sansa gripped his head with both hands and closed her eyes, letting herself be carried away by the incredible sensation of him worshipping the skin beneath which the baby was growing up.

Tyrion descended progressively toward the pubis and tangled his fingers in the hair while he kept on leaving a trail of kisses. Sansa got ready for the explosion of delight which would come close as soon as he...

Oh, for all the gods! Why is it always so wonderful to feel his mouth upon me?

Tyrion sank his lips and tongue in her folds and she lost all coherent thought. She opened to him as much as she could and drew him more tightly to her with her hands. He lifted her hips with his arms to enjoy more her burning sex. He savoured it as he had never savoured anything before she allowed him to fuck her for the first time. No food or a woman's cunt had ever tasted so good as that delicacy Sansa was offering to him with absolute surrender. He devoured it so eagerly that Sansa cried out her climax with a nearly animal howl, crushing his face against her as if she wanted to gobble him down, such as he had been about to gobble her in the frenzy of passion between her legs.

Tyrion smiled, pleased, when he saw her lying in bed, sweaty, struggling to regain her normal breathing.

(Part 16 of a longer chapter)
"You know, my dear, I'll continue to apply the punishment to you as many times as needed," he threatened, with the tone of a maester who scolds a specially difficult pupil. He lied down next to her, made her turn her head to him and kissed her soundly on the mouth, with the full intention of making her taste her own sex on his lips and tongue.

"I'm afraid I'll need lots of punishments, my lord," she said, playfully.

"You're asking for it." Tyrion quickly undressed from the waist down and placed himself between her legs. "You want more?," he asked, challenging, with a flash of laughter and lust in his eyes. However, he did not touch her with his hands or his member, waiting for her reaction to the erotic game.

"I always want more," she replied, responding to the challenge.

*Please, let me get old beside this incredible girl,* Tyrion pleaded, giving thanks silently once more for his good luck.

"Then here you are, take it," he answered, positioning his cock in the entrance and pushing slowly to introduce it carefully. He penetrated to the bottom and remained still for a few seconds, enjoying the feeling of being completely buried inside of her. Sansa rocked subtly her hips to encourage him to move and he did not take long to please her.

*Oh, how wonderful,* he repeated in his mind like a litany each time his cock made its way to the deepest. *Oh gods, gods, gods...*

With his left hand he held her legs, which were resting on his chest and shoulders, and with his right hand he stimulated the clit.

"I love you, Sansa," he confessed in a strangled whisper, in the verge of reaching ecstasy. He felt Sansa's coming and sped up onto and into her.

"Oh, Tyrion, I love you too!," she cried out, with her head thrown back so much that he practically could only see her throat. Her spams imprisoned his cock, making it a prisoner of the sweetest of confinements. Tyrion fell apart once again, feeling that his whole being spilled along with his hot seed. He, gloriously tired, rested both his hands onto the bed, in order not to drop his weight upon her. He pulled his cock out and lied down, breathing heavily.

*(Part 17 of a longer chapter)*
"Tyrion... Thank you," Sansa muttered. He looked at her face and saw two tears sliding down from the corners of her eyes into her hair. He felt a tight knot in his throat.

"My love... I'll always do everything possible to make you feel better. I feel happy to be able to comfort you in the ways I know how to do it. And I feel even happier that you let me."

She searched for his hand and squeezed it.

"I don't know what I'd do without you. I need you by my side. Always." She turned to him and he encircled her with his arms, in a protective gesture.

"I'll always be by your side. I'll always take care of you," he assured, kissing the top of her head. "I'll always take care of you both," he added, resting his hand softly on the bulging belly.

Sansa pressed herself more against him and wept onto his chest until she fell asleep and he continued to rock her for a long while, awake and thinking about his young wife and the baby, until the bedroom plunged into the darkness of nightfall and he got up very carefully in order not to wake up the young asleep woman, so he could get dressed and light the candles. He then touched Sansa's shoulder gently and kissed her forehead, telling her with soft mockery that he never had known such a sleepyhead like her and if she did not awake soon she would miss dinner, which was about to be brought. She protested with her sleepy voice and he, to conceal the erection that hoarse voice caused him and which incited him to fuck her at that moment, tickled her face and went on teasing her about her appearance of freshly awake, until she burst in laughter and blurted to him that she had never met anyone as tiresome as him or who enjoyed so much getting her out of bed.

"How many people have you met who have wanted to get you out of bed?," he asked, with a fake jealous and threatening tone.

"Oh, a few." Her eyes were full of laughter again, and his heart was swelling. "But don't worry, because they were just kids."

"They'd better. And there's a great difference between them and I," he said, responding to her smile.

"That you have hair on your chest and they still don't?"

"Of course. And moreover, if there's something I like much more than getting you out of bed, it's to get you into it. And you'd rather get up right now, or you won't because I'll see after holding you on this mattress while Mhyraz comes with dinner and the poor boy would have to wait outside until I've finished to fuck you. So you choose."

"Oh, wicked man." Sansa sat down laughing onto the sheets and slipped her legs out. That trick was always effective. Each time he mentioned the possibility that Mhyraz caught them in the middle of intercourse, she stood up like a spring and hurried to prepare herself for the meal. Tyrion started to laugh too and allowed her her private space so she could wash herself quickly and don comfortable clothes for dinner.
Meereen: Month 6. Day 5

Daenerys, in the course of a meeting with her counselors, had decided to decree a day of festivities for that week. The idea had been Oberyn's. Now that the city was much safer and a lasting peace prevailed in the city, the fair thing for its inhabitants would be to offer them days of fun, which they had not enjoyed since the rugged reopening of the fighting arenas. The excuse for that public holiday was to welcome properly all the people who had settled in the city during the last months and to promote peace and the mutual acceptance between the old and the new citizens. That sounded much nicer than the reality of the fragile coexistence that was breathed in the city, Tyrion thought, like sounded any pompous excuse for any festivity in which people end up committing excesses of various kinds, which usually involved eating, drinking, sex and brawls. At least in that case it was difficult that the excesses exceeded certain limits, because the city was not rolling in money, and the strong security measures largely prevented bloody outcomes. For what there was a free way was for sex. It was not strange that the brothels were the most flourishing premises in the city, even now that their workers practiced prostitution freely and pocketed a share of the profits because of that. When they were slaves all the profits went to their masters and to the owners of the whorehouses, of course (both in many cases were the same person).

But they had to admit that Oberyn was right when he brought up the topic in the meeting. Meereen needed entertainments. It needed to fill its calendar with holidays and celebrations, like most cities. It did not matter if the reasons for those celebrations were to honour the gods or more pagan reasons. The question was that people from time to time had to leave home to spend a good time in public, eat, drink, laugh, dance, watch inoffensive shows (Daenerys had forbidden the spilling of human and animal blood for fun in any places that were not the fighting arenas, which had not been reopened), to vent tensions and, supposedly, to enhance the relationships between the neighbours.

(Part 1 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 6. Day 5

The festivities had been organized within just a week, for which a hellish activity had been displayed. Tyrion and the new secret king of Meereen (who had offered himself to collaborate very actively with the preparations, to the slight surprise of everyone, as Oberyn gave more the impression of being a man who enjoyed parties plentifully, but who did not feel a great interest in organizing them), had walked around the city incessantly, keeping long talks with Kerro and Sarik about the food supplies and the placing of the facilities for the outdoors banquets in charge of the royal coffers, though speaking of *banquets* was a bit exaggerated, because the Crown could not afford wasteful spendings. But at least there would be a decent amount of food to offer appetizers throughout the day, prepared by the cooks of the Great Pyramid and looked after at all times to prevent unpleasant surprises. A freed man had volunteered, in exchange for a few gold coins, to act as the queen's *personal taster* to try her food and drink and make sure they were not poisoned. At first Daenerys had refused, but the subject was a grown man and he was willing to do it freely for money, and after carrying out a thorough research about the man and being sure that he was not a spy or an undercover hired murderer, she accepted, because, at bottom, being a taster was not a worse or more dangerous job than being a soldier or a bodyguard. Tyrion proposed that the taster tried a little bit of all that there would be in the royal box which would be set up that day, because that way neither Sansa would take more risks than necessary, and by the way Missandei and the other present counselors could eat with no worry as well. Besides, they had to hire comedians and traveling theatre companies so they could offer their performances. Tyrion had compromised on the unavoidable fact that several of the comedians and actors or actresses were dwarves. He decided that it was unfair that just because he did not like the circumstance of being one of them, other dwarves less lucky than him could not earn their living in Meereen in the only way they could.

(Part 2 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 6. Day 5

There would be games, exhibitions and competitions as well, among them a cyvasse tournament, a strategy game Tyrion was fond of after Oberyn had taught him how to play; exhibitions of popular dances would be carried out; and at last, there would be horse races (the dothraki were especially enthusiastic about that). Moreover, in the squares would be displayed the mentioned theatre and comedic performances for the audience fond of that kind of shows.

In order to complete the performances with the spiritual presence, the Graces and the priests of other worships would be present, like those who believed in the Lord of Light and the Dornish septon of the Great Pyramid, who would offer their preachings and blessings to their followers. Everything would be carried out in the three most important squares of the city: the Square of Graces, the Market Square and the Square of the Seven Sighs (called that way because it pooled on its perimeter a high number of brothels where the former slave prostitutes were trained in the Yunkish style, the Way of the Seven Sighs). The round of the horse races would encompass the widest streets which connected the three squares. The events would rotate throughout them. The traveling companies would perform their shows in the three places, the priests and priestesses would spread out and the games and competitions also would be moved from one place to another, though the finals had been reserved for the Square of Graces, and the finish line of the horse races would be there too.

Massida zo Loraq, Hizdahr's mother, had requested a talk with Daenerys a few days earlier and the queen had agreed to it, in the presence of most her counselors except Kerro, who was very busy with his work, Daario and Jorah, who were in their training hours, and maester Maero, who was tending to his patients, as usual. But Daenerys wanted as many of them as possible to be present, because she did not like Massida zo Loraq. That woman as hard as granite was still an enigma. It could not be denied the help she had given to catch a great part of the Sons of the Harpy in Meereen, but they could not trust her. Who might assure that she was not behind the other murders that were still committed from time to time in the city, among them the murders of noble people, of Meereense citizens of humble condition and of freed people? There was something dodgy about her and Tyrion could not get rid of the feeling that those withered eyes gave chills.

(Part 3 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 6. Day 5

Massida had proposed two things in the meeting with the queen, both equally polemical. The first one, to be admitted as a member of the Council to take up the place her son had left vacant. According to her, she had been thinking about it for some time and, after having wept and avenged Hizdahr's death, she considered that she herself must continue with his legacy. Tyrion had jerked up in his seat when he heard that. That woman, who looked like the vivid image of the Harpy that had dominated the city from the summit of the Great Pyramid, taking part in the Council meeting? If they could not trust her, how were they going to deal freely with the topics which only could be tackled behind closed doors? Not to mention the problem of having her so close for longer than the strictly necessary. Massida was much more keen and astute than Daenerys and Tyrion would like and she might guess things that she should not guess, like the relationship between the queen and Oberyn. It would be very dangerous that she discovered the true nature of that relationship. Oberyn would not stay in Meereen for a very long time before returning to Dorne, as it had been agreed, but even in a short period of time many things could happen. And there was the added problem that she might perfectly be a spy. To what extent could they discuss certain matters in front of that woman? What could they reveal in her presence that she would not use to harm all the work they were carrying out? Like Massida herself had declared, she no longer had anything that truly mattered to her aside from revenge and the memory of her deceased son. And who could say that she at bottom did not consider Daenerys largely guilty of her misfortune? The queen had crucified her husband (seemingly unfairly, as according to Hizdahr his father was against the crucifixion of the slave children that the majority of the Great Masters wanted to execute as a warning to the invading silver-haired slut, like they had called her) and, in case the execution of the Great Master Loraq was not enough, later her son had died poisoned because of a drink aimed to the foreign queen who had ordered his father killed. However much Massida proclaimed herself a follower of her son's ideas and a continuer of his legacy, it was very unlikely that she held no grudge against the woman who had led her family to suffer such terrible tragedies.

(Part 4 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 669

Meereen: Month 6. Day 5

Tyrion did not trust her an inch and feared that she took advantage of any unguarded moment to attack Daenerys or spoil some of her plans. In short, as she herself said, she had no more to lose. It could be that she did not mind dying if before that she could ride roughshod over the Mother of Dragons.

Tyrion was disconcerted, and that annoyed him. Few people managed to disconcert him. Massida seemed to hate the whole world, then... Why that supposed aspiration to help Daenerys? Simply because her son had wanted it that way?

The queen had exchanged a glance of concern with her other counselors before answering diplomatically but firmly to the proposal. "It's true that the seat of the noble Hizdahr has been vacant for several months. But it's also true that I can't take lightly the replacement. I understand that being his mother you wish to take his post, but I need you to understand that the position you aspire to is difficult to carry out, as the person who holds it must work for peace in Meereen and not use it for own benefit. I hope you understand my worries. As you're a prominent member of the Meereenese nobility, you have an even more delicate task than the other counselors around me, if anything. I also made that point clear to Hizdahr. We need the peace of this new Meereen without slavery, not for it to continue with an undercover war to reinstate slavery. If you're able to work for that goal, then you'll be welcome to this Council, my lady." The meaning of the sentences Daenerys did not say was obvious. And if you aren't able to work for that goal, then you're my enemy. She did not get to utter the words, but it was not necessary for her to do it.

Massida's gaze was inscrutable as she said: "The only thing I have left of my son is what he wanted to do for this city by your side. He truly had given up on the old regime and believed in you. And I did believe in him, and I still do. You'll have to accept the word of a mother whose son was the only person she has loved in this world, because that is all the guarantee I can offer you." Tyrion had to admit that with such a response, which seemed to be the most honest one the woman could give (even if it had been perfectly calibrated to induce that effect of honesty), it was very difficult to deny Massida of the seat. Daenerys could not be opposed to the fact that the Meereenese nobility should take part in the governing of the city if she wanted to keep the so valuable peace. As long as no Meereenese nobleman had requested to be a member of the Council after Hizdahr, they had been able to dodge that predicament, but now it was on the board and it could not be postponed for longer.

(Part 5 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 6. Day 5

After another silent glance at the rest of her counselors, Daenerys accepted Massida's proposal and the noblewoman was admitted as a new royal counselor.

The woman then tackled her second suggestion. "I'm willing to organize the reopening of the fighting arenas."

Daenerys kept a tense silence for some seconds. "You already know what happened the last time."

Tyrion too felt a chill running down his back when he remembered that ill-fated day at Daznak's pit. The atmosphere in the hall could be cut. Oberyn was the only one to smile.

"I've heard that you've learnt to control your dragons, Yoour Grace," the woman pointed out, unperturbed.

"Dragons aren't pets, my lady. I can't stop them from flying wherever they please or from feeling excessively protective towards me. It's impossible to predict their behaviour, and it's even less when I am in an arena covered in blood by the combats, in the middle of a large vociferous crowd."

"I offer myself to fight in the combats." Everybody turned to look at Oberyn, stunned. "I did it once here in Meereen, and I'm starting to miss the thrill of a real melee fight. The Mountain was just an appetizer. And if I win the prize, I'll donate it to the royal coffers, with which each one of us will benefit."

"It's very dangerous. What if something happens? Your brother wouldn't forgive me," Daenerys opposed, visibly frightened.

Tyrion sensed that Doran Martell's rage was not the only thing that made the queen's hand shake slightly, though it was not in itself a negligible reason in the least. That Dorne's support could be at risk because its Viper prince felt so attracted to playing with death was not a triviality.

"I on my own will write to him as soon as possible to tell him I'm old enough to get into the fights I fancy, my queen. If something happens to me, everything will continue as planned." Oberyn remained as calm as if they were talking about the desserts of lunch and not about his possible death in the arenas. The risk of that happening was great.

Daenerys, on the other hand, was anything but relaxed, but she was making an effort to keep her composure. Tyrion knew how difficult it was for her. She could not give away her true feelings in front of Massida.

(Part 6 of a longer chapter)
"You and I will continue this talk about your participation in other moment, my prince," she said to try to stop the issue, with a tense voice. Tyrion knew that, if she got involved in an argument with Oberyn before the counselors, her confused feelings for him would be shown up on her face, and Daenerys knew that too. Tyrion wondered if she could persuade him in the privacy of the bedroom to give up on the dangerous idea, though he was sure that, if the decision had been already taken, nothing would make him change his mind. Judging by what Tyrion knew, no one, not even his sister Elia or his lifelong lover Ellaria had been able to tame his thirst for blood.

Luckily, neither Asha nor Lubos Xhi seemed especially interested in getting themselves killed in an amphitheatre, in the face of roaring crowds. They were at least as accomplished warriors as Grey Worm, Daario, Oberyn, Jorah and Khotto (Tyrion did not include Ser Barristan in the batch, as he still considered him one of the best warriors in Westeros, if not in the world, so he was above the others. It was true he was old, but Tyrion had seen him in action at the parade ground and he kept an incredible agility for his age), but they were obviously more concerned for their own necks than the Dornish man was for his. Asha was determined to take the Salt Throne and Lubos wanted to be welcomed with honours in the Summer Isles.

It was fortunate that the best talented dothraki had become part of Daenerys's armies, and the soldiers had been forbidden to fight in the arenas, or otherwise Khotto, Daenerys's bloodrider, who was in the Council hall, would have offered himself too as a fighter in the games. Tyrion could see in his eyes his disappointment for not taking part. Anyway, Tyrion did not believe that the queen would allow two of her counselors (her husband being one of them) to join some games in which they might fight in combat and injure badly or kill each other.

(Part 7 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 6. Day 5

It was more than evident that Daenerys had many reticences regarding that new reopening of the amphitheatres, in spite of the benefits they provided, as she tried a last counterargument. "My lady, it's not likely that the population of Meereen accepts to return to the arenas after what happened the last time. They'll fear a new disaster."

"I'll convince them. My son's talent didn't come out of the blue. Give me a little time and you'll see. Moreover, Your Grace... Who can resist a good bloody show and a bit of risk?"

This woman understands well human's nature. People are too much morbid and like blood a great deal to deprive themselves of watching it simply for a little danger of being roasted or crushed, Tyrion thought with sarcasm.

"If I have to be there, I can't vouch for my dragons or for the spectators' reaction if they appear. I don't want more catastrophes I can prevent."

"I was under the impression that dragons are very intelligent beings and respond to the magic language people with dragon blood like you possess, Your Grace. I'm sure you'll know how to keep them at bay."

Was that a challenge? Was that woman seeking to cause deliberately a new disaster as a means of revenge? Did she want to endanger Daenerys, those closest to her and her soldiers? Was she taking so much trouble simply to provide the population with entertainments and to fatten the royal coffers? Anyway, Tyrion did not like at all the idea of another reopening of the arenas, or to have to go again through the predicament of being a witness of the slaughters. But he resigned himself to the unavoidable. If he had to be there, Sansa would hop mad and Tyrion hated that she felt preoccupied because of him.

Ser Barristan spoke too, frowning. "I don't think it wise either to reopen the pits. The citizens have managed perfectly without them."

"Come on, come on, Ser Barristan the Bold. Where is your fighting spirit?," Oberyn joked. He looked at Daenerys and his expression softened. "It won't be necessary for you to be present there, my queen. I'll go as your representative and will fight in your honour. You're the queen and you can change the rules if you fancy."

Tyrion would never imagine that he would look at the Dornishman with so much gratitude. If Daenerys did not attend, he also could escape from going.  

(Part 8 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 6. Day 5

She remained thoughtful, staring at the table, but Massida was not in agreement with the turn of things.

"That would be irregular. People expect their queen to accompany them at least in the finals of the games. Her absence would be interpreted as a sign of bad omen."

"Then tell the people that the queen doesn't believe in omens or bunks. But if you consider that telling them that is politically incorrect, the threat of the dragons will have to be enough for them," Oberyn cut off without ceremony. "People will have their games, but they can't force the queen to attend. And it neither would be the most advisable thing after the last time."

Lady Loraq pursed her lips. "It's alright. I'll do what I can."

The meeting with Massida finished after they had talked about the deadline for the new reopening of the arenas and the organization of the fighting championships, of which the woman would be in charge. They would need at least two or three weeks. Tyrion pointed out with irony that the surviving fighters whose final combat had been truncated by the irruption of the dragons and who had been left without getting paid the prize, probably had been considering for months the idea of kidnapping him, Tyrion, and taking his head to Cersei or, even better, taking him to her alive and kicking, because they must think that possibly his dear sister would pay more for the pleasure of removing his head from his shoulders by herself. Massida assured that they would be granted their final combat, the one they could not end, in the next games. Tyrion breathed exaggeratedly, visibly relieved for getting rid of the demands of those brutes and bringing some mocking smiles, except for Massida's, who never gave more than the hint of a cruel face as a smile; Daenerys's, who was not in the mood for jokes; and Ser Barristan's, who did not appreciate very much that kind of black humour.

(Part 9 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 6. Day 5

That meeting with lady Loraq had been the most remarkable event of the last week, along with Pod's eighteenth birthday (to whom Tyrion and Sansa had gifted a sword made of the best steel that could be made, behind Valyrian steel; Leena had presented a banner with the coat of arms of House Payne to him, made by herself; and there was a birthday lunch in which, in addition to the four of them, were Brienne, Larko and Cloe). There was a lot of activity as well with the exhausting preparations of the festivities in the main squares and streets of the city. No relevant news had arrived from the North, or from King's Landing. Sansa had written to Jon immediately to tell him about the news concerning Bran and Rickon and was waiting for his reply, trying to control the anxiety of waiting. A letter from her brother would be reassuring, at least because it would make her know that he was alive and she could find out about the exact situation in which he was, however precarious it was. It had been a long time since Sansa had stopped living in a bubble of unreality and she now preferred to see the truth face to face to languish in uncertainty. She had already learnt the hard way that it was useless to fantasize to escape from the unavoidable.

In Volantis, the war between masters and slaves had caused a bloodbath and the city was in chaos, following the trail of Meereen itself before Daenerys had managed to impose order, and of Astapor and Yunkai too. The surviving masters of Volantis were trying to establish alliances with those of other nearby cities, but there was serious trouble in them too. There had not ever been uprisings of slaves at such a scale and all the cities that were enemies of the Mother of Dragons were suffering a hard blow. The slave trade had been practically interrupted because the majority of those who were taken as prisoners or kidnapped to be sold rose up, faced up to their captors and were executed before they had been carried to the auctions, or they managed to kill their captors and flee, or took advantage of any opportunity to murder the masters when those bought them.

Tens of thousands of poor wretched killed and died fighting for their freedom.

(Part 10 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 6. Day 5

Nothing like that had been seen before. According to the reports, the wave of revolution had spread throughout a great part of Essos. It seemed that the fact of finding out that many slaves dared to defy their oppressors and fought to the death encouraged others to leave fear behind and rise up. In all their throats a war cry could be heard: *Mhysa*. Mother. Lots of them threw themselves to the bloodbath with that word on their lips. Daenerys had felt profoundly shaken when she read the report. When she started that war, she had not imagined that thousands and thousands of downtrodden people from half the world would end up crying that *maternal* appellative by which they called her.

It was commented too that the red priests of R'hllor were developing more and more strength and influence among the increasing freed population and the masters saw them as a great threat, but they were afraid of them and did not dare to touch them, as the masters who conspired against them died in strange circumstances: their houses burned with them inside, or suddenly they caught mysterious intestinal diseases because of which they bled in a matter of hours, or their corpses were found floating on rivers and ponds... Tyrion remembered Brienne's tale about the shadow that stabbed a ghostly dagger into Renly's heart, apparently conjured up by the red witch who accompanied Stannis and who recently had resurrected Jon. He recalled too Varys's aversion to dark magic, after a sorcerer had castrated him to offer his male attributes to a talking flame. He shuddered. Those red priests were helping largely to keep peace in Meereen and Tyrion understood the usefulness of their presence there, but deep down he did not like to depend on them on that account. He distrusted anyone who proclaimed that their own gods were the only true ones and who wandered around washing people's brains. One only had to look at the sparrows in Westeros. That lunkhead Cersei had given wings to those birds and they had flown and had multiplied like rats.

The fanatics were a growing problem. Ignorance, misery and fear pushed many poor devils to follow the sparrows and become fanatics too. And now that a specially cold, dark and menacing winter was already covering a large part of the world, it seemed that there was more fanatic fever than ever.

*(Part 11 of a longer chapter)*
Chapter 676

Meereen: Month 6. Day 5

Yes, those were certainly dark times. Even in Meereen daylight lasted less hours, the sun did not shine as much as before and the ambient temperature was colder than the people of that normally torrid area was used to feel.

The guild of seamstresses worked hard making winter garments to keep warm as many children and people vulnerable to cold as they could. The maesters and healers tended to numerous cases of colds, influenza and pneumonia, and an outbreak of tuberculosis had appeared; it was a slow-acting but inexorable disease which ruined the lungs and against which there was no effective cure. The only thing one could expect was that, like greyscale in some rare cases, it stopped before it was too late, but most of the affected ones were not that lucky.

In spite of all, or precisely because of that, the city needed entertainments. It needed to break away from the unusual cold, from the problems of coexistence, from the daily misfortunes, from an austerity it had never known before, from the uncertain fear that floated in the environment, which everyone tried to conceal...

Not half the morning had passed when the royal entourage settled in the box of the Square of Graces. A large stage with no walls or sets at its background had been put on opposite the box. It was the same as the stages in the other squares, aimed to the comic and theatrical performances, and to the dances and exhibitions. There were also trestle tables where the collations would be served soon, and other tables aimed to the cyvasse players. The space started to be packed with people as soon as Daenerys and her retinue made their entrance. Both the box and the whole perimeter of the square were guarded by soldiers in tight formation.

(Part 12 of a longer chapter)
Meereen: Month 6. Day 5

Tyrion and Sansa had decided to take Mhyraz, Dara and Ray with them. The children needed to go out of the pyramid as much as the pup, that had grown considerably during the four months he'd been living with them. He almost could knock Tyrion down already when he rested his forelegs on the short man's shoulders with his enthusiasm typical of a young and healthy dog, and when he did that affectionate gesture his head towered over his owner's. Tyrion sometimes took him when he went outside to carry out his duties around the city and the children made him take a walk along the pyramid and the parade ground every day, because he used up so much energy that an extended closure saddened him and turned him restless. Moreover, he had to exercise constantly to strengthen himself and not to begin to suffer diseases too soon because of an excess of sedentariness. The dog was wearing his leather leash, like every time he got out to the streets.

Tyrion had his dagger in its sheath which was hanging on his belt, and he had recommended Mhyraz and Dara to carry their own daggers (Tyrion had gifted them to the kids) and their slingshots, as well as a few small bags full of tiny stones for the slings, in case they had to use them. Sansa also had tied her own dagger to her leg, in the way she had seen Shae do it, so it was hidden beneath her skirt. She hardly had had time to receive lessons in self-defense, but the element of surprise could turn to her advantage. Very few people would expect a Westerosi lady who looked so delicate and defenceless to conceal a weapon under her clothes. Of course, Brienne had definitely agreed to that. The bodyguard was walking behind her protégée, watching the surroundings at all times.

Pod and Leena neither were missing in the retinue. Tyrion had not managed to persuade Pod to take a day off. At last, they reached a fifty-fifty agreement. Pod would be a Tyrion's and Sansa's escort together with Brienne, but Leena would accompany him.

(Part 13 of a longer chapter)
The entourage sat in their respective seats in the royal box, among the applause of the crowd aimed to Daenerys and cries calling her *Mhysa*. The sun, which rose less and less each passing day and shone for less time, warmed up slightly the cold morning air. The wind was calm and the sky looked as clear as usual, with just a few passing clouds. Tyrion observed the varied group of counselors around him.

Ser Barristan remained in his perpetual position, standing behind the queen. He was wearing a new armour lacquered in white which the queen had ordered for him, and Tyrion wondered if in short she was going to appoint him as a member of a new Queensguard, if she had the intention to create it, what she probably would do, following the Westerosi tradition.

Missandei was wearing a a dress warmer than the ones she used to use, and was covering her shoulders with a woolen cloak that Cloe, the queen's personal seamstress, had made for her.

Oberyn was dressed as if he still was at Sunspear, and was watching his surroundings with a carefree and sarcastic smile.

Massida zo Loraq was seating with her back as straight as a spear. The luxury of her attire and of her jewelry emphasized her extreme thinness and did nothing to disguise her deteriorated skin or the deep wrinkles on her face. She was staring around with eyes as cold as the frost of the dawn.

Khotto had taken very seriously his role as a bloodrider and was standing guard to Ser Barristan's right. His long dark hair was back in the usual braid of those who had not been defeated in any fights or combats. All his clothes were made of horse skin and were thicker than the garments he and his people usually wore. That winter was proving inclement even to the seasoned horse lords.

Asha was sitting near the right end, with Lubos Xhi to her left and Oberyn to this one's left. Theon, luckily, was absent, probably by his own decision. Either the battered iron man had become so prudent as to avoid awkward situations, or he was doing it out of sheer cowardice, so that he did not have to face Sansa's contempt and coldness. She detested sharing the box with any Greyjoy, and so Tyrion, in order to help his wife to place herself as far from Asha as possible, had given up his own bench to Massida, just to Daenerys's left, and he and Sansa had moved to the left end. They had agreed to prevent brushes with the Greyjoys, and to achieve that they must be as far from them as they could. Pod and Brienne were standing behind the couple and Leena, to whom a bench had been given, to Sansa's left.

*(Part 14 of a longer chapter)*
Meereen: Month 6. Day 5

Kerro had asked permission to spend the day with his family, mixed among the ordinary people who would come to the festivities. He had many friends amongst the freedfolk and felt more at ease with them than in the royal retinue. In any more solemn act he would have taken his position next to the queen without hesitation, but he had recovered recently his lost sons and he wanted to spend with them all the spare time he had. Moreover, the family had very few occasions to go out and have fun, and that was one of those scant occasions.

The queen had taken with her the children who tended personally to her in the pyramid and these were sitting on the floorboards of the box along with Mhyraz and Dara. The group of kids was chatting and giggling. In the center of them, Ray was resting on his hindquarters and was watching his surroundings excitedly.

Grey Worm was at the head of the soldiers who were guarding the box at ground level, denying access to anyone outside the royal entourage.

The surveillance of the squares and the streets which connected those ones was in charge of the Second Sons, led by Daario, and of more Unsullied, and Jorah was among the rows of the latter.

The traveling theatre company appeared soon; it would be the first one to offer its show, while the spectators were still clear-headed enough to pay attention to a play. The actors, actresses and the dramatist climbed up on the stage and greeted the queen and the audience, and they expressed their satisfaction for performing in the noble city of Meereen. Then, they placed some pieces of furniture and other objects and assembled quickly a movable structure on which were hanging a series of sets made of fabric that were superimposed on each other and could be changed easily. They had been painted with surprisingly good craftsmanship and detail by some anonymous artist who probably sold his paintings for much less than they were worth.

(Part 15 of a longer chapter)
Chapter 680

Meereen: Month 6. Day 5

The costumes and wigs of the actors and actresses looked shiny new, as if they were wearing them for the first time, for that occasion. It was evident that the playwright had preferred to invest a little more money so the appearance of his company was practically irreproachable in front of the queen of Meereen. He undoubtedly wanted to please and flatter her and content the audience to earn a good pile of coins.

It was obvious as well that the play was about the Targaryen dynasty, as a few of the actors and actresses were wearing silver-haired wigs, and there was no one with silver hair who was as famous in the world as the Targaryens. Tyrion feared that it would be a dull performance about the power of the Targaryen dynasty until its decline and fall, because, as they were going to act in front of the Mother of Dragons, it was to be expected that the plot would not be offensive for her or her relatives, neither would it include coarse or scatological scenes. The companies which performed in the presence of the royalty or the nobility were very careful not to offend their distinguished spectators, if they did not want to lose everything from the neck up. That would've been Cersei's typical reaction, Tyrion thought. She would've ordered to arrest them immediately, infuriated, and shortly afterwards each one of their heads would be decorating the walls of the Red Keep. She'd never been very fond of admitting that her shit stinks so much as everyone else's. That's why she almost always shows that face, as if she were smelling shit. He smiled to himself. Luckily for the company, Daenerys was not Cersei.

As soon as everything was ready, the playwright announced the title, Dragon's Fire. Tyrion was about to roll his eyes. Very original.

But the play proved not to be so bad as Tyrion had feared. It narrated with agility and in an enjoyable way the most important events led by the dragon kings and queens since the conquer of Aegon I until Daenerys herself. The dramatist had allowed himself several historical licenses, including some romances that had not existed (Tyrion supposed that he did that to take advantage of the audience's interest towards love affairs) and exaggerating a few battles which had not reached such proportions, with the exception of the Dance of Dragons. The performers changed their clothes often as they adopted different roles in the Targaryen lineage and other characters, and even the dragons' costumes were well made, without looking excessively ridiculous. The public applauded frequently, laughed or kept an attentive silence, and were having a good time.

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Meereen: Month 6. Day 5

Luckily the play was not very long, as it had to make way for the other shows and the food. When its performance in the Square of Graces ended, the theatre company bade farewell with a series of bows in the middle of the applause and the dramatist declared that he expected to have the honour of keeping on pleasing the queen and her subjects in the future, when his company returned to Meereen. To that he added a funny remark about all those who did not want to wait for that long, to enjoy again the performance of the play in the other squares, and the public laughed and applauded once again.

While they were waiting for the next show, the first collation of the day was served and people crowded around the long trestle tables. In the box there was a table as well and the platters, the dishes, the cutlery, the cups and the jugs were placed on it by the children. Only after the taster had tried the wine, the water and the must and a helping from each one of the platters and they waited for a reasonable time, at least half an hour, to check that the man did not suffer symptoms of poisoning, they felt encouraged into the display. Even so, Tyrion tried Sansa's drink and plate before she did and asked her to wait for a little longer. The young woman looked at him between touched and amused, because she always felt very moved that he took so great care of her and the baby, and to cover up her emotion that he risked his life for her, she joked saying that that day his love was making her starve deliberately. He replied with a wicked smile that he certainly was a misunderstood and unfairly treated husband, as he later had the intention to let her satisfy all her appetites. Sansa felt the familiar burn between her legs, even in the middle of that square and of a noisy crowd, and she stared at the ground, to try to make the intense blush on her cheeks go unnoticed.

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Once they were sure that there was no poison, the dishes and the cups of the children and adults of the box were filled. Sansa and Tyrion preferred to eat sitting on their seats to avoid Asha, who had got close to Daenerys to chat. Oberyn, without the slightest qualm, sat down on the floor opposite Sansa and Leena and addressed them his dazzling smile.

"You're specially beautiful today, my ladies. Feast days suit you."

"Thank you, my prince," Sansa answered, failing miserably to control her blushes. Leena responded to the compliment with a serene smile.

"Nice day, eh? I suppose I'll have to get used to stay sitting for hours like a monkey in a cage, in presence of the crowds who watch everything I do while I behave like it's expected of me. Well, more or less. Sitting down on the floor is not something fitting for a prince, even less for a king."

And neither should it be to try to flirt with another man's woman, who is not your princess or your queen, Viper, Tyrion thought, sarcastic. The persevering and cheeky gallantry of the ardent Dornishman did not stop to bother him a bit.

"When I was thirteen years old, I had the idea to organize an improvised fancy-dress party in the open air at the Water Gardens, while my father was in Tor, visiting the Jordaynes. Doran did not like the idea very much, but Elia burst in laughter and supported me, like every time a piece of mischief came to my mind to entertain her and make her forget for a few hours about her delicate health. We spread the word that all the youngsters from any social background were invited, on condition that they attended clean and with a fancy dress. There would be plenty of food and drink, and music. Doran tried to oppose, as he thought that was dangerous. He protested saying that any thief or crook might sneak in with the incentive of having clear track to do what they pleased in a rich house, but I calmed him assuring that they wouldn't be allowed to enter with weapons or any object that could be used as such. The truth is that it was one of the best days of my first youth, because I saw the sparkle in my sister's eyes while we were laughing and dancing with those ridiculous costumes we ourselves made with pieces of this and that. I didn't take my eyes off Elia the whole day, because any of those lads could try to take liberties with her."

(Part 18 of a longer chapter)
"My sister was a princess of Dorne and she was very aware of that. There are certain limits not even the Martells can overstep, and that a princess shows herself off publicly or is seen in a *wanton* attitude with men is frowned upon, and even more with lowly men. You see, hypocrisy reaches every corner, even in the liberal Dorne. There it doesn't matter that a young lady isn't a virgin when she marries, as long as she hasn't conceived bastards and has been discreet in her sex life. Elia might have flirted privately with any of those lads, and even could have taken him to her bed and feign later that she hadn't done anything more indecent than talking and dancing along the day. But she was keeping her flower for her future husband, whoever he would be. I teased her saying that if her husband turned out to be a two-hundred-pound, bald and toothless guy, she would regret not having given her flower to another one who was more to her liking. Elia always got angry and yelled at me that our father never would force her to marry such a guy. That joke annoyed her, because she was a romantic girl. So none of those youngsters who sighed for her in that fancy-dress party brushed even a single strand of her hair inappropriately, or they didn't without suffering the consequences at least. One of them had drunk too much and insisted that she must accompany him behind the bushes, so I broke his nose, knocked out three of his teeth and threatened to chop his cock right there if he didn't bugger off and never came back. Elia was mad at me, accusing me that I had exceeded my brutality, that it would have been enough with throwing him out of the party, and after that she wanted to retire to rest. I followed her and asked for her forgiveness, but I added I had done it because I didn't allow anyone to force her to do something she didn't want to do. Elia then hugged me and said she loved me more than anyone in the world. And I answered the same. It was one of the happiest moments of my life. The party went on without her and without Doran, who never liked my parties very much. And that night I lost my virginity behind some dune on the beach with a boy and a girl whose faces I don't even remember. Perhaps they wore masks, though I'm not very sure. That was too the first time I had drunk heavily." Oberyn stared at his memories with a slight nostalgic smile. "The official versions of the gossip tell that I made my debut with a squire years later, but that's not true. That squire was another one of a long list of lovers that had started long before, but I at first was quite discreet, well, as discreet as I could be. Ah, youthful innocence," he sighed with irony.

(Part 19 of a longer chapter)